1. Questions.
2. On סוכות we have two separate מצוות that seem to have nothing to do with each other. On the one hand we have the מצוה of סוכה which is clearly retrospective in nature, commemorating the past when בסוכות השובתי את בני ישראל. On the other hand we have ד' מינם which are very much a celebration of the present in achieving our goals בימי הדין. Why are both of these מצוות, which don’t seem at all connected, observed on the same day?
3. There is an opinion, which is not accepted in הלכה, that the גמרא records, where only the ד' מינים are כשר לסכך, a clear attempt at a link between the two מצוות. But what is the link?
4. Interestingly, none of these מצוות seem to have anything to do with the real theme of the day as described by the תורה – the חג האסיף – a celebration of gathering in our grains. The only thing we do on סוכות that seems to address this theme, is the reading of קהלת on שבת חוה"מ. How do the מצוות היום fit with the תורה’s presentation of the theme of the day?
5. The ספר החינוך writes: לפי שימי החג הם ימי שמחה גדולה לישראל כי הוא עת אסיפת התבואות ופירות האילן בבית ואז ישמחו בני אדם שמחה רבה ומפני כן נקרא חג האסיף וצוה הא-ל לעמו לעשות לפניו חג באותו העת לשכותם להיות עיקר השמחה לשמו יתברך – essentially, the idea of סוכות is to take the natural joy that we feel and channel it to the service of Hashem. But the idea that material success brings us joy or blessing in any way, is quite a חידוש. After all, the גמרא חגיגה דף ט tells us יאה עניותא ליהודאי – Jews are better off being poor. We just read in פרשת האזינו that וישמן ישורון ויבעט שמנת עבית כשית ויטוש אלו-ה עשהו וינבל צור ישועתו – “Yeshurun shall become fat and rebel; you have grown fat, thickened, corpulent. They will forsake God Who made them and scorn the Roch of their salvation”. Essentially, material success leads us down a road that will ultimately lead to עבודה זרה. It seems that it is a curse and not a blessing worthy of celebration!
6. Perhaps, the link between the מצוות היום provide us with a proper approach to material success. We are celebrating a חג האסיף, a celebration of material success. The torah, and חז"ל channel the celebration in a certain direction through the מצוות ומנהגי היום:
7. First, the מנהג to read קהלת gears our mind in the right direction. הכל הבל – all the material success is useless and ultimately unimportant. This was written by the king who presided over the greatest period of prosperity in Jewish history. A sense of what our goals are and what are tools that help us achieve those goals is in order. So the first message is attitudinal.
8. Second, the מצוה of סוכה teaches what to do in order to maintain this perspective - צא מדירת קבע לדירת עראי – no matter how much money we have, don’t live lavishly. In the ספר אוצר הויכוחים there is a short dialogue between the king of Portugal and the Rabbi. The king tells him: “Before we begin discussing religion I would like to tell you something that you need to hear. Just listen and accept it. The Jews who become wealthy flaunt their prosperity and this offend my countrymen. They buy fancy coaches and stylish homes, shocking everybone with their ostentatiousness for they conduct themselves as only royalty do…” Wealth is addictive and has a way of turning luxuries into necessities. This is best illustrated by the מצוה of צדקה to give די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו, which the גמרא כתובות דף סז understands אפילו סוס לרכוב עליו ועבד לרוץ לפניו. Prosperity can lead to dependency, and in the final analysis the prosperous person is far poorer than one who has always been accustomed to a simpler life. When we are מסתפק במועט we are more flexible and more capable to adjusting to changing circumstances.
9. Finally, the מצוה of ד' מינים teaches us what to do with our wealth - all Jews are united באיגוד אחד. When people experience material success it is common to worry about protecting their wealth. In attempts to preserve the wealth, they are willing to step on other people, lie and cheat, in order to stay on top. Our tradition teaches that the exact opposite approach will help preserve our wealth – מלח ממון חסר. As Dovid Hamelech counseled when informed of economic difficulties in the country – לכו והתפרנסו זו מזו – let the Jews support each other. שלי שלך ושלך שלי – we are all one and my current material success isn’t mine to keep, its mine to share with those who are going through a more challenging time.