



## 5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Ha'azinu / פרשת האזינו

### *Lifnei Hashem In Purity and Joy*

The Torah often employs the phrase 'לפני ה' – before *Hashem*. Yet its precise meaning is not fixed. At times it denotes the *heichal*, the inner sanctum of the *Beit HaMikdash*. In other contexts, it refers to the courtyard of the *Mikdash*. Elsewhere, the Torah is referring to *Yerushalayim* as a whole.

The *mitzvah* of *lulav* provides a perfect example of this flexible interpretation. The Torah commands us to take the *dalet minim* on the first day of *Sukkot* but then adds another layer of obligation: to rejoice before *Hashem* for all seven days of the festival – ושמחתם לפני ה' אלוהיכם שבעת ימים. *Chazal* explain that this “rejoicing” alludes to the commandment of *lulav* in the *Mikdash*. While the *mitzvah* of *lulav* only applies on the first day outside of the *Mikdash*, the *mitzvah* applies all seven days within the *Mikdash* itself (*Sukkah* 41a).

But what exactly does *Mikdash* refer to? This question is debated by the *Rishonim*. *Rashi* (*Sukkah* ad loc.) assumes that this term refers exclusively to the *Beit HaMikdash* itself. Even *Yerushalayim* is excluded from the special commandment of *lulav* for all seven days. However, the *Rambam* (*Peirush HaMishnayos Sukkah* 3:10) expands the definition of *Mikdash* and says that all of *Yerushalayim* is included. Essentially, there is a biblical commandment to take up the *lulav* anywhere within the holy city for all seven days.

(Parenthetically, the *Rambam's* position raises a fascinating possibility: Jews today who take *lulav* in the Old City may be fulfilling a biblical *mitzvah*, not just a rabbinic remembrance. In fact, it is commendable to ensure that one own the *lulav* that he is taking within the Old City for all seven days, a stringency normally reserved for the first day of *Sukkot* only. See *Bikkurei Yaakov* 658:1)

Despite the flexible definition of the phrase 'לפני ה', there is one unifying theme. Rav Hutner zt'l notes (*Pachad Yitzchak, Yom Kippur* 2:7) that the phrase always refers to a place in which the sacrificial service is performed by the community. *Chazal* explicitly exclude an individual's *mizbeach* that is not designated for the *tzibbur*. Only those places which are sanctified by the divine service of the entire congregation can be considered “before *Hashem*.” For any individual to merit standing in *Hashem's* Presence, the entire Jewish people must also be invited to join.

Rav Hutner notes that 'לפני ה' is only used outside the context of physical space once; on *Yom Kippur*, the Torah tells us that we are “purified before *Hashem*.” The implication is clear: only when Jews are joined together can they merit the purifying effects of *Hashem's* divine Presence.



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We are currently transitioning from the beautiful purity of *Yom Kippur* to the ecstatic rejoicing of *Sukkot*. Yet, both *taharah* and *simcha* ultimately stem from being *lifnei Hashem*. In order to unlock the spiritual bounty of these holy holidays, it is vital that Jews stand together in *Yerushalayim*, serving the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in unity and harmony. May we soon merit the purity and joy of unified service in the fully rebuilt *Yerushalayim*.

