

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**W**hat exactly is a sukkah? What is it supposed to represent? The question is essential to the mitzvah itself. The Torah says: "Live in sukkot for seven days... so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt" (Lev. 23:42-43). In other words, knowing -- reflecting, understanding, being aware -- is an integral part of the mitzvah. For that reason, says Rabbah in the Talmud (Sukkah 2a), a sukkah that is taller than twenty cubits (about 30 feet) is invalid because when the sechach, the "roof," is that far above your head, you are unaware of it. So what is a sukkah?

On this, two Mishnaic sages disagreed. Rabbi Eliezer held that the sukkah represents the clouds of glory that surrounded the Israelites during the wilderness years, protecting them from heat during the day, cold during the night, and bathing them with the radiance of the Divine presence. Rashi in his commentary takes it as the literal sense of the verse.

On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva says sukkot mammath, meaning a sukkah is a sukkah, no more and no less: a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling. It has no symbolism. It is what it is (Sukkah 11b).

If we follow Rabbi Eliezer then it is obvious why we celebrate by making a sukkah. It is there to remind us of a miracle. All three pilgrimage festivals are about miracles. Pesach is about the miracle of the Exodus when God brought us out of Egypt with signs and wonders. Shavuot is, according to the oral Torah, about the miracle of the revelation at Mount Sinai when, for the only time in history, God appeared to an entire nation. Sukkot is about God's tender care of his people, mitigating the hardships of the journey across the desert by surrounding them with His protective cloud as a parent wraps a young child in a blanket. Long afterward, the sight of the blanket evokes memories of the warmth of parental love.

Rabbi Akiva's view, though, is deeply problematic. If a sukkah is merely a hut, what was the miracle? There is nothing unusual about living in a hut if you are living a nomadic existence in the desert. It's what the Bedouin did until recently. Some still do. Why should there be a festival dedicated to something ordinary, commonplace and non-miraculous?

Rashbam says the sukkah was there to remind

the Israelites of their past so that, at the very moment they were feeling the greatest satisfaction at living in Israel -- at the time of the ingathering of the produce of the Land -- they should remember their lowly origins. They were once a group of refugees without a home, never knowing when they would have to move on.

Sukkot, according to Rashbam, exists to remind us of our humble origins so that we never fall into the complacency of taking freedom, the Land of Israel and the blessings it yields, for granted, thinking that it happened in the normal course of history.

However, there is another way of understanding Rabbi Akiva, and it lies in one of the most important lines in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah says, in words we recited on Rosh Hashanah, "I remember the loving-kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown" (Jeremiah. 2:2). This is one of the very rare lines in Tanach that speaks in praise not of God but of the people Israel.

"How odd of God / to choose the Jews," goes the famous rhyme, to which the answer is: "Not quite so odd: the Jews chose God." They may have been, at times, fractious, rebellious, ungrateful and wayward. But they had the courage to travel, to move, to leave security behind, and follow God's call, as did Abraham and Sarah at the dawn of our history.

If the sukkah represents God's clouds of glory, where was "the loving-kindness of your youth"? There is no sacrifice involved if God is visibly protecting you in every way and at all times. But if we follow Rabbi Akiva and see the sukkah as what it is, the temporary home of a temporarily homeless people, then it makes sense to say that Israel showed the courage of a bride willing to follow her husband on a risk-laden journey to a place she has never seen before -- a love that shows itself in the fact that she is willing to live in a hut trusting her husband's promise that one day they will have a permanent home.

If so, then a wonderful symmetry discloses itself in the three pilgrimage festivals. Pesach represents the love of God for His people. Sukkot represents the love of the



**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.  
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives & various websites. It is presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL  
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

people for God. Shavuot represents the mutuality of love expressed in the covenant at Sinai in which God pledged Himself to the people, and the people to God. (For a similar conclusion, reached by a slightly different route, see R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Meshekh Chokhmah to Deut. 5:15. I am grateful to David Frei of the London Beth Din for this reference.)

