The Special Joy of Sukkot

W e are uniquely commanded to be beSimcha, to rejoice and to be happy on Chag HaSukkot. When the sukkah goes up, the decorations adorn its walls, and we eagerly move from our permanent residence to our temporary one, we are enveloped by a natural feeling of excitement and joy. The feelings of warmth that permeate our homes and hearts are specific to this festival.

Sukkot reminds us of the Clouds of Glory in which G-d ensconced us when we left Egypt (Vayikra 23:43), and the protection He provides to us in each and every generation. This protection reminds us that our true security lies not in the walls of our homes of bricks and stone, but in the embrace of G-d’s love for us.

Hence, we deduce from here that the mitzvah of simchat yomtov on Sukkot is greater than the mitzvah of taking the Arba Minim!

As the world around us today is storming, and life for our nation and our Land is not easy during turbulent times, it is an avodah we must all engage in: imbuing the midda of simcha, and the ability to rejoice, into our very selves.

Rabbi Avraham Pam taught that, “Helping others is the formula for a life of simcha. The theme of Sukkot is that one must leave his permanent dwelling – his own mind – and settle in a temporary dwelling – thinking of the needs of others. In doing so, he will find contentment in his own life and will enjoy a year-round zman simchateinu.”

When we live with the knowledge that G-d is the Source of our simcha, and we care for others as we have been commanded (Devarim 16:14, as quoted above), we will truly merit a Sukkot of unbridled, pure and holy joy!

Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik teaches that “Man is basically a homeless being. No matter how large and opulent his home, he is exposed. He is subject to the vicissitudes of life, subject to nature – which at best is indifferent to man, at worst is hostile – and subject to an inscrutable future. There is only one home where man gains security: G-d is called התנוהו, an abode (Devarim 33:27). The only home where man can find security is in the Ribono Shel Olam, the Master of the World.”

It is this visceral feeling of dwelling with G-d that leads to the simcha of Sukkot.

“You shall make the festival of Sukkot for a seven day period, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine pit, And you shall rejoice on your festival… A seven day period shall you celebrate to Hashem, your G-d… and you shall be only joyous” (Devarim 16:13-15).

Only in regard to Sukkot are we commanded to not only rejoice but to doubly rejoice! Elsewhere, in regard to Sukkot, the Torah commands us regarding the mitzvah objects of the chag:

“And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a tree of splendor, fronds of date palms, and branches of a cordlike tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven-day period” (Vayikra 23:40).

From this pasuk, Rav Elimelech Biederman learns an important and beautiful insight. The mitzvah deOraita (Biblically ordained commandment) to take the Four Species on Sukkot is a mitzvah only for the first day of the chag: “and you shall take for yourselves on the first day…” However, the mitzvah deOraita to be beSimcha, to rejoice and be only happy, is a mitzvah for all seven days of the chag!

Rabbi Pam taught that, “When we live with the knowledge that G-d is the Source of our simcha, and we care for others as we have been commanded (Devarim 16:14, as quoted above), we will truly merit a Sukkot of unbridled, pure and holy joy!”

Mrs. Michal Horowitz teaches Judaic Studies classes to adults of all ages.

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2. Rav Pam on the Festivals, ArtScroll, p.55.