

SUKKOS

תשע"ט

Sukkos has a unique aspect of simcha, not shared by any other day of the Jewish calendar. There is a mitzvah of simcha on every yom tov, but not on Shabbos. On Shabbos, there is a mitzvah of kibbud and oneg, but not simcha. We dress up and clean up the house to welcome Hashem into our home, and it is a mitzvah of relaxation and having physical pleasure that we save especially to enjoy on Shabbos. But there is no mitzvah of simcha like on yom tov. Yom tov cancels aveilus of an individual because the simcha of yom tov is a contradiction to personal aveilus. The gemara says that a simcha of the many pushes aside the aveilus of the individual. Shabbos doesn't cancel out shivah and sheloshim. On the contrary—an ovel observes various parts of his aveilus even on Shabbos.

The mitzvah of simcha on yom tov is because on yom tov we are in the presence of Hashem. If a person feels the presence of Hashem on yom tov with all the avodah of yom tov, then there can be no aveilus in such a state. In the Megillah, Esther tells Mordechai he cannot come to the King's court wearing sackcloth. Chazal tell us that in the presence of the king there is no mourning. Being in Hashem's presence negates all expression of aveilus. It is sometimes difficult to put aside one's personal aveilus abruptly when yom tov comes right after a family tragedy. But if you feel you are in the presence of Hashem, your neshomo transcends any kind of temporary sadness and is overwhelmed with the rapture of connecting to its Source.

This is why yom tov is simcha but not Shabbos. Shabbos has kedushoh but not this intense presence of Hashem. In the Bais Hamikdosh, whenever there was a korban mussaf, there was a mitzvah of simcha—including Shabbos. This is why we insert the phrase yismichu bemalchusechoh only in the mussaf part of tefillas Shabbos—according to Nusach Ashkenaz. But outside the Bais Hamikdosh, there is no mitzvah of simcha on Shabbos.

Even though every yom tov has a mitzvah of simcha, on Sukkos there is an extra mitzvah of simcha all seven days. There is a unique dimension of being in His presence on Sukkos. Who should be the ones who led the simcha in simchas bais hashoeivoh in the times of the Bais Hamikdosh—only the top talmidei chachomim and roshei sanhedrin, chassidim and anshei maaseh. The rest of the public would come to watch them. Why only them? These were the people who spent their lives in the presence of Hashem all the time and would feel more intensely that extra dimension of lifnei Hashem on Sukkos. According to the Rambam, it is a simcha of performing mitzvos and love of Hashem.

The gemara asks do we rejoice because of the yom tov or because we are in the presence of Hashem? It then quotes a posuk which says it is a simcha of connecting with Hashem. What makes this special connection to Hashem come to the fore specifically on Sukkos? The Rambam says it is connected to the simcha of mitzvos. But, other rishonim say it is the unique simcha of nisuch hamayim—when the water was drawn from a special spring and brought to the Bais Hamikdosh to be poured on the mizbeach once a year—only on Sukkos. The gemara adds that at that point there was an overflow of ruach hakodesh—feeling that they were in Hashem's presence.

This mitzvah of nisuch hamayim has some fascinating aspects to it. It is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah and is only alluded to in the parsha of korban mussaf of Sukkos. What was the purpose of this avodah? It was because Hashem's judgment on rain and our source of water is on Sukkos/Shemini Atzeres. We start saying mashiv haruach

at this time of the year. How does rain tie into the overall theme of Sukkos?

Sukkos is the time when the representatives from all the nations of the world will come to Yerushalayim to acknowledge Hashem as the Melech. They will do this in order to receive their portion of bracha that they receive through the seventy cows brought over the seven days of Sukkos which correspond to the seventy nations of the world.

Rosh Hashono is the day of the creation of Odom Horishon. The 25th of Elul is the first day of creation, and five days later was the creation of Odom. At the end of this day, Odom Horishon sinned with the eitz hadaas and was banished from Gan Eden, and the regular, natural order of the world as we know it begins at this time.

On Rosh Hashono we recognize that the creation of the human being is the culmination of the creation of the world.

There are various approaches people have regarding how the world functions. The Jewish belief is that Hashem didn't just create a world and leave it to nature. Malchus shomayim means that Hashem keeps the world in existence year to year, day to day, moment by moment. It's not like the manufacturing of an automobile. When an automobile factory produces a car, the car rolls out of the factory and has an independent existence. If the factory blows up and gets destroyed later on, this has no effect on the automobile that it manufactured. But this is not how Hashem created the world. He created it and then runs it on an ongoing manner. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim cites the midrash which says there is an angel appointed for every aspect of the physical world to give it ongoing existence. Hashem gives the command to the angel to execute his wishes on an ongoing basis. But it seems to us that there are natural forces. But in reality, there is a spiritual force behind every element of nature. The gemara in Chullin and Tosfos in Avodo Zoro refer to the spiritual forces behind the seas and the mountains. The Ancient world believed these spiritual forces had independent power over the natural elements of the world that they controlled and thought they can appeal directly to these spiritual forces by worshiping them.

Our view of the world is that we can control the forces of nature by our mitzvos and aveiros. Hashem responds to what we do through shaping world events and guiding the various powers of nature to bring either prosperity or calamity to Klal Yisroel.

