



A Guide to Sukkot

A Collection of Divrei Torah from YTVA



Yeshivat Torah v'Avodah

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Introduction

The festival of Sukkot is called Zman Simchateinu—the time of our happiness. But what type of happiness? There is a superficial and materialistic joy that people crave, and then there is a deep, spiritual happiness that can only be experienced precisely on Sukkot, after we have gone through the Yamim Noraim.

What is the deeper meaning behind the Arba Minim, dwelling in a Sukkah for seven days, shaking a Lulav and Etrog, and dancing at the Simchat Beit Hashoeva?

It is our hope that this collection of divrei Torah from YTVVA can serve as a Guide to Sukkot.

Chag Sameach!

סוכות ויום הדין

Wayne Yaffee¹

Sukkot, Yom HaDin? What?? Did we not just finish this judgment stuff up during Yom Kippur and we are good to go? Isn't Sukkot a time for happiness? Just a party!

Not so fast! Take a look at Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:2! That mishna says four times during the year, the world is judged: (a) on Pesach, for the grain; (b) on Shavuot, for the fruit of the tree; (c) on Rosh Hashana, human beings; and (d) on Sukkot, for the water.

If man is judged for the year on Rosh Hashana and that fate is sealed on Yom Kippur, you would think that judgment would include the amount of rain that will fall on his field and the amount of grain and fruit which he will grow. Why then have the three other judgments?

The Ran answers this question by noting on the three festivals, the whole world is judged as to how much rain will fall and how much produce will grow. On Rosh Hashana, Hashem determines each person's share of these gifts (cf. Turei Even אוסי אומר רי' יוסי).

Focusing specifically on Sukkot, the judgment concerns the amount of rainfall that will occur in the next year. In Zechariah, we learn that all the nations who fought Jerusalem will make an annual pilgrimage to Har Habayit on Sukkot so rain will fall on their land. Even nations that do not rely on rain, such as Egypt which has a water source in the Nile River, will be punished by plague for

¹ *Chairman, Bnei Akiva of North America.*

not coming up to Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16-19; the Steinsaltz Neviim, p 1488).

This explains the emphasis on water during Sukkot, notably, the water libation ceremony, our prayer for rain, and the hoshanos.

There is more to the idea of judgment on Sukkot. The Zohar (Vayikra 31b) states, "On the seventh day of the Festival there is the completion of the judgment of the world, and the decrees go forth from the palace." Based on this, the Zohar concludes that Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of Sukkot, is the completion of the judgment that began on Rosh Hashana. This ties together the Tishrei holidays.

Therefore, according to the Zohar (ibid.), on Rosh Hashanah the judgment begins, on Yom Kippur the judgment is sealed, and on Hoshana Rabah the decree is finalized and sent forward. In effect, teshuva is a process which requires engagement on both the personal (with respect to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) and the communal (with respect to Sukkot) levels.

This ties beautifully to the sicha Rabbi Seif gave on Yom Kippur day this year. In his sicha, Rabbi Seif taught about Shema Israel (1834), which was the first major Zionist pamphlet authored by Rabbi Yehuda Alkali (1798-1878), a noted early Zionist thinker. As Rabbi Seif described, in the work, R Alkali noted that the real meaning of teshuva is return and he outlined two types of Teshuva: (1) individual repentance when an individual returns from sin to Hashem (Teshuavah peratit); and (2) national

repentance when the Jewish people returns to EeretZ Israel (Teshuvah kelalit).

A quote attributed to R Alkali provides: *"General teshuva...means that the entire Jewish People returns to the Lord our God, to the land of our forefathers' inheritance."*

By moving through the teshuvah process which begins on Rosh Hashana and concludes on Hoshana Rabah, we commit to our return to Hashem and to the Land. By doing this, we will realize the rain promised to us on Sukkot.

Let's make it rain!!!

The Joy of Sukkot in the Generation of Return

Rabbi Shaul Feldman

Nehemiah chapter 8 describes a people returning to their land and learning God's Torah anew. Their renewed encounter with Torah culminates in an extraordinary celebration of Sukkot. The Talmud, Ben Yehoyada, and Malbim reveal several foundations of that joy: return to the Land, security from enemies, a sukkah open to the public, and the spiritual shelter of Torah. In our generation, as we see these foundations come together, we are called to fulfill "You shall rejoice on your festival" with particular care and fullness.

The Sukkah Returns to the Life of the People

Following the public Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah, the leaders gather around Ezra on the second day. They discover the commandment to dwell in sukkot and send word throughout the cities and Jerusalem to gather branches and build them.

"On the second day, the heads of the ancestral families ... gathered around Ezra the scribe, to gain understanding of the words of the Torah. They found written in the Torah ... that the children of Israel should dwell in sukkot during the festival in the seventh month." (Nehemiah 8:13–14; translation throughout is our own.)

The account does not stop at sukkot on rooftops and in private courtyards. They appear in Jerusalem's shared spaces as well:

"The people went out, brought [branches], and made themselves sukkot, each on his roof and in their courtyards, and in the courtyards of the House of God, and in the square of the Water Gate and the square of the Gate of Ephraim." (Nehemiah 8:16.)

"The entire assembly of those who had returned from captivity made sukkot and dwelt in the sukkot; for the children of Israel had not done so since the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day. And there was exceedingly great joy." (Nehemiah 8:17.)

What was this particular way of celebrating that had not occurred since Joshua? Could the people of Israel really have neglected the mitzvah of sukkah for generations?

The Talmud and the Joy of David and Solomon

"Is it possible that David came and they did not make sukkot until Ezra came? Rather, Scripture compares their arrival in the days of Ezra with their arrival in the days of Joshua: just as, on arriving in Joshua's days, they counted sabbatical and jubilee years and sanctified walled cities, so, on arriving in Ezra's days, they counted sabbatical and jubilee years and sanctified walled cities." (Arakhin 32b.)

