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מקראי קודש MIKRA'EI KODESH

Holiday Divrei Torah, Halakhot & Guidelines



Dedicated by

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Halakhot of Sukkot

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I. Introduction

The festival of Sukkot — when we move our official residence into transient and insubstantial quarters — commemorates the extraordinary care and protection that Hashem bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael during their perilous wandering through the wilderness. In the first instance it refers to the forty years of travel through the desert upon leaving Egypt until reaching the Promised Land. It is also a reminder of the special providence Hashem has extended Israel throughout its history traveling through the “Wilderness of the Nations” (Ezek. 20:35).

Sukkot is one of the Shalosh Regalim (the three pilgrimage festivals, the other two being Pesach and Shavuot) regarding which the Torah prescribed a national pilgrimage to the Bet HaMikdash to celebrate the occasion. The first day of Sukkot and the eighth day (actually a separate festival attached to Sukkot called Shemini Atzeret), are days of Yamim Tovim, full festival occasions on which work is prohibited except those connected to okhel nefesh (food preparation). The six intermediate days are Chol HaMoed, that is, the “non-holy” days of the festival, are days (excluding Shabbat) on which work may be performed with certain restrictions. In the Diaspora, Sukkot begins with two days of Yom Tov and concludes with two days of Yom Tov shel Shemini Atzeret, with five days of Chol HaMoed.

II. Building the Sukkah

A sukkah must be at least ten tefachim (handbreadths) high, approximately thirty-five inches. In times past, when it was common to sit on the floor, this height was adequate. The maximum height for a sukkah is twenty amot high (about 35 feet). If it were higher, an individual sitting in the sukkah might not sense being under the sekhakh covering.

- ❖ A sukkah must have at least two walls and part of a third. In a standard rectangular sukkah, two walls must extend for at least seven tefachim each (24

inches) while the third must extend at least over four tefachim (14 inches).

- ❖ Sukkah walls may be constituted of any material providing they are strong enough to withstand a wind normal for the particular locale during the Sukkot season.

The commercial canvas walls common in our times are only acceptable providing they are fastened well all along their width on top and bottom. One must place strings or cords horizontally across the walls of the sukkah within three tefachim of each other (about 9cm) up to a height of ten tefachim (about 30cm). Together with the canvas, this would be a valid sukkah.

- ❖ The Sukkah must be covered with sekhakh that shades the majority of the area of the sukkah.

Sekhakh must be:

1. Of a material that grows from the ground
 2. Detached from the ground
 3. Able to remain for seven days without decomposing
 4. Not subject to the laws of ritual impurity
- ❖ The most usual materials for sekhakh are bamboo, evergreens, and thin wooden slats. It is acceptable to use bamboos spliced into thin strips and interlaced to make a mat providing it was made for overhead covering or at least not for a floor mat.

Sekhakh should not be so solid that heavy rain cannot penetrate the sukkah. It is preferred to contain some sufficiently porous spots so that some stars may be visible through it.

- ❖ An air gap in the sekhakh of less than three tefachim (10 in.) does not invalidate the sukkah, but one should not eat under such a gap. Invalid sekhakh of less than four tefachim (14 in.) in the midst of kosher

sekhakh does not invalidate the sukkah and one is permitted to eat underneath such a spot. In a minimum-size sukkah (of seven tefachim) these two lenient regulations are inapplicable, as there would not be enough space remaining for a kosher sukkah.

- ❖ A ceiling area that extends into the sukkah from a side wall may have invalid sekhakh (such as a regular roof) up until four amot (seven feet) without invalidating the sukkah. The reasoning is that the part of the ceiling connected to the wall may be considered a continuation of the wall (a curved wall). However, the invalid sekhakh area is not considered part of the sukkah; thus, there must be a minimum size of sukkah without it. When eating in such a sukkah one must be under the valid sekhakh.
- ❖ A sukkah should not be built under any projection (e.g. a ledge, an overhang or trees). If part of the sukkah is under a projection, that part is invalid and one should not eat in that spot.

III. Mitzvah of Residing in the Sukkah

It is a Torah commandment to reside in a sukkah all seven days of Sukkot.

The berakha recited for this mitzvah concludes with the words “leshev basukkah” — to dwell in a sukkah. Many communities have the custom to only make the berakha of “leshev basukkah” when eating at least a kabetza (volume of an average egg) of bread in the sukkah, following the opinion of the Shulchan Arukh.

The custom of the Mashadi community is to make the berakha of “leshev basukkah” upon spending time in the sukkah, even if one is not eating any food, in line with the ruling of the Rambam and the Gra.

- ❖ Less than a kabetza of bread (the volume of an average egg) may be eaten outside the sukkah; more than that requires a sukkah.
- ❖ Cake, crackers, cookies and other baked mezonot items that are more than one kebetza are required to be eaten in the sukkah.

- ❖ Fruits, vegetables, and drinks are permitted outside the sukkah in any quantity. It is praiseworthy to eat and drink in the sukkah in a case where one is not required to do so.
- ❖ On Yom Tov or Shabbat, since there is Kiddush, “leshev bakukkah” is attached to the Kiddush. If one forgot to recite it at the beginning of his meal, he may do so as long as he is still within the meal, even if he no longer intends to eat bread.
- ❖ On the first night of Sukkot, one is required to eat at least a kazayit of bread (volume of an average olive) in the sukkah (about 1oz. of bread). In the Diaspora this applies to the second night also.
- ❖ There are four berakhot in the Kiddush of the first two nights of Sukkot: the first is on the wine, the second commemorates the festival, followed by leshev basukkah and shehecheyanu. On the second night the order of the third and fourth blessings are reversed as explained below.
- ❖ The shehecheyanu in the Kiddush on all first nights of festivals expresses gratitude for being alive to fulfill the mitzvah of celebrating the festival. On Sukkot it also applies to the mitzvah of construction of the sukkah (even if the individual reciting the Kiddush did not build or does not own the sukkah he is in).

Therefore, on the first night it is recited after leshev basukkah, to cover both mitzvot. On the second night, shehecheyanu is only for the festival. As far as construction of the sukkah is concerned, the shehecheyanu of the first night would cover it even if the first night were not really the festival, as the sukkah was already completed.

IV. Exemptions from the Mitzvah

- ❖ Women are not required to eat or sleep in the sukkah, as it is one of the positive commandments governed by time from which they are exempt. If they choose to eat in the sukkah, they fulfill a mitzvah. However, they should not recite the berakha of leshev basukkah, as they cannot say the

word “vetzivanu” (and He commanded us), for they were never commanded to do so. This principle applies to all such cases in which women are exempt but choose to fulfill the mitzvah.

- ❖ In cold or inclement climates, one need not sleep in the sukkah. One should not sleep in the sukkah if it is dangerous.
- ❖ A sick person who is discomforted when eating in the sukkah, even if his illness is not life threatening, is exempt. The sick person’s attendant is also exempt.
- ❖ When it is raining hard enough to interfere with the normal use of the sukkah, one is exempt and may then eat bread outside the sukkah. Similarly, other adverse conditions in the sukkah that cause one significant discomfort, such as extreme cold or bad odor not under one’s control, also exempt one from the sukkah.
- ❖ If one began his meal indoors because it was raining, and the rain stopped while he was in the midst of the meal, he does not have to move to the sukkah or refrain from bread during the rest of the meal. Once he was exempt at the beginning of the meal, he is exempt for the whole meal.
- ❖ On the first night of Sukkot, since eating in the sukkah is a specific mitzvah from the Torah, the halakha is different. If it rains before one fulfilled the mitzvah of eating in the sukkah, and the individual is prepared to begin his meal, he should wait a reasonable amount of time (a half hour in most cases) to see if the rain stops or if there is a sign of stopping. If it does not stop, and there is no sign of stopping, he may then eat with bread in the house.

