

The Hoshanos

One of the central practices of *Sukkos* is the daily *hakafos* during which we walk around the *bimah* with the *arbaas haminim* and recite the *Hoshanos*. In the *Sukkos* editions of the previous two years, we discussed the *hakafos* of *Sukkos* at length. This year, the focus of the article will be the *Hoshanos* recited during the *hakafos*. As we will see, the word “*hoshanos*” can have several meanings. Whenever the intent is the *tefillos* recited at the time of the *hakafos*, the word “*Hoshanos*” will be capitalized.

Basis for the Practices

We will begin our discussion by citing two passages from *Chazal*:

1) “Every day (of *Sukkos*), they would walk around the *mizbei'ach* once and say: ‘*Ana Hashem, hoshi'ah na, ana Hashem, hatzlicha na.*’ Rabbi Yehuda says (that they would say), ‘*Ani veHu, hoshi'ah na*’” (*Mishnah, Sukkah 4:5*).

2) After the *Midrash* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim #703*) gives a detailed description of the *hakafos* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, it states: “This is what was done at the time that there was a *mizbei'ach*. Nowadays the ‘*chazan haknesses*’ (i.e., the *gabbai*) stands like an angel of Hashem holding the *Sefer Torah*; the congregation walks around him as was done with the *mizbei'ach*.”

These two passages serve as the foundations for the custom that we have of *hakafos* and the recital of the *Hoshanos* since the time that the *Beis Hamikdash* stood. While we circle the *Sefer Torah* at the *bimah* during *Sukkos* as a “*Zecher lemikdash*,” “a remembrance of the *Beis Hamikdash*” (*Rambam, Hilchos Lulav 7:23*), we *daven*, as was done in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

This idea that our *tefillos* during the *hakafos* are similar to the *tefillos* that were recited in the *Beis Hamikdash* has support from the *Rishonim*. The *Rokei'ach*, when he introduces his commentary to *Hoshanos*, writes: “Since in the *Beis Hamikdash* they would say, ‘*hoshi'ah na*,’ we say, ‘*hosha na*’” (see also *KolBo #72; Orchos Chayim, Hilchos Lulav #73*).

“Hoshana:” Varied Meanings

It is interesting to note that the *mitzvah* of *lulav* and *esrog* became so intertwined with the concept of reciting *Hoshanos*, that the *lulav* bundle (i.e., *lulav, hadasim* and *aravos*) is referred to in the *Gemara* as “*hoshana*” (see *Sukkah 34a, 37a, 37b, 46b*). There are also places where the *hadasim* alone are referred to as “*hoshana*” (see *Sukkah 30b, 31a, 33b*). However, in the *Shulchan Aruch*, only the *aravah* is referred to as “*hoshana*” (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 664:8-9*). This is because the *aravah* is prominent on *Hoshana Rabbah* when we recite many more *Hoshanos*.

We also find in *Minhagei Maharil* (*Hilchos Lulav #1*; also cited in *Ateres Zekeinim, Orach Chayim 21:1*): “Any time it states in the *Gemara*, ‘*hoshanos*,’ it means all four

species of the *lulav*. They are called ‘*hoshanos*’ because we shake them [some texts read: ‘we take them’] when reciting *Hoshanos*.”

In *Sefer Hatishbi* (*Os Hei*, s.v. *hoshana*), Rav Eliyahu Bachur writes: “The bundle of the brook willows that we take during the holiday of *Sukkos* are called ‘*hoshanos*.’ This is because we cry out over them, ‘*hosha na*’ – meaning ‘*hoshi’ah na*.’ And it states in the *pasuk*, ‘There is one nation’ (*Ester* 3:8). The *Targum* (*Targum Sheini*) elaborates: ‘They make a *hoshana*... and they return on *Hoshana Rabbah*.’” (There is an unclear point here in this passage. The *Tishbi* refers to the bundle of “brook willows” as “*hoshana*,” yet, in his quote from the *Targum*, the word “*hoshana*” refers to the four species.)