According to the view that the first sanctification of the Land did not endure forever, the Talmud understands Ezra's return as a new entry into the Land. The verse marks a renewal of its sanctity and of the people's communal life there. It cannot mean that the mitzvah of sukkah was first observed in Ezra's time.

In his commentary on Arakhin 32b, Ben Yehoyada, Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, asks why the Talmud names

David in particular; the version cited in his commentary also names Solomon. In his words: "Why does it mention David and Solomon specifically, rather than earlier generations, Samuel the prophet and King Saul?" He explains that Sukkot is meant to be celebrated with great joy. In earlier generations, warfare and the fear of it prevented complete joy. In David's day, victories gave Israel confidence; in Solomon's day, the nation enjoyed even greater security. Surely, if Israel could celebrate Sukkot with full joy in any earlier period, it could do so in the days of David and Solomon. Thus, Ezra's distinctive achievement must concern something beyond the simple possibility of a joyful festival. Ben Yehoyada's reading also draws our attention to the verse's closing words: "And there was exceedingly great joy."

Malbim and the Public Sukkah

Malbim (on Nehemiah 8:14 and 8:17) focuses on where the sukkot were built. The Rema rules:

"One should likewise not make a sukkah, at the outset, on another person's land without his consent, nor on land belonging to the public; nevertheless, after the fact, he has fulfilled [the mitzvah]." (Rema, Orach Chaim 637:3.)

Because Jerusalem was not apportioned among the tribes, Malbim asks how sukkot could have been built in its public squares. He proposes that when the returnees renewed the Land's sanctity, Ezra's court stipulated that people could build sukkot in public areas. He finds support in a Tosefta concerning shopkeepers who covered the space in front of their shops for the festival:

"Those who put up covering before the entrances to their shops in the public domain during the festival: although they have permission, if someone is injured by it, [the one who built it] is liable." (Tosefta Bava Kamma 6:13; numbered 6:28 in some editions.)

The Tosefta mentions permission to build and, at the same time, responsibility for any injury. Malbim's identification of the permission as a condition established by Ezra's court is his own interpretation. In his words, when the returnees acquired and sanctified the Land anew, "the court stipulated that sukkot could be made in Jerusalem and in other public domains." (Malbim on Nehemiah 8:14.)

On this reading, "they had not done so" means that sukkot had not been built in this way in public spaces since Joshua's time. Now those without a suitable private courtyard could also join in dwelling in a sukkah. The mitzvah reached beyond the household, and individual joy became the joy of "the entire assembly."

The Sukkah as the Shelter of Torah

The Talmud offers another reading according to the view that Joshua's sanctification of the Land remained in effect:

"And the other [view]? Ezra prayed concerning the inclination toward idolatry and nullified it, and his merit sheltered them like a sukkah." (Arakhin 32b.)

Ezra and his generation prayed for the end of the inclination toward idolatry, and their merit protected the people. Here the sukkah signifies spiritual shelter. A sukkah may be valid even with two complete walls and a

third wall of only a handbreadth (Sukkah 6b). Its lesson is that a nation's security does not come from thick walls alone. Its life with Torah and with God gives it inner strength. Teachings of Rav Kook on the Torah's enduring statutes, published in the periodical *Netivah* in 5695 (1934–35), sharpen this point: the Torah is our strength and resilience; it sustains Jewish life across generations. When the people return to their Land, Torah does not stand outside their national life. The Torah of Eretz Yisrael illuminates that life from within.

Celebrating with Greater Care in Our Generation

These interpretations converge in a responsibility for our own time. Ben Yehoyada reminds us that the joy of Sukkot is bound up with security. Malbim shows how the people's return to their Land allows the sukkah to become a place for the public. The Talmud's second reading teaches that Torah is the nation's inner shelter. Today we have returned to Eretz Yisrael. Where local authorities grant permission under the law, communities can erect public sukkot open to many. Our holy soldiers defend our people and our Land, and the Torah of Eretz Yisrael continues to grow. This gratitude does not erase the worry, struggle, or painful cost of our days. It makes us more aware of how precious these conditions are. When the Land, the people's defense, and Torah meet in the sukkah, our celebration cannot be merely routine. We must observe **"You shall rejoice on your festival"** with greater care: welcome others into the sukkah, fill it with Torah study and love for fellow Jews, and thank God for the privilege of rejoicing in our Land. May our celebration, too, be marked by "exceedingly great joy."

The First Night and the Last War

Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Seif

What Sukkot Remembers, and Why its Haftarot end History in Jerusalem

Pesach remembers the night of the Exodus and Shavuot the morning at Sinai, but it is harder to say what event Sukkot remembers.

The Torah explains the mitzva “so that your generations will know that I made the children of Israel dwell in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Vayikra 23:43). Yet the Gemara (Sukka 11b) cannot agree on what those sukkot were, with Rabbi Eliezer identifying them as clouds of glory and Rabbi Akiva as real huts. There is a second difficulty as well, since Pesach and Shavuot each mark a single moment, while forty years of living in huts is a period rather than an event.

The First Campsite

The verse does not speak of the wilderness or of forty years. It says when I brought them out (בהוציא אותם) which ties the sukkot to the Exodus itself, and the Torah tells us where Israel stopped on that first night when it records that “the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Sukkot” (Shemot 12:37).

R. David Fohrman of Aleph Beta, whose reading this section follows, asks why a place would be given that name, and he finds the answer in Bereishit. When Yaakov left Lavan with his flocks, “he built himself a house, and for his cattle he made sukkot; therefore the place is called

Sukkot" (Bereishit 33:17). A sukka is a rough shelter for animals, and the very next verse in Shemot reports that Israel left Egypt with "very much livestock" (12:38).