Sukkot, on this reading, becomes a metaphor for the Jewish condition not only during the forty years in the desert but also the almost 2,000 years spent in exile and dispersion. For centuries Jews lived, not knowing whether the place in which they lived would prove to be a mere temporary dwelling. Sukkot is the festival of insecurity.

What is truly remarkable is that it is called, by tradition, zeman simchatenu, "our time of joy." That to me is the wonder at the heart of the Jewish experience: that Jews throughout the ages were able to experience risk and uncertainty at every level of their existence and yet -- while they sat betzila de-mehemnuta, "under the shadow of faith" (Zohar, Emor, 103a) -- they were able to rejoice. That is spiritual courage of a high order. I have often argued that faith is not certainty: faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. That is what Sukkot represents if what we celebrate is sukkot mammash, not the clouds of glory but the vulnerability of actual huts, open to the wind, the rain and the cold.

I find that faith today in the people and the State of Israel. It is astonishing to me how Israelis have been able to live with an almost constant threat of war and terror since the State was born, and not give way to fear. I sense even in the most secular Israelis a profound faith, not perhaps "religious" in the conventional sense, but faith nonetheless: in life, and the future, and hope. Israelis seem to me perfectly to exemplify what tradition says was God's reply to Moses when he doubted the people's capacity to believe: "They are believers, the children of believers" (Shabbat 97a). Today's Israel is a living embodiment of what it is to exist in a state of insecurity and still rejoice.

And that is Sukkot's message to the world. Sukkot is the only festival about which Tanach says that it will one day be celebrated by the whole world (Zechariah 14:16-19). The twenty-first century is teaching us what this might mean. For most of history, most people have experienced a universe that did not

change fundamentally in their lifetimes. But there have been rare great ages of transition: the birth of agriculture, the first cities, the dawn of civilisation, the invention of printing, and the industrial revolution. These were destabilising times, and they brought disruption in their wake. The age of transition we have experienced in our lifetime, born primarily out of the invention of the computer and instantaneous global communication, will one day be seen as the greatest and most rapid era of change since Homo sapiens first set foot on earth.

Since September 11, 2001, we have experienced the convulsions. As I write these words, some nations continue to tear themselves apart, and no nation is free of the threat of terror. Antisemitism has returned, not just to Europe, but around the world. There are parts of the Middle East and beyond that recall Hobbes' famous description of the "state of nature," a "war of every man against every man" in which there is "continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes, The Leviathan, chapter XIII). Insecurity begets fear, fear begets hate, hate begets violence, and violence eventually turns against its perpetrators.

The twenty-first century will one day be seen by historians as the Age of Insecurity. We, as Jews, are the world's experts in insecurity, having lived with it for millennia. And the supreme response to insecurity is Sukkot, when we leave behind the safety of our houses and sit in sukkot mammash, in huts exposed to the elements. To be able to do so and still say, this is zeman simchatenu, our festival of joy, is the supreme achievement of faith, the ultimate antidote to fear.

Faith is the ability to rejoice in the midst of instability and change, travelling through the wilderness of time toward an unknown destination. Faith is not fear. Faith is not hate. Faith is not violence. These are vital truths, never more needed than now. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

One of the most picturesque and creative festivals of the year is the Festival of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) – when the entire family is involved in building and decorating a special "nature home" which will be lived in for an entire week. But what are we actually celebrating and what is the true meaning of the symbol of the sukka? Is it the sukka of our desert wanderings, the temporary hut which the Israelites constructed in the desert when they wandered from place to place? If so, then the sukka becomes a reminder of all of the exiles of Israel throughout our

4,000-year history, and our thanksgiving to God is for the fact that we have survived despite the difficult climates – the persecution and pogroms – which threaten to overwhelm us.

Or is the sukka meant to be reminiscent of the Divine “clouds of glory” which encompassed us in the desert with God’s rays of splendor, the sanctuary which served as the forerunner of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem? In the Grace after Meals during the Sukkot festival we pray that “the Merciful One restore for us the fallen tabernacle of David,” which would certainly imply that the sukka symbolizes the Holy Temple. The Talmud (B.T. Succot 11) brings a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to which of these options is the true significance of our celebration. I would like to attempt to analyze which I believe to be the true meaning and why.