In other words, in *halachic* literature both the bundle of the *lulav* and the bundle of the *aravos* are both referred to as ‘*hoshana*.’ This is because, we cry out *hosha na* when holding these bundles (each at its designated time). This is based on the institution of *Chazal* to *daven* for the *Shechinah*, *Klal Yisrael* and for rain at the time that we take the *arbaas haminim* and the *aravos* (on *Hoshana Rabbah*).

There are several places in the *Hoshanos* where Rabbi Elazar *Hakalir* incorporated this idea of *davening* while holding either the *arbaas haminim* or the *aravos*. Here is one example: In the *tefillah* recited on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, “*Az ke’eini avadim*,” the *paytan* wrote: “*Kesichim kederech mata’asom, omsim beshav’asam*.” The literal translation is: “Like shrubs in the manner of their planting, they carry when they cry out.” The *Machzor Vitri* explains that this refers to the *arbaas haminim* and the *aravah* which are held in the manner in which they grow and are carried during *Hallel* and the *Hoshanos*.

Source of our Custom

The main source of the *minhag* of reciting *Hoshanos*, as well as the related *halachos* and *minhagim*, is the writings of the *Geonim*. In *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* it states: “*Hoshana*. In these places, the custom is to recite them all seven days. After the *shali’ach tzibbur* finishes *tefillas musaf*, he recites one or two *Hoshana* according to the order of the *aleph-beis*, and on the seventh day, he says many *Hoshanos*” (see also *Siddur Rav Saadyah Gaon*; *Hilchos Ritz Gi’as*, *Hilchos Lulav*).

Asking for Salvation

Concerning the purpose of the *hakafos*, the *Seder Hayom* (*Seder Kri’as HaTorah BeSukkos*) writes: “The purpose of the *hakafos* is to beseech our G-d that He should grant us salvation from all distress and He should save us from the hands of all of our enemies and confound the counsel of those who rise up against us for evil. This is similar to what occurred on the *mizbei’ach*, when every day the number of bullocks offered was reduced, as an indication that our enemies should be lessened. On the other hand, the rams and sheep (offered on the *mizbei’ach*) which were representative of *Yisrael*, as it states: ‘*Yisrael* is like scattered sheep’ (*Yirmiyah* 50:17), remained constant. They would circle the *mizbei’ach* with this intent and say, ‘*Ana Hashem, hoshi’ah na*,’ and there is no greater salvation than this. We mention the merit of our forefathers at the time of the *hakafos* so that this merit should protect us. This is the purpose of all the *piyutim* and *Hoshanos*, each person according to his custom.”

The *Seder Hayom* mentions that we invoke the merit of our forefathers during the *hakafos*. He is referring to the *Hoshana* of “*Lemaan Eisan*,” recited during the seventh *hakafah* on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, which references the *Avos*.

Hoshanos and Hakafos: A Matched Set

There are two approaches to understanding the relationship between reciting the *Hoshanos* and performing the *hakafos*. According to some, the two are completely connected, as the *Hoshanos* are recited specifically during the *hakafos* (*Orchos Chayim*, *Hilchos Tefillas Hamoadim* #14).

Also, according to the teachings of the *Arizal* (*Shaar Hakavanos*, *Inyan Sukkos*, *Drush* #8), reciting the *Hoshanos* and performing the *hakafos* are dependent on each other. This can be seen from the *Sefer Yesod Veshoreish Ha'avodah* (*Shaar Ha'eisan*, chap. #15). After citing the *Arizal*'s explanation, he writes: “From this, a person will understand that the great advantage of reciting the *Hoshanos* is specifically during the *hakafos*.” It is interesting that at this point, Rav Alexander Ziskind, the author of the *Yesod Veshoreish Ha'avodah*, bemoans what was apparently common practice in his day, where the congregants would recite the *Hoshanos* while standing in their places, and upon finishing, they would circle the *bimah* in silence with the *lulav* and *esrog*.

