

United We Stand

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Sukkos

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Sukkos During War

As we approach Sukkos, I feel a tremendous sense of tension and angst. How can I celebrate Sukkos properly when my brothers are on the battlefield? How can I fulfill the *mitzvah* of rejoicing when there are still hostages? How can I feel a sense of *achdus* and imminent *geulah* when realistically, it seems we are very far from true unity in *Klal Yisrael*? Perhaps I shouldn't be feeling any of these things at all - perhaps such *simcha* is indeed out of place this year. Indeed, as we approach the Hebrew anniversary of the war, I can't help but feel I haven't done enough to empathize with the situation - if anything, I feel like I should be less happy, not more. What, then, are we supposed to be feeling this Sukkos?

Perhaps a deeper understanding of what Sukkos is all about will reveal that the message of this holiday is exactly what we need right now. The source for living in sukkas on Sukkos is two verses in Vayikra (23:42-43): *You shall dwell in sukkas for seven days, every resident of Israel shall dwell in sukkas, so that your generations will know that I caused Israel to dwell in sukkas (sukkot) when I took them out of Egypt ...*

The problem is, where does the Torah actually record that we dwelled in sukkas after we left Egypt? Normally, when there's a commandment to perform a ritual to remember an event, the Torah will have recorded the event. Where does it talk about us sleeping in huts?

Rabbi David Fohrman points out that the answer seems to be just when we first left Egypt, before we even crossed the *Yam Suf* (Shemos 12:37): *The Children of Israel traveled from Ramses to Sukkot*. Indeed, Rabbi Eliezer, who famously maintains that G-d had us dwell in Clouds of Glory (not literally huts) is originally cited by the Tanchuma on this verse. The place "Sukkot", presumably similar to the case when Yaakov came to a place called Sukkot, was probably named for the fact that the Jews resided in huts there. The verse thus reflects our faith and dedication to G-d when He took us out of Egypt, leaving the security of our houses to live in temporary shanties on a dangerous journey.

Where does Rabbi Eliezer get the idea that it was not huts, but the Clouds of Glory which we celebrate? Rabbi

Fohrman points out that the first appearance of the Cloud of Glory is immediately after we left Sukkot: *And they journeyed from Sukkot ... and G-d went before them by day in a Pillar of Cloud to lead them on the way* (Shemos 13:20-21). Perhaps the Cloud appeared in response to the people's taking the first step, leaving from Ramses to Sukkot and building huts. The idea that the Cloud was not merely a GPS device but protected us emerges from the events immediately preceding the Splitting of the Sea, when the Pillar of Cloud went in front of the Egyptians to blind them and block their arrows. (According to this analysis, the timeframe and narrative of Sukkos is interwoven with Pesach, and thus the seventh day of Sukkos – Hoshana Rabba - would parallel the day the Cloud defended us at the Sea of Reeds. Indeed, Rashi, in explaining the practice of reciting *Ani ViHo, Hoshiya Na* on Hoshana Rabba, bases himself on the verses describing the Cloud of Glory defending us against the Egyptians).

All of this reinforces the central theme of Sukkos as expounded by Chazal and later authorities: *chessed*. *Chessed*, as used in the Torah, literally means loyalty or faithfulness. We displayed *chessed* when we followed G-d out of Egypt and built huts, and G-d showed us *chessed* through the Clouds of Glory. Sukkos corresponds with the end of the harvest season, where we

feel the joy of G-d's *chessed*, and on it we are judged for water, which, out of *chessed*, equally benefits the righteous and the wicked, and without which nothing can exist. The quality of *chessed* exists on a plane almost independent of other qualities. On Pesach and Shavuos we focus on personal growth, from humility and an awareness of free will to personal responsibility and building ourselves through Torah. These holidays are meant to focus us inward, on refining ourselves to be worthy of a relationship with G-d. Sukkos, on the other hand, is about focusing outward. We recognize that we don't even have the wherewithal for working on ourselves if not for G-d's *chessed* to us, and we recognize that the world can't survive if we don't show *chessed* to others. On Sukkos we focus our energies, not on ourselves, but outside ourselves, on appreciating G-d and those around us.