The major biblical description of the festivals is found in Chapter 23 of the Book of Leviticus. There are two textual curiosities which need to be examined. The three festivals which were always considered to be our national festivals, and which also biblically appear as the “desert” festivals, are Pessah, Shavuot and Sukkot – commemorating when we left Egypt, when we received the Torah at Sinai and when we lived in desert booths. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are more universal in nature and not at all related to the desert sojourn. It seems strange that in the biblical exposition of the Hebrew calendar Pessah and Shavuot are explained, after which comes Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and only at the conclusion of the description comes Sukkot.

Now, of course one can argue that this is the way the months fall out on the calendar year! However, that too is strange. After all, the Israelites left Egypt for the desert; presumably they built their booths immediately after the Festival of Pessah. Would it not have been more logical for the order to be Pessah, Sukkot, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Secondly, the Festival of Sukkot is broken up into two parts. Initially, the Torah tells us: “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: on the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for God these are the Festivals of the Lord which you shall call holy convocations” (Leviticus 23:33-38). It

would seem that these last words conclude the biblical description of the festivals and the Hebrew calendar. But then, in the very next verse, the Torah comes back again to Sukkot, as if for the first time: “but on the fifteenth day of the



seventh month, when you gather in the crop of the land, you shall celebrate God’s festival for a seven day period... You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree (myrtle) and willows of brooks; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for a seven-day period... You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period... so that your generations will know that I caused the people of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the Land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (ibid. Leviticus 23:39-44). Why the repetition? And if the Bible now wishes to tell us about the four species which we are to wave in all directions in thanksgiving to God for his agricultural bounty, why was this verse not linked to the previous discussion of the Sukkot booths? And why repeat the booths again this second time?

I have heard it said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this repetition of Sukkot with the commandment concerning the Four Species is introducing an entirely new aspect of the Sukkot festival: the celebration of our entering into the Land of Israel. Indeed, the great philosopher-legalist Maimonides explains the great joy of the festival of Sukkot as expressing the transition of the Israelites from the arid desert to a place of trees and rivers, fruits and vegetables, as symbolized by the Four Species (Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 Chapter 43). In fact, this second Sukkot segment opens with the words, “But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you gather the crop of the land (of Israel), you shall celebrate this festival to the Lord.”

Hence, there are two identities to the festival of Sukkot. On the one hand, it is a desert festival, alongside Pessah and Shavuot, which celebrates our desert wanderings and survivals while living in flimsy booths. From that perspective, perhaps it ought to have found its place immediately after Pessah in terms of the calendar and certainly before the description of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in the biblical text. However, the second identity of Sukkot, the Four Species, which represent our conquest and inhabitancy of our homeland and signal the beginning of redemption, belongs after Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – the festivals of God’s kingship over the world and his Divine Temple, which is to be “a house of prayer for all the nations.” This aspect of Sukkot turns the sukka into rays of Divine splendor and an expression of the Holy Temple.

So which Sukkot do we celebrate? Both at the very same time! But when we sit in the sukka, are we sitting in transitory booths representative of our wandering or rather in a Divine sanctuary protected by rays of God’s glory? I think it depends on whether we are celebrating the festival in the Diaspora or in the Land of Israel. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**A**s I aided my grandson and two of his friends in helping erect and decorate our succah I was struck by the fact that not only had I aged and no longer enjoyed climbing ladders but that many of our succah decorations had also seriously aged, faded and some have even disappeared from the scene entirely.

I was delighted however that many of the succah decorations that have hung in my succah for more than fifty years in Chicago, Miami Beach, Monsey and Jerusalem were, like me, around and still in serviceable condition. Naturally, each of those decorations brings back a flood of memories -- of cold and snowy Succot holidays in Chicago and Monsey, of boiling hot and dripping humid Succot in Miami Beach and of the joy of being able to sleep comfortably in my succah here in Jerusalem.