Two Independent Minhagim

Another approach in the *Rishonim* is that the custom of reciting *Hoshanos* is completely independent of performing *hakafos*. This is evident from the fact that some *Rishonim* write that they did not circle the *bimah* during *Sukkos* at all, except for *Hoshanah Rabbah* (when they did seven times), yet they recited *tefillos* every day after *musaf*. According to the *Shibbolei Haleket* (#369), one day they would recite “*Ana Hashem, hoshi'ah na*,” and the next day, “*Ani veH, hoshi'ah na*,” and they would then continue this pattern until the end of *Sukkos* (see also *Tanya Rabosi*, *Inyan* #86; *Shitos Kamai*, *Sukkah* 43b, s.v. *tanan lulav ve'aravah*, citing author of *Aseres Hadibros* [the author of *Sefer Ha'itur*]).

One of the *Rishonim* writes that they would recite one of two *Hoshanos* on a daily basis: *Kehoshata eilim*, which we say every day after the designated *Hoshana* of the day, and *Ana ezon*, which we use as the second special *Hoshana* on *Hoshana Rabbah* (*ibid.*).

Nisuch hamayim

Before we continue with the next part of our discussion, a brief introduction is required. In a fascinating passage (*Rosh Hashanah* 16a), the *Baraisa* inquires as to why Hashem commanded us to perform various unique *mitzvos* throughout the year, such as offering the *korban omer* on *Pesach*, bringing the *shte'i halechem* (the two loaves) on *Shavuot*, and reciting the special *brachos* of *musaf* on *Rosh Hashanah*. It explains the significance of each of these *mitzvos*. The *Baraisa* also addresses the *nisuch hamayim*, the water libations, that were poured during *Sukkos*: “Why did the Torah say to pour water during the Festival [of *Sukkos*]? *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* said: ‘Pour water before Me during the Festival in order that the rains of the year will be blessed for you.’”

Another aspect of the *Hoshanos* mentioned in the *Rishonim* is that they commemorate the *nisuch hamayim*. The *Machzor Vitri* (#381; see also *Siddur Rashi* #224) writes: “All the days of the festival, we recite the *Hoshanos* as a remembrance of the *nisuch hamayim* which took place all seven days in order to request water.” The *Machzor Vitri* explains that we do not openly mention rain on *Sukkos*, as rain on *Sukkos* is viewed as a curse. Therefore, we only “hint” to Hashem concerning rain through the *nisuch hamayim*. Similarly, in the *Hoshanos*, and especially on the seventh day when the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *Sukkah* is about to conclude, there are many allusions to water. And finally, on *Shemini Atzeres*, we mention rain openly when reciting *mashiv haruach umorid hageshem* (see also *Sefer Hamachkim*, *Seder Tefillos Sukkos*).

The Composer of the *Hoshanos*

In the *Hoshanos* recited by *Minhag Ashkenaz* (and this includes the *Chasidim* who *daven Nusach Sefard*), there are a total of nineteen separate *Hoshanos*. Eighteen of them are attributed to Rabbeinu Elazar *Hakalir* (henceforth, “the *Kalir*,” as is common in *halachic* literature), and one, “*Kehoshata adam yetzir kapecha*” (the second *Shabbos Hoshana*), is attributed to Rabbeinu Menachem bar Machir, a noted *paytan* who lived immediately before *Rashi* and was a nephew of Rabbeinu Gershom.

The *Hoshanos* of the *Sephardic* and *Teimani* communities are attributed to either Rabbeinu Saadyah Gaon or Rebbe Yosef ben Yitzchak ben Shetans, who lived at the time of Rabbeinu Saadyah Gaon (*Ohr Tzafun – Biur Hahoshanos*, *Hahakafos*, *Vehana'anu'im*, page 91, footnote #40; *Otzar Mefarshei Hahoshanos*, Introduction, page 42).

