



What We Celebrate

Zman Simchateinu

Although there is a *mitzvah* of *simcha* on all *Yamim Tovim*, only Sukkot is described as זמן שמחתנו. This is because three² of the Torah's four *Yom Tov*-related mentionings of *simcha* refer to Sukkot. The famous words ושמחת בחגך והיית אך שמח refer specifically to *Chag HaSukkot*.

The simplest explanation of the Sukkot *simcha* is that we are celebrating a successful harvest.³ This is why Sukkot is also called חג האסיף, the harvest festival.⁴

Lifnei Hashem – Before G-d

The Rambam⁵ points out that our celebration of a successful harvest is similar to that of other cultures. However, ours differs in its focus – on the Beit HaMikdash. The Torah mandates this with the words ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם (Vayikra 23:40).⁶ This is also why Sukkot is described as *Chag Hashem*.⁷

We celebrate *lifnei Hashem* because we realize He is the cause of our success. Much like the *mitzvah* of bringing *bikkurim*,⁸ on Sukkot we use products of the harvest to praise⁹ and thank¹⁰ Him for our success. We recount how *Hashem* cared for us in the desert and realize that He continues to do so.

Simchat Beit HaShoeva – Celebrating the Water Libation

The focus of the Beit HaMikdash *simcha* was the *Simchat Beit HaShoeva*.¹¹ Throughout each night we would celebrate the water we had just drawn (*shoeva*) from the Shiloach spring before pouring it on the *mizbeach* the next morning. This *simcha* was so

special that Chazal describe it as qualitatively greater than any other.¹²

Why was this ritual (not mentioned explicitly by the Torah) the center of the celebration and even celebrated at all? At the end of the summer (with the springs at their low point) we pour water as a *tefilla* to *Hashem* to provide us with more.¹³ Why would this be the focus of or even a reason for *simcha*?

A Deeper Level Of Simcha

The focus on the *Simchat Beit HaShoeva* expresses a deeper level of the *simcha*. We are happy not only because of our success but also because of our realization that *Hashem* cares and provides for us. Most people celebrate their success but have no real reason to assume it will continue. Because we know that our success signifies the strength of our relationship with *Hashem*, we are confident that success will continue.

When we pour our precious water on the Mikdash's *mizbeach* we are like Eliyahu HaNavi at Har HaCarmel who poured out four large jugs of their last remaining water (after years of drought) on *Hashem's mizbeach*.¹⁴

We express this confidence by not only pouring the last of our water but by also celebrating when we do so. We reflect on our success of the past year, appreciate where it emanates from, thank and praise *Hashem* for it, and celebrate the fact we are confident moving forward.

Like Eliyahu HaNavi whose actions and *tefillot* at Har HaCarmel were answered with rain,¹⁵ our proper celebration and show of faith make us worthy of receiving rain and *Hashem's* other *berachot*.¹⁶

This year is one in which we can easily focus on what we are missing and

unhappy about. It is critical we use *Chag HaSukkot* to focus upon and celebrate all of *Hashem's* blessings (that we often take for granted). May this celebration help strengthen our confidence and merit us continued good health, happiness and *hatzlacha* in the coming year.

- 1 See also Rambam (Sukkah 8:12), who speaks of a '*simcha yeteira*' on Sukkot as opposed to the regular level of *simcha* on other *Yamim Tovim*.
- 2 Vayikra 23:40, Devarim 16:14,15.
- 3 Vayikra 23:39. See also Sefer HaChinuch 324. Chazal also link the celebration to our having received *Hashem's* forgiveness during the first part of the month of Tishrei (See Midrash Tehillim 102, Sukkah 53a, Vayikra Rabbah Emor 30).
- 4 Shemot 23:16.
- 5 Moreh Nevuchim 3:43.
- 6 This verse is the basis for the fact that the Four Species are taken seven full days only in the Beit HaMikdash (Mishnah Sukkah 41a). See Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvot, Asei 169, who connects the taking of the *arba minim* to the *simcha* of Sukkot.
- 7 Vayikra 23:39. See also Devarim 16:15.
- 8 Note the parallel between the verses that describe the *simcha* of Sukkot with the *arba minim* (Vayikra 23:40) and those that describe the bringing of *bikkurim* (Devarim 26:2,11).
- 9 This is why we take the *arba minim* during and integrate them within Hallel.
- 10 See Rashbam and Ramban on Vayikra 23:39 and Ritva on Sukkah 53a.
- 11 See Rashi, Sukkah 50a.
- 12 Sukkah 51b.
- 13 Rosh Hashanah 16a.
- 14 Melachim 1 17:34-35. See also Shmuel 2 23:16.
- 15 Ibid 45.
- 16 Sefer HaChinuch 325.