Even the first night there is no mitzvah to eat in the sukkah while disturbed by rain. If the rain stopped after one began or completed his meal, he should enter the sukkah to eat at least a measure of bread with the berakha of leshev basukkah. However, if the rain stopped after one went to bed to sleep for the night, it is not then necessary to go to the sukkah.

- ❖ Travelers during Sukkot are exempt from sukkah during their journeying times and may eat bread outside a sukkah providing they are traveling for purposes of business or a mitzvah.

V. The Four Species - Lulav, Etrog, Hadas and Arava

The Torah prescribes taking four specific species of greenery on the first day of Sukkot (items representative of the beauty and productivity of the land of Israel) and rejoicing. The Talmud defines these as etrog (citron), lulav (palm branch), hadas (myrtle branches) and arava (willow branches). Rejoicing with these items was undoubtedly associated with their symbolism and the time being toward the end of the harvest season (Lev. 23:39). In the Bet HaMikdash the celebrating with the four species was performed all seven days of Sukkot, but only on the first day outside of the Mikdash (or Yerushalayim). After the destruction of the Bet HaMikdash, our Sages extended the mitzvah to all seven days for any location.

This mitzvah is performed once daily, during daytime only, by lifting the four species together. This is the minimal, technical requirement. In the spirit of the law one would hold the four species in his hands while singing and chanting prayers, particularly the hoshanot. The mitzvah is not performed on Shabbat as the Rabbis feared it would lead to carrying.

- ❖ Women are not obligated in this mitzvah as it is a positive mitzvah governed by time. They may choose to perform it, but without a berakha.
- ❖ One lulav, three hadasim and two aravot should be bound together, so that the three species comprise a single unit. It is customary to bind them with lulav leaves. The binding should preferably be done before Yom Tov so that the binding material could be cut to size and knots made. If done on Yom Tov it may only be done in an inferior manner, without cutting and without proper knots.
- ❖ In fulfilling the mitzvah, one takes the three species bound together in his right hand, recites the berakha, then takes the etrog in his left hand and while holding the four species together, waves

them. The central spine of the lulav should face towards the person. The berakha is recited just before taking the etrog in hand in accordance with the rule that berakhot on mitzvot are recited just before fulfillment. If preferred, one may hold the etrog upside down before the berakha and turn it right side up after the berakha, as the mitzvah is not fulfilled until the four species are held right side up. Right side up means the point of detachment from the tree is to the bottom.

- ❖ On the first day two berakhot are recited: “al netilat lulav” and “sheheheyanu.” On the rest of the days only the first berakha is recited.
- ❖ The Torah indicates that we should each take *our own* set of four species. This applies to the first day; on the other days he may borrow a set from another. On the first day if one does not have his own set, someone may present him with a gift with the understanding that it will be returned. If the congregation owns its own set, there is an assumed general consensus. Each member is considered a partner and each is understood to relinquish his share on behalf of whoever wishes to say the berakha.
- ❖ There is a technical problem involved with the giving of the lulav set to children on the first day. Halakhically, a child can acquire property when an adult gives it to him, but cannot give over property. Therefore, an adult should be careful not to transfer his lulav set to a child as a gift on the first day before all the adults who intend to say a berakha on that set that day have done so.
- ❖ The lulav must measure at least four tefachim (14 in.); hadas and arava stalks must measure at least three tefachim each (10 in). An etrog must be at least the volume of an average egg.
- ❖ An etrog from which even a small amount is missing is invalid. This includes the node from which the pitum protrudes. Etrogim that grow naturally without such a node are acceptable. The upper portion of an etrog (the upper slope until the top) should be very presentable, without flaws such as discoloration. Flaws on the lower portion of the

etrog are not as serious and its acceptability depends on the extent of the flaw.

- ❖ Proper hadas has three or more leaves protruding from the same horizontal line all along its stem. At the minimum, it should be tripled for at least four and one-half inches along its stem, which is the majority of the bediavad measurement of hadas. If all the leaves dry up to the extent that they no longer are green but whitish, it is invalid.
- ❖ Proper arava has smooth-edged leaves. If the majority of the leaves dry up or fall off, it is invalid.
- ❖ Whatever is invalid because of a missing piece, poor appearance, or blemishes is only invalid the first day.
- ❖ Hadas and particularly arava spoil relatively quickly. To preserve them, it is helpful to wrap them in a large sheet of aluminum foil, wet newspaper or a damp towel and refrigerate.
- ❖ There is an important halakhic principle is to beautify the mitzvot. Since the etrog is defined as the Biblical hadar (beautiful), it is especially appropriate to seek a presentable one.

VI. Shemini Atzeret

The festival of the eighth day (and the ninth day in the Diaspora), Shemini Atzeret, is a separate festival in most respects. Thus, the halakhot of sukkah and the four species do not apply to it.

It is customary to eat in the sukkah on the first day of Shemini Atzeret without reciting the berakha on the sukkah. This is based on the practice of conducting as they did before establishment of a set calendar, when they had the doubt regarding the day, i.e. perhaps the eighth day is really the seventh day and still Sukkot, even though we now know it is the eighth day.

However, since the day is Shemini Atzeret which does not require sitting in the sukkah, slight discomfort permits eating indoors, as the mitzvah to be joyous in celebrating the festival is from the Torah and the custom to comport in accordance with the doubt of the

day that they had before the set calendar cannot override it.

We begin reciting "mashiv haruach umorid hageshem" (acknowledging that the time for rain in Israel has arrived) in the Amida of Musaf of Shemini Atzeret. If one mistakenly recited "morid hatal" he does not repeat the Amida, as dew (tal) is appropriate all year long. We do not begin "barekh alenu" in the Amida for a few more months.

VII. Simchat Torah

Simchat Torah is celebrated on Shemini Atzeret; in the Diaspora it is celebrated on the second day. On this day we conclude the annual reading of the Torah and begin reading it anew. It is appropriate to then rededicate ourselves to increasing our study of the Torah this time around.

- ❖ We read from three Sifre Torah. In the first we conclude the Torah, in the second we begin Beresheet and in the third we read the maftir for the day. Although we normally recite Kaddish after a required reading of each Sefer Torah of Yom Tov or Shabbat, the custom is not to recite Kaddish after concluding the Torah so as not to interrupt between concluding and beginning again.
- ❖ Three Chatanim (grooms of the Torah) are designated for the readings. The Chatan Me'ona reads the portion of the Torah that precedes the concluding portion, the Chatan Torah concludes, while the Chatan Beresheet reads from the beginning of the Torah.
- ❖ A special celebration is made in honor of the Torah. The rabbis and the public dance with the Torah and circle the Torah seven times with singing and dancing both at night and by day.

VIII. Prayers

- ❖ Ya'ale VeYavo is recited in each Amida. If one omitted it during Chol HaMoed, when a weekday Amida is recited, and did not realize it until having concluded the Amida, he repeats the Amida since he made no mention of the special day. If he

realized the omission after "hamahazir shekhinato letziyon" but before beginning "Modim" he should say it there. If he realized after that point but before concluding the Amida, he should return to "retze" and repeat from that point on, which includes Ya'ale VeYavo. On Yom Tov, if mention of the festival was made in the Amida independently of Ya'ale VeYavo, one does not need to repeat.