Allusions to the Author

There are two places in the *Hoshanos* that the *Kalir* hinted to his name:

- 1) In the first of the special *Hoshanos* for *Hoshana Rabbah*, “*Titneinu lesheim ulis'hilah*,” examine the first words in the last six stiches, starting with “*Te'adreinu*.” The second letter of the first five spell “Elazar,” and the first word in the last stich contains the word “*chazak*.”
- 2) In “*Ometz yesh'acha ba*,” also recited on *Hoshana Rabbah*, we find in *Machzor Romi* an additional seventeen stiches that do not appear in our texts. The first letter in each of these stiches spells “*Elazar beribi Kalir chazak*.”

The fact that the *Kalir* authored the *Hoshanos* is mentioned by numerous *Rishonim*. See: *Minhagim Yeshanim MeiDura* (pg. 158), *Minhagim debei Maharam* (*Seder Hoshanos*), *Rikanti* (*Bereishis* 38:8), and *Rashi* (*Iyov* 24:6).

It should be remembered that the *Kalir* is considered to be the most prolific of all *paytanim*, etc and he is author of much of our liturgy beyond the standard *tefillos*. Aside from the *Hoshanos*, he authored *yotzros*, *maaravos*, *kerovos*, *selichos*, *kinos*, as well as the *tefillos* for *geshem* and *tal*.

According to the *Aleph-Beis*

Most of the *Kalir's* *piyutim* are based on the order of the *aleph-beis*. In other words, the stanzas or the stiches of his work follow the sequence of the *aleph-beis*, either

forwards or backwards (“*TaSHRaK*”). The reason for this approach is mentioned in *Sefer Maavor Yabok* (*Minchas Aharon*, chap. 7). He cites a *Midrash* that relates that before the *Kalir* began writing his *piyutim*, he used one of Hashem’s Names and ascended to Heaven. He asked the *malach* Michael to relate to him how the angels sing and what the basis is of their *shirah*. Michael told him that their *shirah* follows the order of the *aleph-beis*.

It can be assumed that because of this, the *Kalir* based his *piyutim* primarily on the order of the *aleph-beis*.

It is beyond the purview of this article to discuss the greatness of Rabbi Elazar *Hakalir*, but I will suffice with one tidbit that we have from *Rishonim* who were concise with their words and not given to exaggeration. Rabbeinu Tam writes in a responsum (cited in *Shibbolei Haleket* #28 and *Machzor Vitri* #325) that he heard from his father, Rabbeinu Meir (*Rashi*’s son-in-law) in the name of his teachers, the *geonei* Lutir: When the *Kalir* composed the *piyut* “*Vechayos asher heinah meruba’os lakisei*” (found in *kedushah* of *musaf* on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*), he was surrounded by a burning fire.

Unclear Identity

It is unclear when Rabbi Elazar *Hakalir* lived. Several *Rishonim* maintain that he was a *Tanna*, yet there is debate among them as to which. According to *Tosafos* (*Chagigah* 13a, s.v. *veraglei*) and the *Rosh* (*Brachos* 5:21), he was Rabbi Elazar berebbi Shimon. (Although most agree that this Rabbi Shimon was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai [see *Bach*, *Orach Chayim* 68; *Tosafos Rabbeinu Yehudah Shirleon*, *Brachos* 11a; *Ohr Zaru’a*, *Hilchos Kri’as Shema* #20], some are unsure [*Malbushei Yom Tov* #5 to *Rosh*, *Brachos* 5:21].)

The *Rashba* (*Shu”t Harashba*, vol. I, #469), on the other hand, identifies him as Rabbi Elazar ben Arach (see also *Drashos Mahari ben Shu’ib*, *Shemini* [45b]). And the *Tashbeitz* (vol. I, end of #33) writes simply that he was one of the great *Tanna’im*.

