



The Joy of Sukkot



Rabbi Binyamin Blau

As both a rabbi and a *mechanech* (educator), I often feel that the *chag* of Sukkot does not get its proper due. Understandably, there is a tremendous amount of focus on the *Yamim Noraim*, but as a result, there is often little time devoted to fully appreciating the *chag* that follows. There are many beautiful aspects of Sukkot that are deserving of exploration, but I would like to highlight two components.

We refer to this Yom Tov as “*Z’man Simchateinu*.” Why, of all the *chagim*, does Sukkot receive this title? Are we not joyous when we relive the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*? Isn’t the revelation at *Har Sinai* a more appropriate time to express intense happiness? Let us put those questions in abeyance and note a second observation.

In contrast to the other two *regalim* (pilgrimage festivals) that match up with historical events, the timing of Sukkot seems almost arbitrary. We did indeed sit in Sukkot in the desert on the dates that the *chag* is observed, but we also did so throughout the year, so why is the designation of this Yom Tov linked to this period? Could it not have been celebrated at almost any point in the calendar?

While there are many answers to these queries, perhaps we can take the following approach: While we often think

of Sukkot as being in the beginning of the year – after all, it occurs at the start of the school year in *chutz laaretz* and after *yeshivot* and *midrashot* have resumed in Israel – in the eyes of the Torah it clearly comes at the close of our cycle of *chagim*. As such we need to look at the entire pattern of *chagim* to understand both the joy of Sukkot and its deliberate placement.

Despite the fact that we refer to the first of Tishrei as Rosh Hashanah, Nissan is *chodesh harishon* (the first month) which means that our holiday cycle begins with Pesach. It is then that we became a nation forming our identity as *Am Yisrael*. However, we were a people without a purpose and so the *chag* that follows immediately afterward is Shavuot, *Z’man Matan Torateinu*, when we celebrate the giving of the Torah. At that moment we were given a mission, a noble task to fulfill in our role as Hashem’s chosen nation.

Having received our directive, the next step is for Hashem to examine if we have successfully accomplished what He asked of us, both collectively and individually. This is why Rosh Hashanah follows, as we recognize Hashem’s *malchut* (kingship) and acknowledge that we are being judged on our observance of Torah and *mitzvot*.

Fortunately, even if we are found lacking, there is an opportunity to repair

our shortcomings and reconnect with our Creator. Yom Kippur is a unique day for both meanings of *teshuvah* – repair and return – when we pour out our hearts to Hashem and He is eager to forgive us.

Hopefully, we have navigated all these *chagim* successfully and that brings us appropriately to Sukkot. By now, we fully understand who we are as a nation and what our mission is, and we have corrected our errors and regained our closeness to Hashem; now, we are ready to celebrate and bask in this incredible relationship.

This is why Sukkot comes directly after Yom Kippur and it is the *chag* designated for expressing *simcha*. Can there be any greater joy than appreciating and experiencing this feeling of purpose and this incredible bond with Hashem? The joy is intense and that is why even Hashem suggests that we stay an additional day, Shemini Atzeret, before departing.

Let us reflect on the deeper meaning of Sukkot, and may we all be blessed with a *chag sameach*.

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