- ❖ Ya'ale VeYavo is also recited in the Birkat HaMazon throughout the festival including the intermediate days.
- ❖ Complete Hallel with a berakha is recited after the Amida of Shacharit each day of the nine days. The lulav set is waved on each of the days of Sukkot except Shabbat (that is, on six days) during the recital of certain verses in Hallel. It is customary to wave the lulav in all six directions: south, north, east, up, down, west.
- ❖ Hoshanot are recited daily after Hallel for the seven days of Sukkot. A Sefer Torah is placed on the bimah and each individual circles around it while holding a set of the four species. On Shabbat, hoshanot are not recited. Some recite special hoshanot composed especially for Shabbat but do not bring out a Sefer Torah for them.
- ❖ The last day of Chol HaMoed is Hoshanah Rabbah. Some have a custom to stay up all night learning Torah. Rav Chaim Vital, the main disciple of the Ari'zal, states that the reason behind this custom is that this night is really the final sealing of our judgment, so we don't want to spend it in bed.
- ❖ After Shacharit of Hoshanah Rabbah, seven sections of hoshanot are recited, during each of which the congregants circle the Sefer Torah on the bimah.
- ❖ At the conclusion of Musaf, five aravot, bound together, are beaten five times on the ground with a silent prayer that G-d should grant us a year during which the earth yields its produce abundantly.

Sukkot in the Mikdash

Rabbi Yosef Bitton

The days of Sukkot were days of a special joy in the Bet haMiqdash (Temple of Jerusalem). In addition to the biblical commandment of taking the four species (ארבעת המינים), there were two other mitzvot that were fulfilled in the Temple. One of these was nisukh hamayim (= the water libation), the ceremony of pouring water on the altar. The second is the Mitsva of the 'araba.

NISUKH HAMAYIM

The rabbis describe the great joy of the ceremony of water libation:

"He who has not seen the celebration of the water libation has never experienced true joy. Big golden lamps were hoisted, with four cups of gold on top of each lamp. Four young, apprentice priests, rose to the top, carrying large jugs of oil with which the lamps were filled. Once lit, there was no courtyard in Jerusalem which did not shine with the light emanating from the Temple.

Special balconies were constructed to allow the women of Israel see the Sages of the Sanhedrin as they danced. People sang, and the righteous and pious men danced before them, while juggled with lighted torches. The Levites stood on the fifteen steps leading down from the court of Israel to the court of women, playing music with lyres, harps, trumpets and many other instruments.

Two priests stood on the top of the stairs, on each side of the entrance to the great door of the court and honked the silver trumpets [these were real trumpets, not shofarot]. All this was done to honor the commandment of the water libation.

At dawn, people came with melodies and songs to the spring of Shiloach, at the foot of the walls of Jerusalem. A Cohen carried a special jug of gold and filled it with water from the spring.

Then the congregation walked back to Temple, led by the priest bearing the water. On reaching the Temple, he brought the vessel to the altar and poured water into a basin of silver in a corner of the altar."

(Masekhet Sukka, Chapter 5).



This festive ceremony, known in Hebrew as Simhat Bet haShoeba, was connected to the beginning of the prayers for rain, and was accompanied by Tefilot and psalms of praise, trusting that HaShem will bless the earth and its products with rain during the coming year.

MITSVAT 'ARABA

The other special ceremony that was held at the Bet haMiqdash during Sukkot was Mitsvat 'Araba. "The commandment of the willow branches." This was

independent of the mitzva of the two willow branches in the four species (ארבעת המינים), which are tied together with the lulab and the myrtle.

The Mishna says that there was a place outside Jerusalem called Motza (which still exists today) located on the banks of "Soreq" river. Each day of Sukkot, people went to Motza and cut down large willow branches (about 20 feet high). These branches at the foot of the altar (mizbe'ah) were placed, with the top bent over the altar. Since the middle altar, 16 feet high, the branches jutted one meter above the top of the altar, on all four sides.

Each day of Sukkot, the Kohanim (and according to other opinions, the elders of the city as well) went around the altar once, marching with their lulabim in hand, and praying to the Almighty “*Anna haShem hoshi’a na; Anna haShem batzliha na.*” In the seventh and final day of Sukkot, Hosh’a’na Rabbah, people would go around the altar seven times.

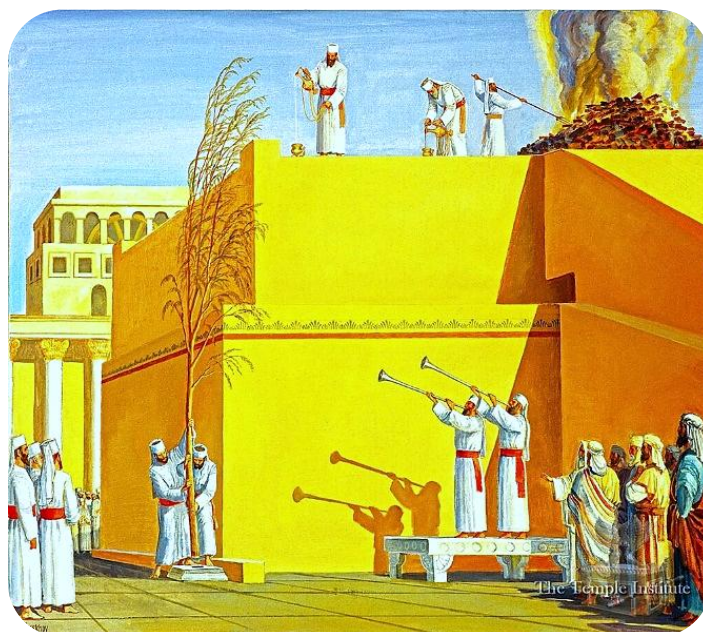
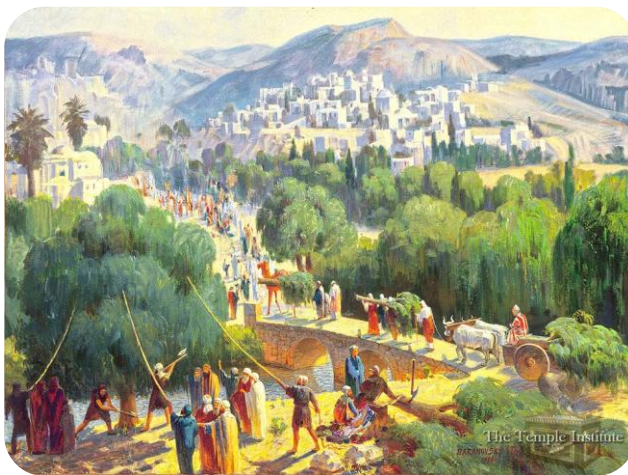
Nowadays we go around the ‘bimah’ (the platform on which the Sefer Torah is placed) every day of Sukkot, with our lulabim and etrogim, in memory of the Mitsvat ‘Araba that was held at the Bet haMiqdash. On Hosh’ana Rabbah, we will go around the bima seven times.

There is an additional ritual that belongs to the mitsva of ‘arabah. A tradition established by the later prophets of Israel, Haggai, Malakhi and Zekhariah, after the destruction of our first Temple. At the end of the Tefillah of Hoshana Rabbah we take a few branches of ‘Araba (the tradition is to take five ‘arabot, which

cannot be those that we used for the lulab) and, without reciting any blessing, we hit these branches into the ground. This ancient tradition is called *habatat* (or *hibut*) ‘araba.

Why so much emphasis on the ‘araba? Our rabbis explain that by the end of Sukkot, the Celestial Court issued the verdict on the rain will fall during the next year (*bahag niddonim al hamayim*). This is the main reason why, following a Kabbalistic custom, it is customary to stay awake all night during Hosh’ana Rabbah studying Tora.