It is also interesting to note that several *Rishonim* point out that there are *piyutim* in which the *Kalir* incorporates the following acronym: “*Elazar berebbi Kalir mei’Kiryas Sefer*.” Based on this, these *Rishonim* conclude that the *Kalir* lived in a city in *Eretz Yisrael* called “*Kiryas Sefer*” (*Rosh*, *Brachos* 5:21; *Machzor Vitri* #325; *Avudraham*, *Hilchos Kri’as Shema*).

However, others argue that it is evident from one of his *piyutim* that the *Kalir* lived during the era of the *Geonim*. This is based on a *krovetz* that he wrote for *Tisha Be’Av*. (A “*krovetz*” is where additional *tefillot* are added to the *chazaras hashatz* of *shacharis*.) One stitch in this *krovetz* (in the first stanza of *Avos*) reads, “I will bemoan (the *churban*) nine hundred years.” This indicates that he lived nine hundred years after the *churban*, which coincides with the *Geonic* era. Another argument to the contention that the *Kalir* lived during the time of the *Geonim* is that if he was indeed a *Tanna*, how is it that neither he nor his *piyutim* are mentioned in any *halachic* source until *Rashi* and the *Baalei Tosafos*? (*Shu”t Zichron Yosef* [Rav Yosef Steinhardt] #13; “*Hapiyutim Vehapytanim*,” Rav Wolf Heidenheim, *Machzor Reidelheim – Shemini Atzeres*).

As to the earlier cited proof that the *Kalir* lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, the author of *Shu”t Zichron Yosef* (#13) dismisses this proof. This is because during the *Geonic* era, those

Jews who lived in *Eretz Yisrael* lived only in two or three of the largest cities, and it is unlikely that Kiryas Sefer even existed then. Rather, he points to a *Gemara* in *Temurah* (16a) that relates that during the mourning period following Moshe's death, many thousands of *halachos* were forgotten, but Asniel ben Kenaz was able to derive them anew through his sharp and incisive learning. The *Gemara* derives this from a *pasuk*, "And he captured it" (i.e., a city called Kiryas Sefer) [*Yehoshua* 15:17]. *Rashi* (*Temurah* 16a) explains the connection between the *pasuk* and the fact that Asniel relearned the forgotten Torah, as "Kiryas Sefer" refers to "*halachos*." Based on this, *Zichron Yosef* maintains that the *Kalir*'s reference to Kiryas Sefer does not imply that that was the name of his city, but rather that he came from a family of *talmidei chachamim* who knew *halacha*.

However, several later authorities refused to accept the opinion of the *Acharonim* that the *Kalir* lived during the *Geonic* era, as it runs counter to the view of the *Rishonim*. They maintain that the stitch, "I will bemoan for nine hundred years," was added to the *piyut* by a later authority in order to greatness the sense of loss of the *churban* as nine hundred years had already passed (*Shu"t Noda Biyehudah*, *Orach Chayim* *Tinyana* #113, see there notation from the author's son; *Tzelach*, *Brachos* 34a, *Tosafos* s.v. *al yishal*; Responsum of Rav Efrayim Zalman Margolios, printed in Introduction to *Machzor Korban Aharon*). Concerning the second argument of the *Acharonim* that no authority prior to *Rashi* mentions the *Kalir* or his *piyutim*, see the comments of the *Noda Biyehudah*'s son to his father's responsum.

The Arbaas Haminim and Us

The *Seder Hayom* explains the reason behind the *mitzvah* of the *arbaas haminim* as follows:

Every leaf and every blade of grass have an appointed angel whose job is to ensure that it grows. This is true concerning all plant life with the exception of the *lulav*, *hadas*, *aravah* and *esrog*. These four species are under the direct *hashgacha* of Hashem Himself. And it is for this reason that Hashem commanded us to take these four species during *Sukkos*, in order to announce that just as these species are under His constant *hashgacha*, so too the Jewish People are. And because of this, they should not fear anything in the world, as Hashem is always watching over them and protecting them.

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