And as the years have gone by, there are the beloved ones who visit my current succah only in the form of spiritual ushpizzin, but whose presence are nevertheless very real to me. We have decorations from the whole world hanging in our succah and therefore every little bauble carries with it a memory of a place visited and an experience tucked away in the recesses of our mind.

Thus, putting my succah together is always an emotional experience for me, a time of memories and recollection. My grandchildren who have helped me to decorate the succah have done so fairly dispassionately since they enjoy the curios from far distant lands and places but they have no personal attachments to the objects and they do not awaken any memories for them. But, that is not the case for their old grandfather, for whom the succah decorations are, in a large measure, the story of his life.

The custom of decorating one's succah is an ancient but sporadic one. Usually agricultural decorations -- dried corn and grains, honey in jars, dried fruits, etc. -- were used when they were available. This was in keeping with the biblical theme of Succot as the harvest festival of the Jewish calendar year.

In many climes there was no possibility of such decorations. In my youth I remember that in my father's synagogue's succah and in the yeshiva's succah there were little or no decorations. And, they didn't have much color or any pizzazz attached to them. Over the past number of decades, as having a succah for one's self and family has become increasingly popular in the United States and here in Israel, the succah decoration industry has flourished.

Many succot now come with their own built in decorations on their panels and the Chinese are hard at work thinking up new types of decorations for our succot from year to year. Many tinsel decorations originally manufactured for non-Jewish holidays find

their ways into succot, especially here in Israel where certain sections of the population are completely unaware of the original reason and purpose of their manufacture. It is an interesting and sometimes even amusing world that we live in.

I find that the unseen guests -- the ushpizin -- are in many ways the stars of the Succot holiday. They have come to visit Jews in every clime and location on the globe. The Talmud itself has many illustrations of possible succot that were constructed in its time and in later times as well. There is a park in Israel called Neot Kedumim where all of these different types of succot are on view.

Though there are many variations possible, a succah basically is composed of a structure with a little more than two plus solid walls and a roof of natural agricultural materials that is partially open to the sky. In rainy climates there was always an attempt to protect the succah during the rain storm by ingenious methods.

The rain always plays havoc with the succah decorations and many of my mine have fallen victim to the rains in America. Even here in Israel, ten years ago we experienced a violent rain storm on Succot that pretty much soaked everything and everyone. The heavy rains have not as of yet arrived here in Israel this year but the early fall rains have happened and since Succot is "late" this year, there does exist a possibility of rain for the holiday.

Nevertheless, my succah decorations are proudly established in the succah and the holiness and anticipation of this holiday of family joy is felt anywhere you go in Jerusalem. May God's succah of happiness and peace envelop and protect all of us all year long.  
©2019 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**S**ukkot is the only festival referred to as zeman simhateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy.

The Torah in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing Sukkot. (Deuteronomy 16:14, 15) This in contrast to Shavuot where it appears only once. (Deuteronomy 16:11) On Passover, the word is totally absent. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8) Sukkot is described in the liturgy as the days of happiness, as the term simcha is most associated with this holiday. Why is Sukkot deemed as the ultimate holiday of happiness and joy?

On a historical level, Sukkot is the culmination of the three festivals. Passover is the holiday of physical freedom. Yet, freedom without purpose is void of happiness; hence the word simcha is not linked to Passover. Shavuot gives meaning to our freedom since on that day, we received the Torah. Hence

simcha is mentioned in reference to Shavuot. Sukkot takes us to another dimension. Real joy occurs when one is able to sustain meaning in life well beyond the dramatic moments. As Sukkot is a commemoration of the fragile homes in which we lived during the 40 years in the desert, this holiday represents the maintenance of belief, even beyond the experience at Sinai. So, the Torah mentions simcha twice relative to Sukkot.

On an agricultural level, Sukkot teaches another important lesson about happiness. The ultimate holiday of gathering our produce is Sukkot. Thus, the festival is called Hag ha-asif. The Torah, immediately preceding the laws of the holidays in Deuteronomy, mentions the laws of giving tithes. (Ch. 14:22) This serves as a reminder that true happiness is achieved when one takes of what one has gleaned and gives it to another. Most people believe that happiness is achieved by taking more. The reverse is true. The more one gives, the more one experiences exhilaration of having given of themselves to others. In the end, happiness is a feeling. Giving, on the other hand, is an action. While one cannot automatically achieve an emotion, each of us has it in our power to act. Through action, feelings emerge. In the case of Sukkot, from giving of our produce, happiness surfaces.