Rain is the most critical element for our sustenance. It is possible then that the ‘araba also reminds us of our vulnerability and our dependence on the rain HaShem sends us. Moreover, hitting the branches of ‘araba on the ground and seeing how the ‘araba loses its leaves with each stroke, helps us internalizing our fragility and our total dependence of HaShem, not only for our sustenance and prosperity, but also to our very survival.



Simchat Yom Tov

The following is an AI-generated adaptation of a lecture given by Rabbi Joshua Maroof

One of the unique mitzvot of Yom Tov is the mitzvah of simchah — to rejoice on the holiday.

The Rambam describes this obligation in very practical terms. A person is supposed to be happy on Yom Tov, and he is responsible for bringing joy to his family as well. Children are given treats, women are given gifts, and men traditionally rejoice with meat and wine. At the same time, the Rambam makes clear that this is not simply permission to indulge. If a person eats and drinks while ignoring those who are poor or alone, the Rambam says that this is not simchat mitzvah, but merely simchat kreiso — the joy of his own stomach. And if a person drinks excessively and becomes frivolous or intoxicated, that too is not the joy that the Torah commanded. The simchah of Yom Tov must itself be part of our service of Hashem.

But this raises a fundamental question. How can the Torah command an emotion?

A person can be commanded to eat meat. He can be commanded to drink wine. He can be commanded to give his children treats or his wife a gift. But happiness itself is an internal state. Sometimes a person is happy and sometimes he is not. Circumstances in life may weigh upon him. How can the Torah simply tell him: Be happy?

There is another difficulty as well. Wine occupies an important place in the celebration of Yom Tov. Yet in other contexts, wine seems to be the very opposite of avodat Hashem. A Kohen who has drunk wine may not enter the Beit HaMikdash to perform the avodah. A person who has drunk may not issue a halachic ruling. We are likewise not supposed to drink and then stand before Hashem in tefillah.

If wine produces simchah, and serving Hashem is supposed to be done with simchah, why is wine specifically excluded from some of the highest forms of serving Hashem?

Perhaps the answer lies in understanding that there are two different kinds of joy.

There is a joy that is intrinsic to an experience. When a person is deeply involved in something meaningful, stimulating and fulfilling, the activity itself produces the joy. He does not need something external to make him happy. The experience itself makes him feel alive

A person who is deeply engaged in Torah learning can experience this kind of joy. The understanding, the discovery, the growth itself is satisfying. The same is true of tefillah or any genuine experience of closeness to Hashem. At that moment, the relationship itself is the source of the joy.

But there is another kind of joy: the joy of celebration.

Imagine someone completes a major section of Torah learning and makes a siyum. Hopefully, the person enjoyed the learning itself. Yet afterward he makes a meal. There is food, drink, family and friends. Why?

The meal is not the learning. It is a celebration of the learning.

The person is taking something that his mind and soul already recognize as significant and translating that recognition into the language of the body and emotions. The banquet says: This accomplishment matters to me. This deserves to be celebrated.

A wedding provides perhaps an even clearer example.

The bride and groom do not need the steak, the music or the dancing in order to understand that they are getting married. Their joy is intrinsic to what is happening to them. Everyone else, however, comes to celebrate. We dress differently, stop what we ordinarily do, eat a special meal and dance because we are giving outward expression to the significance of the occasion.

The celebration is not the event itself. It tells us how much the event means to us. Perhaps this distinction explains the structure of Yom Tov. When we learn Torah, pray and engage directly in serving Hashem, we are experiencing the intrinsic joy of the relationship itself. This is laShem. At such a moment we do not need wine to create joy. In fact, wine would interfere with the clarity of mind necessary for the experience. That is why a Kohen serving in the Beit HaMikdash cannot drink. That is why one should not drink before tefillah or before giving a halachic ruling.

The avodah itself must be the source of the joy.

But Yom Tov also asks us to step back and celebrate the fact that we have this relationship with Hashem.

That is the role of eating and drinking.

Wine relaxes a person and allows him, within proper limits, to put aside some of the ordinary pressures and anxieties that occupy his mind. Meat, historically the food of a significant banquet, gives the meal a sense of importance. We are creating a feast because the occasion deserves a feast. The Yom Tov meal therefore says something. It says: Look how fortunate we are. Look at the relationship we have with Hashem. Look at the Torah we have been given. Look at the privilege of being part of Am Yisrael. This is something worth celebrating. This may also explain the famous disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua regarding the proper division of Yom Tov.

The Torah describes Yom Tov in two different ways. On the one hand, it is a day laShem — devoted to Hashem. On the other hand, the Torah describes the day as lachem — for you. Rabbi Eliezer understands these as two possible paths. A person may make the primary character of his Yom Tov laShem, immersing himself in Torah and experiencing the relationship itself. Or his primary mode may be lachem, celebrating through eating and drinking the tremendous privilege of that relationship.

Rabbi Yehoshua, however, says **חציו לה' וחציו לכם** — part of the day must be for Hashem and part for ourselves.

According to Rabbi Yehoshua, these are not simply two alternative paths. They correspond to two dimensions within every human being.

We have a mind and a soul, but we also have a body and emotions. Our spiritual side needs the direct experience of Torah, tefillah and avodat Hashem. But our emotional and physical side also needs to be brought into the experience. It must learn to celebrate what the soul already understands. And therefore Yom Tov contains both. We go to shul. We pray. We learn. We engage our minds and souls in a direct relationship with Hashem.

And then we come home. We sit with our families. We eat a beautiful meal. We drink wine. We give gifts. We create an atmosphere of celebration. The two are not competing with one another. They are completing one another. Perhaps this also explains how the Torah can command happiness. The Torah cannot simply command a person to flip an emotional switch and suddenly feel differently. Instead, it gives us a structure designed to move us beyond ourselves. Sadness naturally causes a person to turn inward. He becomes absorbed in his worries, frustrations and disappointments. Joy allows a person to turn outward — to engage, to appreciate, to see what is around him and to connect with something greater than himself.

So the Torah gives us the tools. Learn. Pray. Eat. Drink. Give. Celebrate with your family. Include the person who does not have a meal of his own. Stop focusing exclusively on yourself and allow yourself to recognize the extraordinary privilege of the life Hashem has given us. That is why the Rambam describes rejoicing in the performance of mitzvot as an avodah gedolah — a great form of divine service. Simchah is not merely the reward for serving Hashem. Simchah itself is part of the avodah. Yom Tov asks us not only to serve Hashem, but to appreciate that serving Hashem is itself something worth celebrating. Our minds should understand it. Our souls should experience it. And our bodies and emotions should celebrate it.

That is the harmony of **חציו לה' וחציו לכם** — a Yom Tov in which every dimension of the person participates in the joy of having a relationship with Hashem.

Sukkot: Freedom, Faith, & Purpose

The following is an AI-generated adaptation of a lecture given by Rabbi Jonathan Livi on Sukkot 2025

When we think of Sukkot, we often picture the festive atmosphere - families eating together in the sukkah, shaking the lulav and etrog, and celebrating together. But Sukkot is far more than a joyful holiday. It represents the culmination of the journey that begins with Pesach and Shavuot, and ultimately points toward the greater purpose of the Jewish people in the world.

1. The Agricultural Cycle and the Joy of Completion

On a simple, physical level, Sukkot - like Pesach and Shavuot - is an agricultural festival. Each of the three Regalim corresponds to a stage in Israel's harvest season.