G-d's *chessed* is best appreciated, and most able to be actualized, the more we are worthy of it, or at least on track to take advantage of it properly. This is why Sukkos is positioned after Pesach and Shavuos, as well as after Yom Kippur, when we have a fresh slate and a new determination



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to do better. But no matter how lowly we may be, chessed knows no boundaries. Chazal tell us that chessed is a signature trait of the Jewish people; we are told to suspect the ancestry of someone who exhibits cruelty, for such a quality is distinctly un-Jewish. No matter a person's level of religiosity or personal or communal flaws, a Jew is full of chessed. Likewise, G-d is always full of chessed for His people, even in the darkest of times. By sitting in our sukkot, we reenact our chessed towards G-d as well as G-d's chessed towards us, irrespective of everything else going on. Through the sukkah, we break the boundaries that come from an overly inner focus, embracing G-d and the whole world with love. It is no coincidence that Sukkos is the only holiday in Judaism that is universal, where, in the Beis Hamikdash, sacrifices are offered specifically on behalf of all the other nations of the world - while yes, family comes first, chessed belongs to everyone.

I can think of no more meaningful time to celebrate Sukkos than this year. More than ever, we need to look outwards, embracing our oneness as a people, with a sense of chessed and love that extends even to those who may not reciprocate yet. We need to appreciate how G-d is holding our hand even as we go to battle, even as we are falling and taken hostage. We need to celebrate the fact that no matter how uncertain the future may be, we are a people of chessed with a G-d of chessed, and so victory is inevitable. And we must cry out to the G-d of chessed to save us and bring redemption, *bimheira viyameinu*.

Deeper Meanings

Reprinted from 5781.

One of the most famous Divrei Torah on the message of the Arbah Minim is that they each represent a different type of Jew, and each is indispensable to our nation: The Lulav, which tastes good but doesn't have a smell, represents one who is strong in learning Torah but not in mitzvos; the Haddasim, which smell nice but don't taste good, represent one who does lots of mitzvos but doesn't focus on learning Torah; the Esrog, which smells nice and tastes good, represents one who balances learning Torah with mitzvos; and the Aravos, which neither smell nor taste good, represent one who does neither.

This approach is frustrating for its apparent superficiality and ambiguity. First of all, what is the significance of those four archetypes? Secondly, why are they all necessary? If the Esrog has everything, what do the others add - especially the Aravos?

I read a beautiful explanation based on one of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's sichos. He explains that each of the Arbah Minim exemplify a quality that is desirable in each of

us at certain times. The Esrog exemplifies the balance between Torah learning and mitzvos, i.e. spirituality and action, which in ideal conditions is indeed the best way of going about things.

The Lulav represents someone who focuses almost exclusively on Torah learning. This, too, is important at certain times in order to strengthen one's spiritual/intellectual foundations; that's why people go to Yeshiva.

The Haddasim represent someone who focuses almost exclusively on mitzvos/action; in many situations it may be commendable to neglect our learning in order to attend to the needs of the moment. This takes numerous forms - on erev Shabbos/Yom Tov, we are supposed to learn less so we can adequately prepare for Shabbos, and when people need help and we are in a unique position to help them, that also takes priority.

Finally, the Aravos represent someone who neither learns nor does mitzvos. He does nothing; he is nothing. Sometimes it's important to stop, take a step back, and recognize our smallness. As epitomized on Hoshana Rabbah, there is a place for confronting our inadequacy in heightening our perception of our dependence on G-d.

It is almost impossible to find a person that has mastered the art of versatility to the point where they can shift to each of these archetypes as needed; in general, we will be especially strong in one of these areas, and different communities may have general trends in their archetypes as well. And that is especially why the Arbah Minim helps us appreciate the indispensability of every member of our nation; because no matter one's deficiencies, everyone has unique qualities that both elevate our nation and inspire us to greater heights.

Goal of the week

Build extra acts of chessed into your Chol HaMoed schedule.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Chag Sameach !!

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