

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir



Eight Thoughts Under the S'chach

1. Freedom

Sukkot is the chag of Faith. We leave our homes, we don't know what the weather will be, and we feel just like *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert, under G-d's wing. This year we understand this more than ever. Since Purim we have been participating in a "Sukkot Workshop" – relax, let go, understand you're not in charge. Lockdown and quarantine, no *shul*, none of our regular frameworks, schools, shows... our beloved routine. This year it's easier for us to relate to the *chag*, and fulfil the wonderful *pasuk* in Tehillim: הָרַפּוֹ וְדַעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי אֶלְקִים – 'chill out' and know that I am G-d.

2. Between Yom Kippur and Sukkot

We tend to think the highlight of the *chagim* is Yom Kippur, Neilah, and then we come back down to earth. But no, the peak is now. To fast all day like angels is not the ideal. There's something even higher, and it's called Sukkot.

Yom Kippur is only one day, when everything stops. The aim is to draw strength from it for the other 364 days of the year. To take the messages and energy of this special day into our lives, into nature, into the world. Thus writes Rav Kook: "Those days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot were given to educate us about returning to the matters of this world." In other words, one needs to build a *sukkah*. One needs to go to

the market to buy *arba minim*, and yes, there are family meals that need to address everyone's preferences and dislikes, and yes, sometimes the noise from the neighbor's *sukkah* is annoying, and yes, you need to juggle all the kids, etc. But when you take what you've gleaned from Elul, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and apply them to all these seemingly mundane assignments... that's the ideal. Life itself.

3. Family

These are very much family-oriented days. Here's one idea, from the well-known Israeli parenting counselor, Ziva Meir (who also happens to be my mother-in-law): "Notice that many of the most moving songs in the world are about "Mother." In all styles. In all languages. "Umi" in Arabic, "Mama" in Yiddish, everyone worships Mommy. How did Deborah the Prophetess say it? "Until I, Deborah, arose, I arose as mother in Israel." אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, a mother in Israel, is a concept. A Jewish mother should be proud of who she is. She does not need to put herself down. Mom has often become a focus of guilt. We blame her for anything that's not okay or we just blame her for the sake of blaming...

Mothers! At this time of year, find out who you really are. Don't follow the external needs of others but connect to yourselves. After all, the world is lying to us all the time: at work, it's easy to glean compliments and at home, you can work hard all day every day and after all your effort, your child can give you a generous

mouthful of *chutzpah*. Outside you receive feedback and praise, inside everyone is not always happy. Your work is sacred but not appreciated: why keep the house in order if it's just going to be chaos again tomorrow?

"*Eim BeYisrael*" – mothers need to value themselves and what they do. They're full of self-criticism, taking on more and more assignments and constantly frustrated and unhappy. I urge them to connect inwards, give themselves a pat on the back for being who they are and doing what's right for them. Do that from the inside and everything outside will change as well."

4. Know to Differentiate

On Shabbat during Sukkot we read *Megillat Kohelet*. In our crazy times, the profound words of Shlomo HaMelech carry a lot of significance: "Everything has its season and there is time for everything under the Heaven: a time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot... a time to cry and a time to laugh, a time to eulogize and a time to dance... a time to hug and a time to avoid hugs..."

In our confusing reality, we try to do everything at once. Career and family and marriage and relationships and studies and hundreds of WhatsApp messages in between all that. Kohelet reminds us of a simple truth: one needs time for everything. Stop creating chaos in your reality. There are times for that, and there are

other times. There's permitted and forbidden, right and wrong, and it's important to discern the difference and be cognizant of what you're doing and when. For each area of our lives to blossom and flourish we need to learn to differentiate and distinguish between what's important and what's more important.

5. Arba Minim

Rav Erez expands on the famous symbolism of each of the species representing a different type of Jew:

"As we know, the *arba minim* symbolizes unity, but it's not only the unity of different parts of the people, but unity within us – unity between all the parts and all the situations Jewish souls can possibly encounter. Each one of us could be a *rasha* or a *tzaddik*. And what is our call as we shake the *arba minim*? First, connect to *Am Yisrael*. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done or do, you have a connection too; you can come closer to being a *tzaddik* as well. Second, it's not only "connect" but also "wake up!": we are shaking the *arba minim* to the four corners of the earth and up and down, and the message is: whoever, whatever, wherever you've been thrown or fallen, do not despair. You can come back and come closer from absolutely anywhere in the world."

6. Ushpizin

The *Ushpizin*, the guests we invite into our *sukkot*, are seven fathers of the nation – Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon and David. There are many profound and kabbalistic explanations for this custom, but in "*Be'er Miriam*," I found an historic reason I've never thought of before: our national fathers were largely nomads. Avraham left his birthplace and came to Israel, and

then to Egypt, and back. Yitzchak went to the land of the Philistines during the famine, and then to the western Negev, to Beer Sheva and Chevron. Ya'akov fled to Charan, returned to Canaan, and emigrated to Egypt. Yosef was sold as a slave, Moshe and Aharon wandered for 40 years in the desert and Moshe had already been in Egypt as a child. David too fled from Shaul and Avshalom.

Their lives were lives of *sukkah*, not of permanent homes. They well understood how much the permanent reality is transient, and how much flexibility, faith and creativity one needs in life. And, despite all the inconveniences and troubles mentioned here, each one of our ancestors built himself up and led and educated. We too can take our circumstances and become better people.

7. Simcha

You can't miss it. *Simcha* is supposed to be the central element of Sukkot – וְשִׂמְחָתָּ בְּחֻגְךָ וּרְדִיתָ אֶת אֶרֶץ שִׂמְחָה – and you shall rejoice in your holiday... and you shall just be happy. The Rambam tells us that in Jerusalem on Sukkot there was "excess *simcha*" and writes that *simcha* on Sukkot is a "great service [of G-d]," while in our *siddurim* Sukkot is referred to as זְמַן שִׂמְחָתֵנוּ, the time of our joy.

So what's the connection between joy and Sukkot? The big test in our times – generally – is not one of poverty but of wealth. Not of lack but of plenty. Nevertheless, most of us are not content. *Chag HaSukkot* offers an alternative: we leave our comfortable homes for a shaky hut, which reminds us of the wanderings in the desert. That's how our ancestors lived. And it is precisely out of this minimalism and simplicity we remember the great historical story and everything we've been through. We look at nature

anew (*s'chach*, *lulav*, *etrog*, etc.), and renew our bonds with our families and community during this week of celebration. We learn to appreciate everything we have around us all year long... and be happy.

8. Starting Over

Meals, dancing, candy bags, laundry, and suddenly, we're starting over again. The Shabbat after Simchat Torah is *Shabbat Bereishit*, on which we read the first *parasha* of the Torah again. Yet we notice something intriguing: the Torah does not spend too much time on the Creation of the World. Rather than describing the details of the cosmos and the stars and the oceans at length, it stops and details the first sin of the first human being. As it continues, the Torah does not report on all the peoples and kingdoms that rose and fell during those times, but it does stop to record how Avraham Avinu welcomes guests into his tent, or how Rivka quenches the camels' thirst near the well.

Why? Because that's what important. The Torah is not a book of science or history. The word תורה comes from the word הוראה – to teach, to guide, to educate. These "small deeds" are the most significant and influential.

The effort and the running around – the *sukkah*, the house, the meals, the little conversations, the family moments – all of these are the foundation stones of *simcha*, solidity and stability.

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