Pesach marks the beginning of the barley harvest. Shavuot comes during the wheat harvest and is associated with the first fruits. Sukkot comes at the end of the season, when the produce has been gathered in and the year's agricultural work reaches its completion. That is why the Torah calls Sukkot Chag HaAsif, "the Festival of Ingathering" (Shemot 23:16; 34:22). It is the time when the harvest is safely brought home. After months of planting, waiting, working, and worrying, a person can finally look at what has been produced and rejoice.

This helps explain why Sukkot is described especially as a time of joy. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes simchah in connection with Sukkot (Devarim 16:13-15). The work has borne fruit. The year's parnassah is gathered in. There is a natural feeling of completion, security, gratitude, and happiness.

2. The Spiritual Journey of the Regalim

But the agricultural cycle reflects a much deeper spiritual journey.

Pesach is the beginning. On Pesach, the Jewish people become physically free. Hashem takes us out of Egypt and transforms us from slaves into a free nation.

But freedom alone is not a purpose. A person can be free and still have no direction. Therefore, Pesach leads to Shavuot. At Har Sinai, freedom receives meaning. We are given the Torah and learn what we are supposed to do with our freedom.

But even receiving the Torah is not the final stage. The goal was never for the Jewish people to remain at Har Sinai. The next stage was to enter Eretz Yisrael and build an actual society based on the Torah - a nation with homes, farms, businesses, courts, an economy, and political independence, while remaining connected to Hashem.

That stage brings a new spiritual challenge. In the desert, Hashem's protection was obvious. Food fell from heaven. Water came miraculously. Clouds protected the nation. But once the Jewish people entered the Land, they would plant fields, build homes, earn money, and create wealth through seemingly natural means.

The Torah warns repeatedly about the danger that comes with that success. "Lest you eat and be satisfied, build good houses and dwell in them... and your heart becomes haughty, and you forget Hashem your God" (Devarim 8:12-14). A person can begin to say, "My strength and the might of my hand made me this wealth" (Devarim 8:17).

That is precisely where Sukkot enters. At the moment of greatest agricultural security - when the harvest has been gathered and a person feels most successful - the Torah tells him to leave his permanent house and enter a temporary sukkah. The message is not that material success is bad. Sukkot is a celebration of that success. The message is that success must never cause us to forget its Source.

Sukkot teaches us how to live with prosperity without becoming arrogant, how to enjoy the physical world without becoming materialistic, and how to live within nature while still recognizing Hashem's hashgachah.

Pesach gives us freedom. Shavuot gives that freedom purpose. Sukkot teaches us how to take that purpose into the real world.

3. From Building Ourselves to Influencing the World

But there is one more stage.

The Jewish people's mission does not end once we become free, receive the Torah, enter the Land, and build a successful Torah society. If that were the entire purpose, the story could end there. From the beginning, Hashem describes the Jewish people as a "mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh" - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Shemot 19:6). Avraham is told that through him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Bereishit 12:3). The prophets later describe Israel as an "or lagoyim," a light to the nations (Yeshayahu 42:6; 49:6).

Why a kingdom of "priests" (kohanim)? Because a kohen does not exist only for himself. His status creates responsibility toward others. In the same way, the Jewish people are meant to build a society shaped by Torah and then allow that society to become a source of moral and spiritual light for the rest of humanity.

And remarkably, this universal dimension appears more clearly on Sukkot than on any other festival.

4. The Seventy Bulls of Sukkot

The Torah commands a unique series of korbanot on Sukkot. Over the seven days of the festival, a total of seventy bulls are offered (Bamidbar 29:12-34).

The Gemara explains that these seventy bulls correspond to the seventy nations of the world (Sukkah 55b). Rashi explains that they were offered for the nations, so that blessing should come to them.

This is extraordinary. At the very moment when the Jewish people celebrate their own harvest, their own land, and their own national blessing, the korbanot in the Beit HaMikdash turn outward toward the entire world.

Our success is not supposed to close us off from humanity. It is supposed to increase our responsibility toward humanity.

5. Shlomo HaMelech and the Dedication of the Beit HaMikdash

The same idea appears at one of the greatest moments in Jewish history.

Shlomo HaMelech completed the first Beit HaMikdash and gathered the nation for its dedication during the month of Tishrei, at the time of Sukkot (Melachim I 8:2, 8:65).

In the middle of Shlomo's great prayer, he does something striking. He does not pray only for the Jewish people. He specifically asks Hashem to listen to the prayers of non-Jews who come because they have heard of Hashem's greatness:

"Also to the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel... when he comes and prays toward this House, may You hear in Heaven... and do according to all that the foreigner calls to You for, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your Name" (Melachim I 8:41-43).

The Beit HaMikdash was the center of Jewish national and religious life, but Shlomo understood that its ultimate influence was supposed to extend far beyond the Jewish people. Yeshayahu would later describe the ideal Beit HaMikdash with the famous words, "My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Yeshayahu 56:7).

It is especially fitting that this dedication took place at Sukkot. The holiday celebrating the completion of Israel's physical and spiritual development is also the holiday that begins to turn Israel's mission outward.

6. Zechariah: Sukkot at the End of History

The prophet Zechariah takes this idea to its ultimate conclusion.

In the final chapter of Zechariah, after describing a future war in which the nations gather against Jerusalem and Hashem ultimately reveals His kingship, the prophet describes what happens afterward.

The surviving nations will come to Jerusalem "year after year to bow before the King, Hashem, Master of Legions, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot" (Zechariah 14:16).

And Zechariah continues that a nation that refuses to come will not receive rain; Egypt and other nations that refuse will suffer punishment and plague (14:17-19).

Why, of all the Jewish holidays, is Sukkot the festival that the nations will ultimately celebrate?

Because Sukkot represents the final stage of the entire process.

The story begins with one nation being freed from Egypt. It continues with that nation receiving the Torah. It develops as that nation enters its land and attempts to build a society under Hashem. But the story is not complete until the values revealed through that nation begin to influence humanity itself.

The culmination is not simply that the Jewish people recognize Hashem. It is the prophetic vision in which "Hashem will be King over the entire earth; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name One" (Zechariah 14:9).

7. The Full Meaning of Sukkot

Seen this way, the three Regalim form one continuous story.

Pesach asks: Can a people become free?

Shavuot asks: What will they do with that freedom?

Sukkot asks: Can they take the Torah into the real world - into land, wealth, agriculture, politics, business, family, and national life - without forgetting Hashem? And once they succeed, can they use what they have built to become a source of blessing for others?

That is the deeper meaning of Sukkot as a culmination. Agriculturally, it is the culmination of the harvest.

Historically, it represents the movement from the desert into settled national life.

Spiritually, it teaches how to remain dependent on Hashem precisely when we feel most independent.

And ultimately, it points toward the culmination of the Jewish mission: not merely to become free and receive the Torah, but to build a society shaped by Torah that can serve as a mamlechet kohanim and an or lagoyim - a people whose relationship with Hashem brings blessing, morality, faith, and knowledge of God into the world.

Perhaps that is why Sukkot is the great festival of joy. The greatest joy is not simply having received blessing. It is understanding what that blessing is for.

We leave Egypt so that we can receive the Torah. We receive the Torah so that we can live by it. We live by it so that we can build something holy in this world. And ultimately, what we build is meant to help bring the entire world closer to the recognition of Hashem.

That is the journey from Pesach to Shavuot to Sukkot - from freedom, to Torah, to purpose, and finally to mission.

The Joy of Yom Tov

Gilad Azariah

"You shall rejoice in your festival (Sukkot), with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst." (Devarim 16:13)

In essence, we are commanded to be happy on Sukkot.

On face value, this seems like a simple mitzvah. Be happy, and enjoy the week! Go to a sukkah party, eat some poppers there, make a l'chaim, and you're good, right?