Not coincidentally, Sukkot comes on the heels of Rosh Hashanah, when we wish each other Shana Tovah. Shana Tovah is commonly translated, "have a happy year." This translation, in fact is a take-off of the American New Year, when happiness is the only goal. In truth, Shana Tovah does not mean "happy new year," but "good new year." In fact, not everything that is happy is good and not everything that is good is happy. When we wish each other a Shana Tovah, what we are really saying is, "may you have a year of doing good." By experiencing a High Holidays of tov, of goodness, and internalizing the message of Sukkot, we can ultimately realize the description of Sukkot as found in our prayers -- zman simhateinu, the time of true joy.

©2019 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### RABBI NAFTALI REICH

### Legacy

**Y**omim Noraim (the 'High Holy days') are always a most uplifting experience at Ohr Somayach. Standing shoulder to shoulder with other mispallelim in the packed bais medrash as we pray for a good year, one has an inkling of what it was like in the times of the Bais Hamikdosh when hundreds of thousands of people converged in the Temple courtyard. Our sages tell us that they stood 'tzefufuim,' cramped like sardines and yet, when the time came for them to prostrate themselves, there was suddenly ample space for everyone. Was this due to miraculous

Divine intervention? Undoubtedly. However, one might also explain this phenomenon on a psychological level.

The Torah teaches us the mitzvah of Hakheil. Every seventh year, the entire nation was commanded to ascend to Jerusalem. Not a soul remained behind. In every corner of the land millions of people made the jubilant journey to rejoice on the festival of Sukkos in Jerusalem. Today, we can actually see at the excavations of 'Ir Dovid,' the remnants of the city walls that surrounded Jerusalem in those days. The entire city is no more than a square mile and a half. How was there room for everybody? It boggles the mind to picture the spectacle. Millions of people without air conditioning, bathroom facilities, garbage pickup service! The streets must have resembled a solid moving mass of sweaty, agitated humanity. What an ordeal it must have been.

Yet, remarkably, the sages tell us that, on the contrary, that no man ever complained in Jerusalem about the lack of space! The people were unperturbed by their meager accommodations. Perhaps there was an element of the miraculous that unfolded in Jerusalem at that time. But, on an essential level, the Jewish people were simply ecstatic and filled with the joy of being in the presence of their Creator. When one is in an ecstatic frame of mind, suffused with happiness and gratitude for being able to be present at the most sublime moments of the year, the physical conditions don't matter.

When each one cares for the other, there is enough for all. As our sages tell us, when a husband and wife are devoted to one another, they can both sleep "on the edge of a knife" but when there is no unity, even a palace will not suffice. Even if one is in the east wing and the other in the west wing, there is no room for comfort. However, when we stand together in harmony and are focused on helping one another, there is always enough to go around. When happiness, appreciation and love prevail, physical shortcomings simply do not play a role. ©2019 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

#### RABBI LABEL LAM

### Dvar Torah

**E**very once in a while when reading a bed time story to the younger children I find myself in the end wiping a tear from the corner of my eye and wondering if any of the children are really capable of appreciating the depth of the seemingly simple story, if it is not meant more for the parents and if we get it either.

One such book reappeared on the bookshelf recently. It must have been with all the stuff for sukkos 'cause it certainly belongs there. It's called, "The Happiness Box". The plot is something like this. There's this kid that's never happy with what he has. He finds things to complain about all day. Whatever he has is

not enough or not just right and all he can find is fault.

One day after his family moves into a beautiful new house a giant package arrives. It's a washing machine or some other large appliance and the kid is suffering from existential nausea because it's not for him. His clever father convinces him that the box is the real item of desire and it's just for him. It's called "a happiness box" and while inside one must think only happy thoughts.