The Mekhilta already reads Shemot 12:37 this way, recording the same dispute as the Gemara with the names reversed, so that Rabbi Eliezer holds these were real sukkot and brings his proof from Yaakov, while Rabbi Akiva holds they were clouds of glory. The argument about the festival began as an argument about the first campsite.

That same night the people baked their dough as matza, "for they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, and they had made no provisions for themselves" (12:39). The Torah then chooses this moment to tell us that "the dwelling (moshav) of the children of Israel in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years" (12:40), so that four hundred and thirty years of settled life are set against a night spent in makeshift shelters with unrisen bread.

Pesach and Sukkot therefore remember the same night from two sides, with Pesach recalling what we ate and Sukkot recalling where we slept. Yirmiyahu describes that night as an act of kindness on Israel's part when he says in God's name, "I remember for you the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, your going after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (2:2). Read in this light, the Gemara's dispute concerns emphasis rather than fact, because real huts commemorate Israel's trust and clouds of glory commemorate God's protection.

Why Tishrei?

If both festivals remember one night, why are they six months apart? Ibn Ezra suggests that the huts were first needed once the weather turned cold, and the Tur adds that only in Tishrei, when everyone else moves indoors, is it evident that we sit outside for the sake of a mitzva.

The Torah offers its own reason when it sets Sukkot “on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the produce of the land” (Vayikra 23:39). Devarim 8 warns about exactly that season, when a person may “eat and be satisfied, and build good houses and dwell in them,” and then say in his heart that “my strength and the might of my hand made me this wealth.” The Rashbam draws the two passages together and explains that God placed Sukkot at the ingathering so that we would leave houses “full of all good” and recall that in the wilderness we had no houses at all. Pesach comes while the grain is still standing in the field, whereas Sukkot comes when the barns are full, and so we are sent back to the hut at the moment we feel most secure.

Gog and a People at Rest

On the first day of Sukkot we read Zecharia 14, and on Shabbat Chol HaMoed we read Yechezkel 38–39. Both chapters are traditionally read as prophecies of the war of Gog and Magog at the end of history, although only Yechezkel mentions Gog by name. Yechezkel is precise about when Gog will come. He describes Israel as “a land brought back from the sword, gathered out of many peoples,” whose inhabitants “dwell securely, all of them” (38:8), and he has Gog plan to attack “a land of unwalled

villages," a people "at rest" who live "without walls, having neither bars nor gates" (38:11) and who "have gotten cattle and goods" (38:12). The prophet does not criticise this security, which fulfils the return to the land, but it is the very condition Sukkot addresses, a people settled in its own land with full storehouses.

Israel does not win this war by its own strength. God declares that He will "strike your bow out of your left hand, and make your arrows fall out of your right hand" (39:3), and Israel's part begins only after the battle, when the people gather the weapons to burn as fuel for seven years (39:9–10) and bury the dead to purify the land (39:12). The festival and the haftara thus turn on the same question of where Israel's protection comes from.

On the first night Israel had no shelter and God sheltered them. At the harvest Israel has shelter, and the Torah sends the people out of it so that they remember whose it was. In Yechezkel's final war a people living without walls is attacked, and once again its protection comes from God alone.

Two Accounts of the Last war

Zecharia writes from inside Jerusalem, where the city is taken, its houses plundered and half its population sent into exile (14:2) before God goes out to fight. His prophecy ends with the response of the nations, whose survivors "go up year by year to bow to the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot" (14:16), while the families of the earth that fail to come will receive no rain (14:17). Yechezkel's

refrain is “and they shall know that I am the Lord,” and for him the purpose of the war is the sanctification of God’s name before the nations (38:16, 38:23).

R. Mosheh Lichtenstein distinguishes two ways of seeing the world. One may see it as entrusted to human beings, since “the heavens belong to God, but the earth He gave to man,” in which case history is measured by human achievement and failure. Or one may see it as God’s own project, whose condition reflects on its Maker. Zecharia’s account, with its human cost and its nations who choose whether or not

to come, sits closer to the first view, and Yechezkel’s account, centred on God’s name, sits closer to the second.

Zecharia’s ending also shows why his prophecy belongs to Sukkot in particular, because in his vision Sukkot is the festival the nations keep. Chazal already understood the festival as concerning the whole world when they taught that the seventy bulls offered over its seven days correspond to the seventy nations (Sukka 55b). Zecharia singles out only one nation by name, Egypt, which according to the commentators does not depend on rain and is therefore threatened with a plague instead (14:18–19). The festival that remembers the night we left Egypt ends with Egypt coming up to Jerusalem to observe it.

Sitting in the Sukka

Sukkot begins with a people that left four hundred and thirty years of settled life for temporary shelters without any provisions, and in the haftarot it ends with that same

people settled in its own land, attacked precisely because it lives without walls, and delivered by God.

Our generation has houses and harvests, a state and an army, and it also knows what it means to be "a land brought back from the sword" that believed it was dwelling securely. On the fifteenth of Tishrei, with the harvest gathered in, we leave our houses and sit under a roof of branches that could not keep out a storm, let alone an army, and we remember who sheltered us on the first night.

זכרתי לך חסד נעורִיךְ

God remembers our first night, and the Sukka is how we remember His.

Separate from Life versus Return to Life

Rabbi Yair HaLevi

The Halakha understands that there's a relationship between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. After Yom Kippur we are told to build a Sukkah. Immediately after we finish Yom Kippur, we must begin to build the Sukkah, which means that Sukkot is a sort of counter reaction to Yom HaKippurim.

If we think about Yom Kippur, the direction is from outside inside. We go from the house of the Kohen Gadol, to the Azara, to the Kodesh HaKodeshim.

Sukkot is the opposite. We go from the permanent house of Kevah to the temporary dwelling of Arai. We go from inside outside.