But in reality, for many, this could be one of the most difficult mitzvot to fulfill. Being happy is not such a simple task. Just because it's Sukkot does not mean we can flip a switch and suddenly become happy! We see people are suffering in so many areas: financially, with health, with fertility, with finding their zivug; the list goes on and on.

So how does Hashem expect us to magically turn around and become happy?!

I heard a story that can help us answer this question from my grandfather, Rabbi Ezrahan, 10 years ago or so on the first night of Sukkot, and the story has stuck with me ever since.

The Rambam (Maimonides) faced this question himself, and also struggled to come up with an answer. In the times of the Rambam, there was a Sultan who had conquered many countries and was essentially king of the world. The Sultan had heard of the great rabbinic scholar Maimonides, who was also a giant in the medical world and was probably the most talented physician in the world at his time. The Sultan wanted him to be his personal doctor and brought him to his capital city. The Rambam continued his studying and teaching of the Torah while being on the Sultan's staff.

One day, the Rambam's receptionist came to his study and told him there was a man who had an appointment to see him; he wanted his medical opinion. The mystery man entered the office with a stylish haircut, nicely trimmed beard, and a striking designer suit, and sat before the Rambam. The Rambam knew he must be a

man of great importance if he knew the Sultan personally, and was ready to hear the man out and help him. The man explained how he was physically ailing: he couldn't sleep at night, could never get out of bed in the morning, had no appetite, and had severe body aches and migraines. The Rambam did a physical, blood tests, MRIs, whatever, and after a bit came to the conclusion: the man is physically perfect; he must be mentally ill, he was a very sad and depressed man.

The Rambam called the man back to meet with him and delivered the news. But he told him, "Do not worry, there is this world-famous comedian in town, the funniest man in the world, putting on a personal show for the Sultan and his friends. I have two tickets! Find yourself a nice date, go to the comedy show, and you will laugh so much, your depression will be cured!" The depressed man sadly looked at the Rambam and replied, "I am the comedian..."

The Rambam was shocked. The funniest man in the world was suffering from depression!? He was rich, good-looking, and famous; how could he be depressed?! He began searching through the Gemara, the mefarshim, all throughout Jewish literature to find the cure. It took him all night, and he found no answer. The next morning, suddenly it hit him. The key to happiness was not a big secret; it wasn't so far out of reach; it was, in fact, in his hands the whole time: it was the Torah and mitzvot.

When the Rambam returned to speak with the comedian, he asked for some more information about the man's life. The man explained that he lived a wild life. He partied almost every night, drank a lot alcohol, gambled, and did various drugs. He didn't have a community, no real, true friends. He had money and fame, but he went to bed every night empty and unfulfilled.

The Rambam asked the man to do one thing for him: go to minyan every day at 8:30. (Yes, the world's most famous comedian is Jewish... what did you expect?)

The comedian decided he had nothing to lose; why not? He went to bed early that night because he had to wake up early. He sat in the back, no one really paid any attention to him, and he went about the rest of his day as usual. But he didn't give up. He desperately wanted to get his life together, and kept going to that same minyan. Very quickly, the other members started noticing this funny and charming man, and he made some friends, and eventually was invited to a Shabbat dinner. Another member of the minyan asked him to learn with him a little once a week at nights, and slowly, through his chavruta, he built up his Jewish education. Soon enough, he was finally married to a great woman, who made him a better man and Jew, and together they built a family, and become a pillar of their community. Finally, the comedian was at peace.

What we learn from this story is that many times in life we take for granted the Torah and its teachings. We look at it the mitzvot and their limitations as a burden, holding us back from the full enjoyment we could be having in life. Keeping Shabbat, going to minyan, keeping kosher... many times we view these as restrictions. But in reality, God gave us the mitzvot not so we could do them for Him, but for ourselves. The Torah gives us the guidelines to build lives that are meaningful and filled with family, community, and purpose.

For example, many times men look at going to minyan as a bothersome chore. In reality, it might be the greatest gift God gave us. You know that feeling when you are at the airport and you see that one other Jewish family is also traveling with you? It gives you a great

feeling, like you're not alone here. In a world where so many people suffer from loneliness, Hashem in his infinite wisdom foresaw this, and commanded us to pray with nine other men. He ensured that you would constantly live with that feeling: you are not alone here.

Shabbat is also one of the hardest mitzvot to keep, which many people really struggle with. But if we look at it from a different perspective, Shabbat is one of the most beautiful times possible in our households. The average American family rarely gets everyone together for dinner, maybe once a year on Thanksgiving. And even if they do, everyone's on their phones, or watching TV not really present or connecting. In Judaism, at least once or twice a week, on Shabbat and on holidays (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, etc.), the family is essentially forced to sit down together, with no phones, no work, no homework or tests, no running around to different places, just sit down together as a family and enjoy time together. To me, these are always the times I am the most at peace and simply happy with life.

Every mitzvah Hashem commanded has a deeper purpose than we see and is not simply there to make life worse; it actually is there to make our lives more meaningful and better. I strongly encourage everyone to find a mitzvah they think is completely meaningless and annoying, and ask one of our Rabbis or do your own research. There is great meaning behind it, and it is there to guide you to a life full of happiness and meaning. Chag Sameach!

Shemini Atzeret: The Ultimate Swan Song

Dan Hopkins

We made it. Yes, after over a month of selichot, the intensity of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah (Ten Days of Repentance), and a week of joy over Sukkot, we stand at the precipice of Tishrei's final act, Shemini Atzeret.

After our annual festive marathon, the curtain call is a Yom Tov which, forgive me for saying, can seem a little underwhelming. No specific mitzvah to rival the shofar or the lulav, or a defining minhag that we can get behind, like eating dairy of Shavuot. There's also remarkably little explanation in the Torah of what the day commemorates. Yet this is the closing note which is to carry us spiritually throughout the long winter. What makes this a fitting finale?

Perhaps, to understand the ending, we need to remember where this story began.

A relationship, not just a reckoning

Elul introduced the season through a verse about love. The Chida famously comments that the name Elul is an acronym for:

“אני לדודי ודודי לי”

“I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.” (Shir HaShirim 6:3)

Before the courtroom imagery of Rosh Hashanah, we are invited to return to through the language of a relationship. We move towards Him, and He responds by drawing us close.

That relationship takes centre stage in Tishrei, the seventh month. To paraphrase, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ז"ל in his essay “The Duality of Jewish Time”, Tishrei is to the year what Shabbat is to the week and Shemittah is to year to Yovel cycle. The Midrash expresses the pattern affectionately:

“כל השביעין חביבין”

“All sevenths are beloved,” (Vayikra Rabbah 29:11.)

Perhaps the seventh month gives our relationship with God what every loving relationship needs, namely time set apart from ordinary life to remember what matters most and repair what has been damaged.

Reframing our understanding of this time of year through a lens of relationship a pattern starts to appear.

Elul is the courtship, getting up early, going to bed late, we are willing to go the extra mile to show our devotion. Rosh Hashanah things are getting more serious; we renew our vows with the Borei Olam. During the musaf tefila of the day we recite the verses of Kingship:

“כדי שתמליכוני עליכם”

“So that you make Me King over you.”

There is a well-known quote from Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer:

“החתן דומה למלך”

“The bridegroom is like a king”

One could say that Rosh HaShana is both a coronation and a wedding. Where we accept our Creator's dominion over us and trust that He has our best interests at heart.

Then comes Yom Kippur, our moment to yichud with The Master of the Universe, when in biblical times the Kohen Gadol would enter the Kodesh HaKedoshim and utter the 72-lettered Shem haShem.