This boy accepts the premise of the box and at first begrudgingly but later with greater ease is able to generate happiness producing thoughts such as; "Sometimes my mother makes dinners I like." And other such affirming statements that put him into a state of mind that makes him feel rich and full. After a while he's complaining a lot less. Then he becomes anxious about going to summer camp because all his possessions need to fit neatly into a duffel bag and he would have to leave "the box" at home. What would become of his state of happiness? He then realizes the great truth that the happiness is not in his box but in his head. The important life lesson is well learned. The children are fast asleep but I am more awake.

The simple child's story reminds me a little of a bad joke about a fellow who claims his dog is so talented he can do anything he is commanded to do. The challenge is taken up by a friend who throws a stick a distance and commands the dog, "Fetch!"

The dog looks up at him and begins his diatribe. "All day long people tell me what to do. Roll over! Jump! Go through the fiery hoop! Good dog. Bad dog. Sit! Heal. Eat this! Don't eat that! I can't take it anymore. It's no fun being a dog. I hate it. I wish I were never born! The fellow interrupts the dog and tells him with a sense of outrage, "All I asked you to do was fetch." The dog answers back with surprise, "Ohhhhhh! I thought you said "Kvetch".

Sukkos is referred to in our liturgy as "the time of our happiness". How do we celebrate? We leave our lovely homes and sit exposed to the elements in little boxes. We are commanded by the Torah; "and you should rejoice with your holiday and be only happy!"

Maybe the story is not so simplistic and the joke not so (as we say in yiddish) "farfetched". It's very



© Can Stock Photo

easy to be focused on what's missing in life; to give special recognition to the cruel and heartless; to the unfinished business of history and history of business. Even more so these days we need a

way to regain a sense of optimism. How about 7 days in "a happiness box" to see what's right in G-d's world. Hearing clearly the commandment as it is pronounced is a critical point. No where does it say, "kvetch"!

We all know how we can feel sometimes and how it creates a contagion of negativity. Therefore we hung two signs in our sukkah. One upon entering reads, "You are entering a no kvetching zone". The other posted prominently reads, "Don't even think of kvetching in the sukkah!" The Vilna Gaon called this the hardest mitzvah in the Torah to fulfill. So, don't expect it to happen with a simple story, a bad joke, by reciting an imperative verse, or by hanging a humorous sign but it sure is a good beginning. © 2019 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

**RABBI YIRMIYOHU KAGANOFF**

## The Stars and the Sukkah

**T**he halacha is that, lechatchilah, one should be able to see the stars through the sukkah's schach. What is the reason behind this requirement?

The following thought was suggested: The sukkah, a temporary dwelling with a leaky thatched roof, represents the Jew in exile. Yet, there are a wide variety of kosher Sukkos. Some sukkos are constructed with four complete and sturdy walls that reach all the way to the schach. On the other hand, there are Sukkos that are much less sturdy and yet they are still kosher. For example a sukkah with just two fairly narrow walls accompanied by a third "wall" that is a mere plank the width of one's fist is kosher. Such a shabby sukkah can be kosher, even if its walls are only ten tefachim tall, which is less than forty inches, with open air between the top of the short "walls" and the schach, notwithstanding that such a sukkah provides virtually no privacy. Do you know anyone who would live in such a house?

The different types of sukkos represent different forms of exile. In some times and places, we were welcomed and had a sense of security; in others, we had to cringe in fear.

Yet, there is one common factor in all the various exiles that we have been through – the stars. The stars remind us that when Klal Yisrael merits it, instead of being like the dust of the earth, we will be like the stars in the sky! (This approach is cited in the contemporary work, Shalal Rav, Sukkos volume, page 114.) Thus, regardless of the difficulties of the moment, we have a Divine promise that one day we will be stars! © 2019 Rabbi Y. Kaganoff and rabbikaganoff.com

**ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

## A Hybrid Etrog

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**he Etrog is a very delicate fruit. In order to strengthen it so that it can last a longer time, people created Hybrid Etrogim or they mixed two

types of breeds together, in this case the Etrog and the bitter orange, to create a stronger and long lasting fruit. Our sages in general forbade this "Etrog Murkav" for the following reasons:

1. The fruit is not authentic if it is a Hybrid.
2. Even if it is not hybrid it is still a combination of two fruits.
3. Even if we except the reasoning that there is enough of Etrog in the mix to make it kosher, in an Etrog that is exactly the minimum requirement, this second fruit would minimize the required amount needed for a kosher Etrog.
4. The very essence of the pure Etrog is minimized because of the additional fruit.
5. There are situations that the actual making of a Hybrid fruit would be prohibited therefore creating a situation that The Mitzva of Etrog would be accomplished by transgression.