If you look in Shul on Yom Kippur, we look like angels. If you look in Shul on Sukkot, it almost looks like a safari, a zoo; like wild people worshipping and shaking trees.

Sukkot is an antidote. It's the opposite of Yom Kippur. The idea of Yom Kippur is to remember that we sometimes need to separate. We get so connected to nature that we forget that we must control nature. We therefore need to remove ourselves.

To give an example, if someone cannot prevent themselves from drinking alcohol then they shouldn't drink because they're addicted to it, they're controlled by it. If you could not do it for a full year, obviously it means that you're not addicted to it, you're in control of it, and then maybe it could be okay.

Yom Kippur teaches us that although connecting to nature is the highest level, it's also dangerous. It's complicated. It's difficult.

On Yom Kippur we need to remember our direction, our ability to fail, to make wrong turns. However, the ultimate goal is to come back and realize that nature, life, is the holy of holies. We go into Kodesh Kodashim on Yom Kippurim, but we enter into Chayyim/life on Sukkot.

And what do we do in the Sukkah? We live. By sleeping, you're doing a mitzvah. By eating, you're doing a mitzvah. You say Leshev BaSukkah. Every time you sit down, you make a bracha on it. You make a bracha on life itself.

And the story of Sukkot is that once we know the danger of nature; once we know the things that could hold us back, then we can recognize that the ultimate goal is not to run away from nature. The goal is to immerse ourselves within nature; to understand the potential, to understand the beauty of life, to understand the beauty of people.

The Uniqueness of the Arava

Rabbi Yitzchak Steinberg

In the prayer composed for the time when the Lulav is bound (as it appears in some prayer books) it is written:

"And through the three Hadasim which correspond to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and through the two Aravot which correspond to Moses and Aaron; and through the Lulav and Etrog which correspond to Joseph and David, may the four letters of Your great and holy Name be bound together."

The Arava symbolizes humility. A person who views himself as an Etrog—meaning he feels perfect, possessing both Torah and good deeds—cannot connect with others (just as the Etrog is not physically bound together with the other species). Only a person who feels incomplete can connect with others, because he does not look down on them and is willing to learn from anyone. Therefore, the other three species are bound together, because within each one is a point of incompleteness, and it is precisely this that enables a connection to another.

The peak of humility and the feeling of incompleteness is found in the Arava. It represents a person feeling that he still has a long way to progress and perfect himself in all areas. Consequently, it is specifically through the Arava that the most perfect connection between a person and their fellow is created, fostering a person's strongest and most constant aspiration to continuously advance. This mirrors the phrase: "Our Father, our King, favor us and answer us, for we have no good deeds; treat us with

charity and kindness and save us." Every person must view himself as having "no deeds" and plead for Hashem's mercy and kindness, rather than relying on his own merits as if he deserves to be answered.

We find a hint to this in Tractate Shabbat (20a-b), where the Gemara explains the verse in Jeremiah (36:22)—"and a hearth (Ach) was burning before him." The Gemara asks: "What is an Ach?" Rav replied: Achavana. Rashi explains: "Achavana means an Arava." In other words, the Arava is called Ach, which also means "brother" in Hebrew, because it connects and creates brotherhood (Achva) among people due to the feeling of incompleteness it symbolizes.

From this, it becomes self-evident why Moses and Aaron were compared to the Arava. Specifically they, who were the most susceptible to feelings of pride and perfection due to their immense deeds in Torah and righteousness, nevertheless declared: "And what are we (V'nachnu Mah)?" They even omitted the letter Aleph [from the word Anachnu (we)], as if to say they have no full independent existence of "we," but are intrinsically lacking, in the aspect of "Nachnu". Furthermore, whatever remained of their persona was only "Mah" (what)—implying no perfection whatsoever. This is humility within humility. Moses achieved the absolute pinnacle of humility: "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man on the face of the earth." Aaron absolutely accepted the choosing of Moses, his younger brother, as leader over him and the nation: "and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart." Who could be more of an "Arava" than them!

Perhaps this is also the reason the Arava was chosen for the central service of Hashem on Hoshana Rabbah, to teach us that salvation only comes with humility.

This is also a highly vital directive for building a marriage. A husband and wife should view themselves as incomplete in their traits and personality, and aspire to grow by receiving the completion offered by their partner. Therefore, the creation of woman only came after man felt a void—"but for man there was not found a helper against him"—meaning he felt he needed help.

This was also the initial Divine intent in creating a couple, as the Midrash cited by Rashi (Genesis 2:18) states: "'It is not good for man to be alone'—lest they say there are two authorities: the Holy One, Blessed be He, is singular in the upper realms and has no partner, and this one [man] is singular in the lower realms and has no partner." This is not merely an external concern to eliminate a theological error; rather, it is a guiding direction for a good marriage. If a person feels "singular in the lower realms"—meaning that he feels perfect and complete on his own—he has no chance of connecting to a spouse.

Only if he accepts the fact that "It is not good for man to be alone"—that he isn't perfect by himself, and that only Hashem in the heavens is singular and complete—only then can he find his "helper against him" and bond deeply with her.

The Meaning of a Sukkah as a Dirat Arai- Temporary Dwelling

Rabbi Yotam Erlich

The Gemara in Sukkah teaches that as part of the laws of Sukkah, it must be noticeably a temporary dwelling (Dirat Arai); otherwise, it is invalid. What is the idea behind this law? The book Bat Ayin writes that the temporary nature of the Sukkah comes to remind a person that they must never stand still in one place. Instead, one must always strive for more and desire to progress—and this is the true and complete acceptance of the Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven (Ol Malchut Shamayim).