Moreover, the Mishnah is Ta'anit (4:8) says:

“ביום חתונתו — זו מתן תורה”

“‘On the day of His wedding’—this is the giving of the Torah.”

Rabbi Ovadya d'Bartenura explains that this refers to Yom Kippur, when the second Tablets were given. These were the Tablets received after the Golden Calf, which according to Hazal, Moshe brought down on Yom Kippur. These luchot symbolised the Ribbono

shel Olam's infinite forgiveness. Testifying for eternity that what was broken could be rebuilt.

The joy of being welcomed back

Five days after Kippur, we are celebrating Sukkot. How do we move so quickly from fasting and confession to such happiness? The Midrash makes the connection directly.

"לפי שנטלו הנפשות דימוס ביום הכפורים"

"Because the souls received pardon on Yom Kippur."
(Yalkut Shimoni)

The joy of Sukkot is not a change of subject from Yom Kippur. It is the joy of believing that the reconciliation was real.

We know from our own relationships that an apology and a reconciling are not the same thing. Someone can accept an apology while still keeping their distance. We breathe differently when the warmth returns.

We've gone through the effort of dating, the legality of marriage and the intimacy of Yichud. Now onto the party!

The Gemara teaches that there were seventy bulls offered during Sukkot corresponding to the seventy nations of the world. Within our wedding analogy, the whole world has been invited to our spiritual Sheva berachot. (Sukkah 55b.)

But eventually the seven days end.

When the guests go home

The guests leave. The tables are cleared. There are no more speeches, no more tables to be planned and nobody left to host. But what is left is what matters most. You and Him. From the outside, it might look underwhelming. From the inside, it is what the whole process was for.

After the seventy bulls of Sukkot comes the single bull of Shemini Atzeret. The Gemara compares this to a king who first hosts a great banquet, then turns to his beloved companion:

"עשה לי סעודה קטנה כדי שאהנה ממך"

"Prepare a small meal for Me, so that I may enjoy your company." (Sukkah 55b)

The smaller meal is not a lesser celebration. Its significance lies in who is sharing it.

We began Elul trying to find our way back. We reach Shemini Atzeret hearing God, as it were, asks us to stay. That is more than forgiveness. It is the reassurance that our company is still desired.

Perhaps this answers the question with which we began. Tishrei's finale does not need to outdo everything that came before it. The point was never to keep the celebrations going indefinitely. It was to renew a relationship strong enough to accompany us when ordinary life resumes.

May we all merit to draw inspiration from Shemini Atzeret and this entire holiday season into each and every day of this new year.

Chag Sameach!

Dwelling in the Sukkah & Dwelling in Eretz Yisrael

Emil Ben-David

The mitzvah to dwell in the sukkah is a unique mitzvah. Unlike many other mitzvot, which involve a particular action performed with a particular part of the body, the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah encompasses us in our entirety. When a person enters the sukkah, his entire body enters the mitzvah. He eats there, drinks there, talks there, learns there and, when possible, sleeps there. The mitzvah does not merely ask us to perform an action; it asks us to make the sukkah our dwelling place.

The Torah says:

בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים

"You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days." (VaYikra 23:42)

Our Sages understand the word **teishvu**, "you shall dwell," to mean that a person should live in the sukkah in a manner similar to the way he lives in his home. "תשבו כעין תדורו" (Sukkah 28b). The sukkah is therefore not simply a place where we perform a mitzvah. It temporarily becomes our home.

Many mitzvot require us to do something. We put on tefillin with our arm and head. We take the arba minim with our hands. We say words of Torah with our mouths. We give tzedakah with our hands and our possessions. These mitzvot sanctify particular parts of our lives. But mitzvah to dwell in the sukkah is different.

This quality of the sukkah points toward a remarkable parallel with another mitzvah: Yishuv Eretz Yisrael, the mitzvah to dwell in the Land of Israel. The Vilna Gaon is famously associated with the teaching that sukkah and settling in Eretz Yisrael are unique in that a person fulfills these mitzvot with his entire body. In both cases, the mitzvah is not limited to the hand, mouth, mind, or any particular limb. Rather, the person himself becomes immersed in the mitzvah.

This is more than an interesting halachic similarity. It reveals something profound about the nature of both mitzvot.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the sukkah is that it transforms ordinary actions into something holy. Eating lunch becomes a mitzvah. Drinking becomes part of the mitzvah. Sitting and talking with family becomes part of the mitzvah. Even sleeping in the sukkah is a fulfillment of the mitzvah.

This same idea can be seen in the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael.

When a Jew lives in the Land of Israel, the mitzvah is not confined to a particular action. Simply living there, walking its streets, working its fields, raising a family, sleeping in one's home, and going about ordinary life are all within the framework of the mitzvah of settling the Land. The remarkable idea is that the mundane actions a person performs can become a mitzvah.

Both mitzvot therefore teach the same fundamental lesson: The Torah does not ask us to escape physical life in order to find holiness. It teaches us how to bring holiness into physical life. Holiness is not something that exists only in a synagogue or in moments of prayer. Holiness can surround a person wherever he lives.

There is a beautiful allusion to this connection in the verse:

"ויהי בשלם סוכו ומעונתו בציון"

"And His sukkah is in Shalem, and His dwelling place in Zion." (Tehillim 76:3)

The verse connects sukkah with Tzion. The sukkah is a temporary dwelling place for the Jewish people, and Eretz Yisrael is the ultimate dwelling place of the Jewish people.

There is another remarkable connection between Sukkot and Eretz Yisrael.

On Sukkot, we are commanded to leave our permanent homes and enter a temporary dwelling. Our Sages describe this as:

“צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת עראי”

“Leave your permanent dwelling and dwell in a temporary dwelling.” (Sukkah 2a)

For seven days, we are asked to give up the security of our home. We leave behind the feeling that our physical security comes from our possessions, our walls, our locks, and our material stability. The walls may be thin. The roof is open to the sky. The structure is temporary and fragile. Yet we sit under the sechach and in effect say: My ultimate security does not come from the walls around me. It comes from Hashem.

Dwelling in the sukkah is therefore an exercise in emunah.

The same lesson applies to living in Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael is not simply a geographic location. It is a land in which Am Israel is commanded to live in a special relationship with Hashem. The Torah repeatedly teaches that the success and security of the Land are dependent upon our relationship with Him.

A person naturally wants security. He wants strong walls, stable finances, a predictable future, and protection from danger. Yet both the sukkah and Eretz Yisrael teach us that ultimately, security is not created by physical structures alone.

The sukkah has walls, but those walls are deliberately insufficient to provide the kind of security we normally expect from a house. Its roof is made of sechach, and it reminds us that the protection of Hashem is greater than the protection of anything we can build ourselves.

Likewise, living in Eretz Yisrael requires a person to recognize that the ultimate protection of the Land comes from Hashem. This does not mean that a person should ignore physical responsibility. We are commanded to build, protect, work, and act responsibly. But underneath all of our efforts lies the recognition that our efforts alone do not determine the outcome.

We build the sukkah, but Hashem provides the ultimate protection. We build and develop the Land, but

Hashem is the One who gives the Land its blessing and enables Am Israel to flourish within it.

Perhaps this is one of the deepest messages of Sukkot. During the rest of the year, we live in a sturdy house and may easily forget how dependent we are on Hashem. Our walls give us a sense of permanence. Our possessions give us a sense of stability. Our plans give us a sense of control.

Then Sukkot arrives.

Hashem tells us: Leave your house. Come outside. And live under a roof that is not really a roof. For seven days, we deliberately place ourselves in a situation that reminds us that we are dependent upon Him.