Those sages who permit a hybrid Etrog offer the following explanations:

1. The Torah never specifically uses the term Etrog but rather the words "A fruit that is beautiful" (Pri Etz Hadar). Thus they claim a "Etrog Murkav" is also beautiful.
2. The Etrog combined by the two fruits looks exactly like an Etrog.
3. The addition of the additional fruit does not serve to annul the actual authentic Etrog.
4. The hybrid Etrog does not apply to doing a Mitzva even if it is a prohibition with regard to sacrifices.

The question of the hybrid Etrog is indeed complicated and is an interesting subject to delve into during the holiday of Succot. As well, one can find an exhaustive analysis on the subject in the Encyclopedia Talmudit. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### **RABBI PINCHAS AVRUCH**

### **Succos – Staying Focused**

**F**or most holidays, the Torah reading is the narration of the events the festival is commemorating. This past week's Yom Kippur reading detailed the procedures for the special service in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem). The Pesach reading recounts the Exodus from Egypt, and we read of the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot. Succos, though, does not honor one particular event, so the reading comes from Parshas Emor, where all of the holy days are discussed in the middle of a narration of numerous facets of Divine service.

"On the fifteenth day of [Tishrei] is the festival of Succos, a seven day period for Hashem." (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:34). It is noteworthy that the Torah calls this holiday "Succos" (plural of succah) but has not, at this point, explained why a succah is germane to the celebration. It is not until the end of the narrative, even after the discussion of the mitzvah of

the Four Species, in verses 42 and 43, that it is related, "You shall dwell in booths ("succos") for a seven day period...So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt." If our observance of dwelling in booths is the focus of the festival, these closing verses are out of place; they should be at the opening.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Torah Jewry of his time) explains that the concept of "succah" - living in a transient, temporary abode - is not novel to the Jew. Essential to our faith is the precept that our daily existence in this world is given to us as our chance to perfect our spiritual selves and develop a G-d consciousness by utilizing mitzvah opportunities and studying Torah. Furthermore, since the physical trappings of our existence in this world are given to us as aids to achieving our spiritual objectives, there should be no discomfort when we spend money or utilize assets for the fulfillment of mitzvos or giving of charity; this is ultimately why we were given these assets!

Therefore, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, the concept of "succos" is not new, as it is lived everyday, no matter where we find ourselves. The festival of Succos was given to us to help concretize and fortify this tenet in a practical, substantive way.

This understanding also offers a deeper insight as to why we are forbidden from residing in the succah when it is extremely uncomfortable, such as when it is raining or very cold. If the essence of the succah is to teach the perspective to be maintained through our daily lives - which includes the mindset that our assets should never be the cause for a sense of discomfort because they are all a temporary means to a greater end - then that lesson cannot be learned when the succah is physically uncomfortable.

The famed Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) once welcomed a visitor into his home. The visitor was somewhat surprised to see the Spartan conditions in which this renowned leader of Torah Judaism lived, with only a simple wooden table and some benches furnishing the main room of the simple house. When asked what bothered him, the guest blurted out, "Where is your furniture?" Rabbi Kagan responded, "Where is yours?" The visitor answered, "I am only a guest here. I didn't bring any furniture." To which the Chofetz Chaim replied, "I, too, am only a guest in this world. My most prized possessions, my Torah learning and mitzvos, are waiting for me in my real home in the World to Come."

