



Sukkot in the Covid Era

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

It was early morning when the Baal Shem Tov (the “Besht”) met the town’s water carrier and asked how he was doing. The water carrier sighed and began complaining about all of his troubles. He still needed to work despite his old age and lack of strength, his wife had been sick for years, and he was unable to find suitors for his older daughters. The Besht tried to cheer him up, but was unsuccessful.

The two met again the next day and the Besht again asked the water carrier how he was doing. This time he received a different answer. “Despite my advanced age, I am, thank G-d, still breathing, *davening*, laying *tefillin*, and learning each day while most of my peers have already passed away. Not only that, but I am still able to work for a living and am not dependent on others. Though my wife has been sick, *Baruch Hashem* she is still alive and doing a bit better and, thankfully, G-d has blessed me with daughters who are so gifted and special that it is hard to find suitors worthy of them.”¹

Sukkot is *Z’man Simchateinu*, when we celebrate and thank Hashem for our harvest and our successes. For many, after a difficult year of Covid, this Sukkot may be harder to celebrate than usual. Our ability to celebrate hinges on our perspective. There are people who have many blessings, but focus on what they lack, while others who have very little feel blessed.

A *chassid* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe sent him a letter in which he bemoaned his difficult situation. Living in Yerushalayim, he was struggling to support his wife and 10 children. The Rebbe penned a short response expressing how happy he was to hear about the *chassid’s* marriage, the birth of his 10 children, and the great *zechut* the *chassid* had to live in Yerushalayim. After signing his name, the Rebbe added an addendum note to the *chassid*. “The fact that you do not appreciate and thank Hashem for what He has already

given you is keeping Him from giving you more.”²

How many of us are guilty of the same lack of appreciation? We take our blessings for granted and are instead frustrated by the things that we lack.³



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Sukkot is an ideal time to reflect on this idea. Our ancestors spent forty years in the hot and dangerous desert, far from civilization. But instead of bemoaning the difficult lot of our forefathers, we thank Hashem and celebrate the *sukkot* he gave us.

When we awake each morning, we recite a series of *berachot* that thank Hashem for the basics of human life. We bless Hashem: *she’asa li kol tzorki*, “who made all I need for me.” We are meant to appreciate that Hashem has already created⁴ all that we truly need.

In the end, happiness is a matter of perspective. When we read the following poem, entitled *Worst Day Ever?*, written by Chanie Gorkin – a student at Chabad’s Beth Rivkah High School in Brooklyn – line by line from top to bottom, it expresses deep disappointment and frustration with life:

*Today was the absolute worst day ever
And don’t try to convince me that
There’s something good in every day
Because, when you take a closer look,
The world is a pretty evil place.
Even if
Some goodness does shine through once
in a while*

*Satisfaction and happiness don’t last.
And it’s not true that
It’s all in the mind and heart
Because
True happiness can be attained
Only if one’s surroundings are good
It’s not true that good exists
I’m sure that you can agree that
The reality
Creates
My attitude
It’s all beyond my control
And you’ll never in a million years hear
me say
Today was a very good day*

But when read again from the bottom up, the same poem expresses appreciation of the good in each day.

“Who desires life, loving each day to see good?” (Tehillim 34:13).

If we desire a life worth living, we must learn to love each day by focusing on the good in our lives. Let’s take the opportunity of Sukkot in Covid times to appreciate the good in our life that we often take for granted.

¹ See Motzi Asirim (Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld), p. 8.

² Karov Eilecha, Pesach 5774.

³ See *Iyov* 1.

⁴ In contrast to the other *birkot hashachar*, this *bracha* is formulated in the past tense.

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