And remarkably, the Torah commands us to do this specifically as a time of joy (**zman simchatenu**).

Why?

Because, true emunah does not make a person afraid of his vulnerability, it allows him to find peace within it. When we understand that Hashem is our ultimate protector, we can leave the illusion of total control behind. We can live with uncertainty, because we know that Hashem is watching over us.

The mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah teaches us that you do not need to have everything under your control in order to live with Hashem. Eretz Yisrael says the same thing on a national scale.

Am Israel is commanded to build a life in the Land, to plant, build, establish communities, raise children, create a society, and develop the Land, while constantly recognizing that our existence ultimately depends upon Hashem.

Likewise, the challenges of living in Eretz Yisrael can be enormous, but we are reminded that the Land is not simply a place to live; it is a place where Am Israel is meant to live their lives in connection with Hashem.

We put our entire bodies into the mitzvah, and in doing so we place our entire lives into the hands of Hashem.

Finding Joy in the Imperfect

Valentina Hematian

We spend a lot of our lives looking forward to the next stage. We think things will feel better once the baby starts sleeping, the kids get a little older, work settles down, we have more money, or a problem we've been dealing with is finally resolved.

There's nothing wrong with looking forward to easier days. However, I've been thinking about how quickly that can turn into always waiting for something before fully enjoying what we already have.

Especially as a mother, I find myself doing this without even realizing it. Some stages are exhausting, and in the moment, you just want to get through them. Then they pass, and suddenly you're looking at pictures from that time wondering how it went by so quickly. The stage you were waiting to finish becomes the one you miss.

It made me think differently about Sukkot.

We call Sukkot *zman simchateinu*, the time of our joy. Sukkot comes immediately after a period where we've spent weeks thinking about everything that isn't where we want it to be. Throughout Elul, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we look closely at ourselves. We think about where we fell short, what we want to change and how we want the coming year to look.

Then Sukkot comes only a few days later.

Nothing has magically been fixed in those few days. We are still the same people with the same lives, responsibilities and struggles. We may have made commitments to change, but becoming the person we want to be takes time and can be stressful.

Yet this is exactly the point that we are told to have *simcha*.

I think there is something very meaningful about that timing. Maybe Hashem is reminding us that we don't have to wait for everything in our lives to fall into place to feel joy.

Going into the sukkah gives us, in a way, a chance to practice that.

We can spend hours building the sukkah, hanging decorations and setting the table, and then the wind blows. The decorations start falling. The kids are pulling things off the walls. Someone spills their drink. You're carrying things back and forth from the kitchen because you inevitably forgot something inside. It may not look exactly like the peaceful Yom Tov meal you had pictured.

We don't say, "Okay, this isn't going as planned, so we'll enjoy Sukkot tomorrow."

We stay in the sukkah. We pick the decoration back up, clean the spill, bring out whatever we forgot and keep going.

Maybe there's something to that. We're learning, in a very real way, how to enjoy something even if it doesn't look exactly the way we imagined it would.

Because that's life too.

We can want to grow and still appreciate who we are today. We can pray for something to change while still recognizing what is good in our lives right now. We can be struggling with one part of life without allowing it to take away from every other part.

Maybe that is one of the reasons we need Sukkot right after Yom Kippur. There is a time to look inward and ask ourselves what needs to be better. We cannot spend our entire lives looking at what is missing or what still needs fixing.

At some point, we have to look around at what is already here.

There will probably always be a next thing we're waiting for. I don't want to spend so much time waiting for life to get easier that I miss the life I once prayed for.



Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

ACTIVITY PACKET

RIDDLES

- 1 I arrive each night without knocking. I'm an honored guest, although no chair is required for me. Who am I?
- 2 I'm an ending that produces a beginning - and both happen before the dancing stops. What am I?
- 3 As Sukkot concludes, I'm requested before I'm necessarily expected. Farmers especially appreciate me. What am I?
- 4 I have a heart but no heartbeat, a spine but no bones, and words but no voice. What am I?

MULTIPLE-CHOICE TRIVIA

1. On which Hebrew date does Sukkot begin?
 - A. 1 Tishrei
 - B. 10 Tishrei
 - C. 15 Tishrei
 - D. 25 Kislev
2. Which biblical name for Sukkot means 'Festival of Ingathering'?
 - A. Chag HaAviv
 - B. Chag HaAsif
 - C. Chag HaMatzot
 - D. Chag HaBikkurim
3. How many days is Sukkot itself?
 - A. Five
 - B. Six
 - C. Seven
 - D. Eight
4. Which book is traditionally read on Sukkot?
 - A. Esther
 - B. Ruth
 - C. Kohelet
 - D. Eichah
5. How many bulls were offered in total over the seven days of Sukkot in the Beit Hamikdash?
 - A. Seven
 - B. Forty
 - C. Seventy
 - D. One hundred
6. What is the seventh day of Sukkot called?
 - A. Shabbat Hagadol
 - B. Hoshana Rabbah
 - C. Isru Chag
 - D. Shavuot
7. What is the primary mitzvah involving the sukkah?
 - A. Looking at it
 - B. Decorating it
 - C. Dwelling in it
 - D. Building it
8. What does 'Atzeret' most closely suggest?
 - A. Gathering or holding back
 - B. Dancing
 - C. Beginning
 - D. Harvesting
9. What are the dancing circuits on Simchat Torah called?
 - A. Hoshanot
 - B. Hakafot
 - C. Selichot
 - D. Zemiroth
10. What is the person honored with the final section of the Torah often called?
 - A. Chatan Bereshit
 - B. Chatan Torah
 - C. Chatan Hachag
 - D. Chatan Haftarah
11. In Israel, Simchat Torah is celebrated:
 - A. On the same day as Shemini Atzeret
 - B. One week after Shemini Atzeret
 - C. Before Sukkot
 - D. On Rosh Chodesh



Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

ACTIVITY PACKET

TRUE OR FALSE

1. The Torah commands us to build a sukkah but never commands us to spend time inside it.

TRUE / FALSE

2. Hoshana Rabbah is the eighth day of Sukkot.

TRUE / FALSE

3. Simchat Torah celebrates receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

TRUE / FALSE

4. Schach should ordinarily be made from something that grew from the ground and was then detached.

TRUE / FALSE

Connections

Create four groups of four. Each group shares a connection.

DOUGH

AVRAHAM

BOTTLE

HAKAFOT

LULAV

SLEEVES

YOSEF

DAYS

CARPET

HOSHANOT

HAND

YAAKOV

USHPIZIN

MARACA

TORAH

YITZCHAK

ANSWER KEY

RIDDLES

- One of the Ushpizin
- Simchat Torah
- Rain
- A Torah scroll

TRUE OR FALSE

- False - We are told to dwell in it.
- False - It is the seventh day.
- False - That is Shavuot.
- True

TRIVIA 1-6

- C - 15 Tishrei
- B - Chag HaAsif
- C - Seven
- C - Kohelet
- C - Seventy
- B - Hoshana Rabbah

TRIVIA 7-11

- C - Dwelling in it
- A - Gathering or holding back
- B - Hakafot
- B - Chatan Torah
- A - Same day as Shemini Atzeret

CONNECTIONS

THINGS THAT ARE ROLLED

TORAH | CARPET | DOUGH | SLEEVES

THINGS THAT ARE SHAKEN

LULAV | HAND | BOTTLE | MARACA

ASSOCIATED WITH SEVEN

DAYS | USHPIZIN | HAKAFOT | HOSHANOT

TRADITIONAL USHPIZIN

AVRAHAM | YITZCHAK | YAAKOV | YOSEF

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Full dedications inside