Our liturgy refers to the festival of Succos as "the time of our happiness". After the teshuva (return to G-d) of the month of Elul, the recognition of G-d as our Father and King on Rosh HaShanah and the spiritual cleansing of Yom Kippur, we now have seven days to enjoy and revel in our new relationship with our Father in Heaven. The blessings we asked for on the High Holy Days are not an end to themselves. The succah reminds us that we must not become distracted by the temporal; we must keep our focus on our ultimate objective of building the bond. ©2002 Rabbi P. Avruch and Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

In Hilchos Rosh Chodesh (O"C 417), the Tur quotes his brother, R' Yechiel, who says that each of the Three Festivals (referring to the three biblical holidays besides Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) correspond to one of the three Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Pesach corresponds to Avraham who served matzos (on Pesach, see B'raishis 18 and Rashi on 19:3); Shavuos corresponds to Yitzchok, since the shofar whose sound was heard when the Torah was given came from the ram that was offered in his place at the Akeidah (see B'reishis 22:13); and Succos corresponds to Yaakov who, upon returning from Charan, built huts for his cattle (B'reishis 33:17).

In Iyun Haparasha (Yerach Ha'eisanim, Succos 6), the question is posed as to the significance of the huts Yaakov built for his animals vis--vis the holiday of Succos. Since matzos are a major part of Pesach, Avraham serving them creates a clear connection between him and that holiday. Since Shavuos is "Z'man Matan Torahseinu," when the Torah was given, using the horn of the ram that was offered instead of Yitzchok to create the sound that contributed to that awesome experience (see Sh'mos 19:16) also connects Yitzchok with that holiday. But does the mere fact that Yaakov built huts for his animals and that we live in huts on Succos constitute enough of a connection to say that Yaakov corresponds to Succos? (Especially since he built regular houses, not just huts, for himself and his family!) Is there something more than just both having some connection to "huts"?

Several years ago (see pg. 3 of <http://tinyurl.com/q8nqa57>), I discussed why Yaakov called the name of that place "Succos" after the huts he built for the animals, seemingly giving the animals more significance than the people (for whom he also built structures, and more permanent ones at that). I referenced the Malbim (B'reishis 33:17), who says that Yaakov built permanent structures for himself and his family so that they could serve G-d, and temporary structures for the livestock since they were secondary. I suggested that Yaakov purposely took the time to live there (18 months), rather than returning home sooner,

so that the family would live under conditions that made it clear to them that cattle-raising was secondary to serving G-d, in order to counter any incorrect impression that his having worked non-stop with cattle for the previous 20 years -- seven each for Rachel and Leah and six more to accumulate his own cattle -- may have been left. After all, the only thing his children knew, for their whole lives, was their father working day and night raising cattle. Therefore, Yaakov spent a year and a half living in a way -- with the animals living in temporary dwellings while they lived in permanent housing -- that would ensure that his family's priorities would be properly aligned before he returned home.

Rejoicing over the successful harvest that G-d has bestowed upon us brings with it a danger that we will put too much emphasis on our material success, at the expense of our spiritual growth. Therefore, right after the summer harvest, we are commanded to leave our comfortable permanent residences and move into temporary structures, reminding us of the temporary nature of this world, that it shouldn't be our primary focus.

With this being one of the themes of the holiday of Succos, Yaakov having built temporary huts for his animals in order to de-emphasize the importance of material success corresponds very nicely. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **YITZ WEISS**

## **Hug Samayach!**

One of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that Hashem is our protector. We go out of our permanent homes into a temporary dwelling and expose ourselves to the elements. In so doing we recall that Hashem was our guardian when we left Egypt into the desert and remains our protector today.

The minimum requirement for a kosher sukkah is not four walls, but two walls and a tefach (a handbreadth). If we were to construct a sukkah based on the minimum, we would really be exposed to the elements! Two walls and a bit don't seem to offer much protection! How are we to feel secure?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l compares the sukkah measurements to an arm: two "walls" - i.e. from the shoulder to the elbow, and from the elbow to the wrist, and a tefach - the hand. Rav Auerbach says that sitting in the sukkah one is literally in the embrace of G-d!

May this year be one where we see the protection of G-d on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! Have a great yom tov! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Cong. Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*