When a person emerges from the High Holidays after doing good and meaningful spiritual work, they might experience a sense of complacency, thinking, "I have done my part." Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, commands us for seven days to change our entire reality and go out to live in a temporary dwelling. This reminds us that "those who hope in God will renew their strength," and that we must continue with strength in our service of God throughout the holiday, carrying it forward into the weekdays and the entire year ahead.

The trend is completely opposite when it comes to the world of mundane matters and action. In the physical world, the Rambam states in Hilchot Talmud Torah: "One should minimize business and maximize Torah."

The commentators explain this to mean that a person should engage in work only to the extent of their basic

needs. This aligns with stories told about the righteous, who would earn only what they needed for that specific day and immediately return to Torah and prayer. This was precisely the mistake of Haman the Wicked: even though he was blessed with wealth and honor, he said, "Yet all this is worth nothing to me," and continued to chase after honor—which ultimately brought about his downfall.

Pour Out Your Heart Like Water

Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz

"He who failed to witness the celebration of Simchat Beit Hashoeva never witnessed true joy in all his days" (Sukkah 5:2)

In the depths of a holiday expressing great joy "Zman Simchatenu" there is a joy of greater intensity that unfolds expressed by the ceremony of the water libation on the altar in the Temple itself. In fact, it was the highlight of the Sukkot festivities. Although usually wine was offered on the Altar there was an oral tradition (Shabbat 103:b) that on Sukkot it was to be water.

I have always found this a very complex idea to connect to. Especially since water is often associated with sorrow or more somber scenarios. An example would be when the prophet in the book of Eichah laments "pour out your heart like water in the presence of Hashem" (Eichah 2:19) or when Samuel the prophet in Mitzpah tells the people to draw up water and pour it out before Hashem (Samuel1:7:6) this is translated by the Targum as saying that the Jewish people poured their hearts out before Hashem like water in order to repent before G-d. Furthermore, Rashi explains this verse in a similar vein saying that "they stood before G-d humbly and cried out: "we stand before you like uncontained water that has spilled out"

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch once called tears the "sweat of the soul" an expression of the soul from within. An expression of our deepest emotions. The heart can

only be poured out through tears thus the water poured over the alter during the water libation was symbolic of the pouring of human tears as an offering to the Holy One blessed be He.

Rabbeinu Yonah in Shaarei Avodah (2) writes that that when one prays through tears his answers are answered because even when all the gates of prayer are sealed before us the gates of tears are always open before Hashem and are never closed. The Midrash teaches that Yaakov our forefather offered water libations through his tears to the Almighty all the while he was in exile and he stayed with Lavan his seditious uncle. (Breishit Rabbah 78 see also Shabbat 105: a) His tears were collected by Hashem and placed in his treasury.

In essence the tears of Yom Hakkipurim of Am Yisrael are collected before the Holy One Blessed Be He and washed over the Altar in sublime Joy and jubilation that we his nation Israel stand before Him Forgiven and pure ready to serve our Father in Heaven in the year ahead. This can only be achieved through tears represented by water.

So from potential sorrow and remorse emerges joy and hope. Rav Kook (Ein ayah 103:b) explains that this ritual takes us back to the dawn of creation. When G-d's spirit hovered over the waters. Hashem's wisdom exists in the very foundations of the world. All of this is expressed by the very special connection Am Yisrael has with our creator. This closeness and intimacy we celebrate on Sukkot through the water libation. The tears of repentance and nearness to G-d emerge as the joy of forgiveness and our eternal bond as Am Hashem His nation and His people.

Sukkot: Being More versus Having More

Rabbi Ari Ze'ev Schwartz

There are people who spend their days dreaming of meeting their soulmate, building a big family, recovering from some serious sickness, and saving some large sum of money to buy that perfect house. However, what happens when this person actually gets what they always wanted, yet finds themselves still feeling bored, empty and unsure what to do next?

Indeed, this seems to be one of the main dilemmas of a spiritual seeker: What if I had every material thing I wanted? Then what? To put it in spiritual language: How can I move away from a "having" mindset and move toward a "being" mode of consciousness.²

As we shall see, this is one of the spiritual goals of the festival of Sukkot. After spending Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur praying "to have" the perfect upcoming year, the Torah gives a Jew the opportunity to be present and dwell in a Succah for seven days.

"You shall dwell (teishvu) in Sukkot for seven days, every person amongst the Jewish people should dwell in Sukkot" (VaYikra 23:42).

The key word in this verse is "teishvu"- dwell. One of the most important (and difficult) things to work on in life is the ability to be fully present and appreciate the blessings one already has in their life. The commandment to dwell

² See Erich Fromm: *To Have or to Be?* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976).

in a Sukkah for seven days is a challenge to be fully present with the blessings God has already given a person.

Whereas on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we ask to have more blessings, on Sukkot we focus on being more present with our current blessings. One of the ways of showing God that we were serious about what we asked for during the Yamim Noraim is by being more present and appreciative of the blessings we currently have. Indeed, why would God want to give a person more blessings if they don't first appreciate what blessings they have already been given?

If a person prayed for their family and friends on Rosh Hashana, then on Sukkot one should invest more time actively dwelling and being present with these people. If on Rosh Hashana a person prayed for a year filled with more time to learn Torah and pray, then on Sukkot one should engage more in Torah learning and prayer. On Sukkot we try to close the gap between "having" and "being."

In my opinion, for people who grew up in the western world- which is so connected to a "having more" attitude- it seems that it is easier to live in a Rosh Hashana mindset. "I want this thing in the upcoming year. Please give that person more of that type of blessing." It is tempting for a person to forever live in the "having more" mindset and forget about the importance of "being more."

In contrast, on Sukkot, a Jew is asked to *leishev be succah*/slow down and dwell within the blessings of life. Instead of spending the festival praying about one's family and friends, one must focus on being more present with one's family and friends themselves. Instead of spending the festival praying about money for the upcoming year, one must focus on appreciating the money one already has and use it on hosting friends in one's Sukkah and buying gifts for one's loved ones. And finally, instead of praying about a new life, one must be more present and appreciative of the life one currently has.

