



What is Special about Simcha on Sukkot?

While two of the three pilgrimage holidays have a special and distinctive theme, Sukkot, seemingly, does not. Pesach's is *cherut* (freedom) and Shavuot's is *Matan Torah* (the giving of the Torah), each of which defines the holiday and articulates their distinctiveness. Yet Sukkot's theme is *simcha* (happiness), which is an element also found on the other holidays. Why does Sukkot not receive its own unique motif?

Perhaps one may suggest that Sukkot has quantitatively more *simcha*. Although there is nothing unique to Sukkot, it does have more *simcha* than the other holidays. As the Rambam says, Sukkot has "excess happiness" (Lulav 8:12).

Alternatively, the *simcha* on Sukkot could be qualitatively different from the *simcha* on the other holidays. In other words, there are two models of *simcha*. One is the classic model, contained within Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, and the other is a singular model unique to Sukkot, similar to the way *cherut* characterizes Pesach and *Matan Torah* Shavuot.

What are these two models? Perhaps examining the different *halachot* of each can help us develop a theory to explain Sukkot's '*simchatic*' uniqueness.

How does one fulfill the *mitzvah* of *simcha* on Jewish holidays? For men, it's drinking wine and eating meat; for women, it's buying new clothing, etc. Each person should be involved with what they themselves enjoy (Pesachim 109a). The goal seems to be to increase people's happiness through engaging in activities that give them joy.

By contrast, the *simcha* of Sukkot is accomplished differently. Taking the *lulav* in the Beit HaMikdash is described by the Torah as ושמחתם, and be happy (Vayikra 23:40). Moreover, the *Simchat Beit HaShoeva* (Sukkot water-drawing festival) took place in the Beit HaMikdash as well.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 324) claims that this time of year is a time when people are naturally happy. After all, it's the harvest season, when farmers rejoice with the fruits of a year's hard work. Furthermore, being spiritually cleansed after Yom Kippur adds to that feeling of joy.

The goal of Sukkot is to take that happiness and channel it towards G-d, wherever we are. We raise a *lulav* in all locations on the first day, and specifically in the Beit HaMikdash, where we raise it on all seven days (on a Biblical level). The *arba minim*, plants

that embody the successful harvest, are used in religious practice – to serve G-d.

While the goal of the classic *simcha* (the one existent in all three holidays), is to generate personal and national happiness and rejoice in expansive fashion, Sukkot's *simcha* is fundamentally different. Because the *chag* itself carries a preexisting *simcha*, the Torah aims at now raising that *simcha* to a higher level and focusing it towards G-d.

We express our innate happiness in an appropriate spiritual way, through sincere religious experience.

This lesson is not just important for Sukkot, but for life in general. One should direct and elevate one's natural emotions and feelings in a way that can better serve G-d and bring us closer to Him. And that, in turn, leads to even greater *simcha*.

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