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Zecharia and Sukkot: Consolation for Corona

For many months now, Covid-19 has disrupted our civilization. The whole of humanity has found itself contending with a common threat to life as we know it, and it behooves us to re-explore universal messages of our past in the Torah and the words of the Prophets.

As we open the Tanach, we find numerous precedents for plagues and pandemics that have stricken either the Jewish people and/or specific nations, ranging from plagues in Egypt though pandemic punishments in the wilderness. Both the Plishtim and people of Yehuda suffer pandemics due to improper interaction with the *Aron Kodesh*, and David HaMelech faces national disease after conducting a census. However, there is only one *מַגֵּפָה* (plague) mentioned in Tanach with parallel global ramifications and fatalities – and we read its messages on the first day of Sukkot!

Sukkot is celebrated as a holiday of nature, as we enjoy our harvest through the Four Species and dwell in *sukkot* (Ibn Ezra, Vayikra 23:43). Yet *Chazal* teach us to simultaneously recognize *Hashem's* miraculous supervision, in the form of the Clouds of Glory that sheltered us in the wilderness.¹

The *haftarah* on the first day of Sukkot revisits these existential themes as we hear Zecharia's eschatological prophecy (chapter 14). He sought to encourage the minority Jewish population of *Shivat Tzion* to regain sovereignty in the Land of Israel. He begins his prophecy by describing how *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* will fight against foreign nations in

Yerushalayim (reminiscent of the Six-Day War):

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished, and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, but the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall *Hashem* go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fights in the day of battle (Zecharia 14:2-3).

“”” The climax, however, will be a global plague that will not be overcome through natural means and will elicit a recognition of *Hashem's* powers.

He continues to detail miraculous changes in the political and natural realms as victory will ensue and Yerushalayim will be safe. The climax, however, will be a global plague that will not be overcome through natural means and will elicit a recognition of *Hashem's* powers. Zecharia then notes that those nations that survive this cataclysmic war will be required to go to Yerushalayim every year on Sukkot to pay homage to G-d.

The message of the pandemic is to teach the world that rules of nature may change. Even “super-power” countries must recognize *Hashem's* kingship. Countries such as Egypt,

who depend on the Nile River for water, must learn that *Hashem* controls natural and supernatural forces, and has the ability to stop the most natural phenomenon of rainfall!

Zecharia concludes his vision with a poignant description of horses and pots – symbols of man's efforts to control natural forces through warfare and cooking, which will be transformed into sacred objects dedicated to *Hashem's* Mikdash. Even household pots will be treated as holy as we recognize Divine immanence in every aspect of our lives!

Sukkot is the time to relay this message to the global community. *Hashem* controls agricultural-natural forces and provides us with seasonal huts. On Sukkot we are meant to recognize and internalize mankind's vulnerabilities and *Hashem's* omniscient powers – which extend beyond the natural – providing us with Clouds of Glory and miraculously-supervised rainfall in Israel and throughout the world.

Perhaps if we do that this COVID-affected Sukkot, then together with the global community, we will merit

And the L-rd shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the L-rd be One, and His name one (ibid. v.9).

¹ See the Tannaitic dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael, Sukkah 11b.

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