Negative Boredom versus Positive Boredom

One of the ways to enter into a "being mode" on Sukkot is being comfortable with the emotion of boredom. We live in a generation that desperately tries to escape any form of boredom. The need to be continuously stimulated by something online is rooted in a person's fear of being bored. In order to cure ourselves of this spiritual illness, we must distinguish between negative boredom and positive boredom.

Negative boredom is when I am forced to do something that is not personally meaningful. Such boredom is a negative thing since it stems from a person's lack of connection to the current thing they are doing and the longing to engage in some satisfying activity. Negative boredom leaves a person feeling irritated, tired and dead inside.

In contrast, positive boredom is when a person intentionally chooses to do mundane activities such as cleaning the house, doing the dishes, or even exercising. As a result, creative thoughts often begin to appear in one's mind. Positive boredom is a good technique when a person is struggling with procrastination or writers block. Going for a run often makes space for creative thoughts. At such moments, the mind is not overly stimulated and one is better able to hear their inner thoughts and creative insights.

In connection to Sukkot, the new year has begun and a person is eager to start working on their new year's resolutions. This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to "dwell in the Sukkah" and be present for seven days. "What am I going to do for seven days of sitting in a hut, eating and drinking?" However, as we have said above, there is a positive boredom that clears mental space, allowing new ideas and insights to surface that might be blocked by constant activity or entertainment. Therefore, by choosing to *leishev be succah*/sit in a Sukkah for seven days and not immediately start my new year with work one awakens a type of positive boredom, or perhaps even holy boredom- a connection to one's soul, to God.

To give a metaphor, one way to truly get to know another person is to go for coffee and allow each person's "small talk"/"how are things?" conversation to reach its logical end. When the conversation reaches that awkward, dead-space moment, instead of ending the conversation, stay there- here is where the real authentic conversation begins. In this sense, one of the secrets to entering a "being mode" is allowing oneself to feel bored more

often. Do not resist boredom or try to immediately remove it through some online activity- enter into its endless creativity.

After the drama of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, of praying out of the Machzor to “have more” for the upcoming year, a Jew is asked to slow down their lives for seven days and dwell in a Sukkah. I recommend that a person not only le’sheiv be succah/dwell in the Sukkah during public meals but also go there privately- to study a book, do hitbodedut/talk to God, and meditate. There is no doubt that the days of Sukkot feel less weighty than Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. There, we were in judgment before the King. Here, we have more free time to ourselves. Indeed, Sukkot can often feel like one has too much time on one’s hands. However, it is precisely this type of “positive and holy boredom” that awakens a fresh and surprising spiritual connection and meaning.

Kohelet: A Critique of the “Having Mode”

On the Shabbat of Sukkot, there is an ancient tradition³ to read King Solomon’s book Kohelet. One of King Solomon’s main themes is to critique the “having more” mindset.

“I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces...Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Kohelet 3:8-11).

³ Rama, Orach Chayim 490:9; 663:2.

In this very honest passage, King Solomon describes the exhaustion of spending his life chasing after having more things, of amassing more material possessions. It is one thing to hear this advice from a spiritual monk, it is another thing to hear it from a wealthy person like King Solomon. There is a certain believability in his words since he himself attained so much wealth and was still not satisfied with this having mode. As someone once said, "If you think a lot of money will make you happy, you've probably never had it before." Yet the truth is, in another passage King Solomon goes even further and describes how the "having mode" can also be applied to the obsession with having more knowledge and wisdom.

"I said to myself, 'Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me... but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief'" (Ibid. 1:16-18).

In other words, the addiction to have more wisdom can also be a superficial pursuit, a type of materialistic spirituality. When a person feels that they can only be happy if they have read this book; when they have understood this philosophy and that psychological theory, this too is rooted in the having mode.

At the conclusion of Kohelet, King Solomon encourages his readers to let go of the having mode and focus on the being mode.

"Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do... Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love" (Ibid. 7:7-9).

Indeed, a person cannot have love, but only be present in the loving experience with someone else. In fact, in Hebrew there is no way to say "I have." The closest is "yesh li," which literally means this is to me. In King Solomon's eyes, more important than "having more" is "being more"- being more present with the one's loved ones, being more present with one's soul, with Torah, with God. *"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: revere God and follow His mitzvot; for this is the duty of all people" (Ibid. 12:13).*

According to the Shulchan Aruch, every time a Jew sits and eats bread in the Sukkah, they should recite the bracha "leishev be'succah"- to dwell in the Sukkah. In a deep sense, Sukkot is a time to lean into the current blessings that a person has, to fully dwell in the Sukkah of one's life and not be afraid of being bored.

As a final note, I remember one time my teacher, Rabbi David Aaron, said to us in a class: "Most people think that winning the lottery would change their life. If I ever won the lottery, I wouldn't change anything about my life. I already have everything I need."

In my opinion, one of the goals of Sukkot is to achieve this state of consciousness.

בסוכות הושבתי

Rabbi Albert Katz

When the Torah describes Pesach, it tells us what happened. Pesach falls on the fifteenth of Nissan because that is the night we left Egypt. Shavuot is different: the Torah places it in the context of the wheat harvest, and it is Chazal who connects it to Matan Torah. Sukkot falls six months after Pesach, on the fifteenth of Tishrei, and the Torah presents it as a harvest holiday:

”אך בחמשה עשר יום לחדש השביעי באספכם את תבואת הארץ תחגו את חג ה'” (ויקרא כג:לט).

Then it tells us to take four plants and to live in huts. The historical reason comes only in the last verse of the passage:

”למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל” (ויקרא כג:מג).

So why does it come last? What is a story about leaving Egypt doing at the end of the agricultural year?

Sukkot seems to sit between two worlds: the world of yetziat Mitzrayim and the world of the agricultural year, the desert and the settled life of Eretz Yisrael. It brings together what Hashem has done for us and the life we are now responsible to build.

Perhaps this is already contained in the date. The Torah repeatedly calls Tishrei “the seventh month.” When it introduces the first of the month, it doesn't use the name Rosh Hashana. It says, “בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש.” Fifteen days later we arrive at Sukkot. The seventh month

is tied to the completion of the agricultural cycle: "בצאת
באספך את מעשיך מן השדה," "תקופת השנה," "השנה
The work of the year is done and the produce is gathered in.
Yet the same month is exactly six months from Nissan
and the beginning of the Exodus. Sukkot comes at a
particular moment. The Jewish people have left
Mitzrayim, and now they have to learn what it means to
live after leaving Mitzrayim.

Leaving Egypt is not the end of the story. It is the
beginning of a new life. A person can leave one place and
still not know where he is going. He can have a dramatic
moment of freedom and still have to learn how to live as
a free person. The same is true nationally. The Torah
doesn't want the Exodus to stay an isolated event from
generations ago. Sukkot takes it and places it in the
middle of ordinary life, when a person has a home, a field,
a harvest and possessions. The question is no longer only
whether Hashem can take us out of Mitzrayim. It is
whether, once we've built a life, we still recognize where it
came from.

Before Sukkot was a hut, it was a place. "ויסעו בני ישראל
ויסעו מסכת ויחנו באתם בקצה," "מרעמסס סכתה
המדבר." Sukkot was the first stop after leaving Egypt,
before the long years of wandering. The Jewish people
leave the house of Pharaoh and arrive at a place called
Sukkot. They are no longer in Egypt, but not yet in Eretz
Yisrael. They have left one life and haven't established
another.

That may explain why the Torah gives Sukkot two names.
It is "חג הסוכות" and it is "חג האסיף." One looks back at
the wilderness, and the other looks at the life we live now.

One is historical and one is agricultural. One reminds us of where we came from, and the other confronts us with what we have. The Torah puts them together.

What Was the Sukkah?

What exactly are we remembering when we sit in a sukkah? The Gemara records the machloket:

”כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל – ענני כבוד הויו, דברי רבי אליעזר. רבי עקיבא אומר: סוכות ממש עשו להם” (סוכה יא ע”ב).

According to Rabbi Eliezer, the sukkot were the ענני הכבוד. According to Rabbi Akiva, they were actual huts the Jewish people made for themselves.

There is a wrinkle here. The Sifra (אמור) has the same debate with the names reversed: Rabbi Eliezer says ”ענני כבוד הויו” and Rabbi Akiva says ”סוכות ממש הויו.” The Bavli's version is the familiar one. The attributions differ, but the question is the same either way: are we remembering physical huts, or the divine protection of the ענני הכבוד?

At first, the opinion of סוכות ממש is harder. If the mitzvah is to remember the wilderness, why does it matter that they lived in huts? We remember miracles. We remember the Exodus and the splitting of the sea. Why recreate the temporary housing of people who left Egypt with almost nothing?

The Rashbam (ויקרא כג:מג) takes this seriously and says that this is the peshat. He reads the verse as a reminder of the condition in which we lived. In the wilderness we had no settlement and no inheritance, only temporary

dwelling. The sukkah is not there because the wilderness was beautiful. It reminds us how little we had.

The timing is part of the message. The Torah has just told us that the harvest is in. A person has a house, a field and a full storehouse, and a year of work behind him. Now he leaves it for seven days and goes outside. The danger at the end of the agricultural year is not that he will forget that he worked hard. It is that he will look at everything he has and say כחי ועצם ידי. The sukkah reminds him of the other side of his life. There was a time when all he had was a temporary shelter, and everything he had came directly from Hashem.

The Ramban (ויקרא כג:מג) looks at the question from another direction. He asks why Sukkot is in Tishrei at all. If we left Egypt in Nissan, why not sit in the sukkah in the spring? He gives two answers, one for each side of the machloket. If the sukkot were the Clouds, then Pesach remembers a one-time event, the Exodus, and falls in its own month. Sukkot remembers the miracle that continued through all the years in the wilderness, and that can be marked at another season. If they were actual huts, then the Jewish people began building them when the cold came, at the start of winter, as people do in a camp. That is why we sit in them then.

The two approaches are different. For the Rashbam, the season explains the mitzvah: the harvest is the whole point, and the sukkah shows us what we lacked. For the Ramban, the mitzvah explains the season, and the harvest plays no role. But his first answer fits what we saw earlier. Pesach is the night we left, and Sukkot is the long stretch after it.

The sukkah is also an interesting structure. It is temporary, but we still build it carefully. We choose the walls, put up the schach, decorate it, bring our family into it, and eat and sleep there. It is something a person makes, and yet it is deliberately inadequate as a permanent home.

That combination is at the heart of Sukkot. We are supposed to build, but we are not supposed to believe that what we build is the source of our security. We work the land, gather the harvest and create homes, and we know that all of it exists within something much larger than ourselves.

The Sukkah and the Mikdash

Once we see Sukkot this way, the connection to the Beit HaMikdash makes sense. It is already present in Tanach. When Shlomo dedicates the Mikdash, the whole nation gathers "בִּירַח הָאֵיתָנִים בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי." When the Jewish people return from Bavel, they gather in Jerusalem in the seventh month, rebuild the mizbeach, keep Sukkot and resume the korbanot (עֶזְרָא ג'). This happens before the foundation of the Mikdash is laid. In Nechemiah (ח'), the people find the mitzvah written in the Torah and build sukkot on rooftops, in courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God and in the streets. They had not celebrated Sukkot this way since the days of Yehoshua bin Nun.

The two structures are almost opposites. The sukkah is the individual's temporary home, where he lives with Hashem. The Mikdash is the permanent national home of the Shechinah. Yet the holiday of the temporary house is

when the permanent house keeps being dedicated. They express the same idea: the physical world that we build can become a place in which we live with Hashem.

This also helps us understand Hakhel. Every seven years the nation gathers in the Beit HaMikdash to hear the Torah. The individual leaves his house for the sukkah, and the nation leaves its ordinary life to gather in the house of Hashem. Sukkot is about creating a way of living in the present in which Hashem stays at the center of what we are building.

Zechariah (יד) takes this idea even further. He describes a time when the nations come to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot, and rain is connected to whether they come. Sukkot begins with the Jewish people under Hashem's protection after leaving Mitzrayim, moves into the settled agricultural life of Eretz Yisrael, and ends by pointing to a world in which the nations recognize Hashem.

The Arba Minim

The sukkah is the historical side of the holiday, and the four minim are the agricultural side. The Torah introduces them in the middle of its description:

“ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר, כפת תמרים, וענף עץ עבת, וערבי נחל, ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם שבעת ימים”
(ויקרא כג:ח).

The Torah could have simply told us to rejoice at the time of the harvest. Instead, the agricultural side of Sukkot becomes the arba minim. We take plants that grow from the ground and bring them with us into the holiday.

This is different from Pesach and Shavuot, where the agricultural offering is food: the omer of barley and the שתי הלחם of wheat. Of the four minim, only the etrog is a fruit, and none of them is a harvest. Rabbi Eliezer connects them not to the crop but to the water that makes any crop possible:

”ארבעה מינין הללו אינן באין אלא לרצות על המים, וכשם שארבעת מינין הללו אי אפשר בהם בלא מים כך אי אפשר לעולם בלא מים” (תענית ב ע”ב).

The world needs rain. The field and the plants need water. A person who has just gathered his produce is reminded that everything he is holding ultimately depends on something outside his control.

Then we take the lulav and shake it in every direction. Rabbi Yochanan explains:

”מוליך ומביא למי שהארבע רוחות שלו, מעלה ומוריד למי שהשמים והארץ שלו” (סוכה לז ע”ב).

The four directions belong to Hashem, and so do the heavens and the earth. We have just gathered the produce from our fields, and we recognize that the whole world it came from — the ground, the rain, the wind and the heavens — is His.

This helps explain the two approaches to the sukkah. The opinion of סוכות ממש emphasizes the physical experience: real structures, built by people, in which people lived. The opinion of ענני הכבוד emphasizes Hashem's presence and protection. The four minim

express the same tension. They are completely natural things that grow from the earth and depend on water, and we use them to recognize that the physical world belongs to Hashem.

Sukkot doesn't ask us to reject the physical world. It asks us to see it correctly. The harvest is real, the home is real, and the work a person does is real. But none of them exists independently of Hashem. Sukkot takes the physical world itself — the plants, the rain, the harvest and the home — and teaches us to see Hashem within it.

The Eved and the Rain

But the same Gemara has an objection. Rabbi Yehoshua answers Rabbi Eliezer that rain during the festival is "ימין קללה." Rabbi Eliezer replies that he never said to ask for rain, only to mention it. We follow Rabbi Yehoshua, and we begin mentioning rain only after Sukkot. The last mishnah in the second perek of Sukkah gives this a picture:

"כל שבעת הימים אדם עושה סוכתו קבע וביתו עראי. ירדו גשמים, מאימתי מותר לפנות? משתסרח המקפה. משל למה הדבר דומה, לעבד שבא למזוג כוס לרבו, ושפך לו קיתון על פניו" (משנה סוכה ב:ט).

We are supposed to make the sukkah our permanent home and our house temporary. But if it rains hard enough, we leave. Chazal compare this to a servant who comes to pour a cup for his master and has a pitcher of water thrown in his face. It's an uncomfortable image. We left our homes and entered the sukkah, we're doing

exactly what we were asked, and Hashem sends rain and tells us to go inside.

That is the point of the mashal. The sukkah is not ultimately about our control. We build it, we enter it, and we make it "קבע," and then we find that even this mitzvah depends on whether Hashem wants us to stay.

The second perek begins and ends with a servant. It opens with Tavi, the servant of Rabban Gamliel, who is exempt from the sukkah, and ends with the servant in the mashal. The word eved is the language of yetziat Mitzrayim. We left Egypt as עבדי פרעה because the purpose of the Exodus was to become "עבדי ה'". "שלח את 'עבדי ויעבדני'" was a demand to leave one master in order to serve another.

That is where Sukkot takes us. We spend seven days in a home we built ourselves, remembering that our security never came from what we built. We gather the harvest we worked for, holding the four minim, and remember that the world can't exist without Hashem providing its water. We build the sukkah and sit inside it knowing the protection is His.

This is what connects "חג הסוכות" and "חג האסיף." The holiday is about what we receive from Hashem and what we do with it. We are not meant to choose between dependence on Hashem and human responsibility.

A person leaves Egypt, enters the world, works, builds and gathers. He eventually has a home, a harvest and a life of his own. Sukkot asks him to step outside of it for seven days, not to reject it, but to remember what it means. Redemption doesn't mean that we no longer

depend on Hashem. It means that we can build a life while knowing that everything we build is still within His world. The goal is not to stay in the wilderness forever. It is to leave it, build homes, plant fields and gather the harvest, and never forget who brought us there:

”למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל
בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים, אני ה' אלקיכם.”

May we be zoche to build our homes and gather our harvests while remembering what they rest on, and to use our דעת and בחירה to find Hashem both in the sukkah and in the house we return to.