There is the Greek view of the universe which Modern man has adopted which says the world is self-perpetuating. It works like an automatic, perpetual motion machine—needing no additional input for its ongoing existence.

On Rosh Hashono, we know the entire world is being judged. Hashem judges nations and individual Jews and it all depends on mitzvos and aveiros. On Yom Kippur there is the final judgment. But on Yom Kippur, Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second luchos and the Torah Shebaal Peh.

The theme of Sukkos is about the lesson we received from our experience in the midbor. We started our history as a nation as we left Egypt. We were shown that we are totally dependent on Hashem. Pesach is the yom tov where we recognize that Hashem is in total control over nature. On Shavuos we saw the gilui Shechinoh which showed us that Hashem is the only reality. But knowing it is one thing. Living it is another. Hashem brought us out into the midbor—go out

there and see it yourselves sometime. It is a place where nothing grows and no one can live, somehow 3 million people were able to live and thrive there for forty years. We got mon and water from the rock and we were surrounded by annanei kovod to give us suitable living conditions. Hashem instructed Moshe to take a container to preserve the mon in the Bais Hamikdosh as a reminder to Klal Yisroel for all time. We must never forget where our ability to survive and prosper comes from.

So, at Sukkos time, when a person finally gathers in his harvest, after a long and difficult process of raising crops, he is bound to feel very satisfied with himself. He has a beautiful house and sees he had a successful, profitable year and will naturally feel he is in control of his life. At that specific time, a person undergoes a judgment about his future and is told to leave his strong sturdy house. He is not in control.

One can't make a sukka rainproof. Rabbeinu Tam says that if the sukka is rainproof it is posul. The point of a sukka is that you leave the security of your permanent home and are exposed to the elements. You need to feel you are totally dependent on Hashem. The sukka symbolizes emunoh. We need to remember our experience of the midbor. Klal Yisroel survived in the harshest environments because we were being taken care of by Hashem Himself.

On Sukkos we also take daled minim. They are full of symbolism. But the Rambam notes that they are species that are found in plentiful quantities, specifically in Eretz Yisroel. We thank Hashem on Sukkos for the gift of Eretz Yisroel. What is the message of living in Eretz Yisroel? It is a very unique place on the globe. The weather pattern is very erratic. The posuk in Chumash says unlike Egypt, Eretz Yisroel is absolutely dependent on rain. You cannot depend on rivers and lakes with a regular reliable water supply as in most places of the world. The gemara in Taanis says among all the forces of nature, rain is solely in the hands of Hashem. As a result, rainfall is absolutely unpredictable. No one will ever be able to predict it with absolute certainty. No one really knows too far in advance what the weather will be.

On Sukkos, there is a special simcha because of (1) our unique experience of being in Hashem's presence and (2) the special nisuch hamayim which is a tefillah for the judgment on rain. (3) We take daled minim to highlight the fact that whatever grows in Eretz Yisroel is dependent on rain which makes us rely completely on Hashem, and (4) we leave our homes and enter sukkos to be exposed to rain—again relying completely on Hashem for protection and security.

On Sukkos we put ourselves in Hashem's hands totally—and even the nations of the world are compelled to accept malchus shomayim on themselves. There are two groups that worship avodo zoro—either those who worship the spiritual beings in charge of the natural forces, or those who try to figure out how nature works to the exclusion of Hashem's ongoing involvement in the physical world. But on Sukkos in the future, everyone will accept malchus shomayim. The korbonos on Sukkos correspond to those seventy nations to ensure their survival and prosperity which comes from Hashem exclusively.

After going through the yemei din of Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur, we go into a sukka with the understanding that our wealth and security comes from Hashem. The idea that we are dependent on Hashem shouldn't belittle us—it shouldn't frighten us. After undergoing a process of taharoh and removing all the barriers between us and Hashem created by our aveiros, we emerge with a feeling of intimate

closeness with Hashem. We got rid of our bad middos and wrong approach to life and this fills us with great simcha. This is the time we are judged on water and we bring a special korbon which is for water.

The closeness on Sukkos happens in two stages. There is the seven days of Sukkos with the seventy bulls for the nations of the world, and then there is Shemini Atzeres where only one bull is offered. Chazal give a parable of a king who married off a daughter. During the first stage of celebrations the entire kingdom comes to the palace to celebrate the wedding, but after everyone leaves, the King wants one extra day to be together with his daughter to have a private simcha. This is Shemini Atzeres—our private simcha with Hashem. And it is combined with another day of celebration—we celebrate the completion of the Torah. We got the second luchos and Torah Shebaal Peh on Yom Kippur and we express our simcha of closeness with Hashem through our deep connection to limud haTorah.

There is one level of simcha on Yom Tov which is in Hashem's presence—which has an extra dimension on Sukkos with the nisuch hamayim. The people who lived in Hashem's presence throughout the year through their limud haTorah participated in the water-drawing ceremony in the times of the Bais Hamikdosh, and they experienced an incredible feeling of deveikus where they had ruach hakodesh during that time. On Shemini Atzeres there is an additional mitzvah of vehoyisem ach someiach. It continues for us on Simchas Torah which expresses our deep bond with Hashem.

This is the entire process which starts with Rosh Hashono and a process of purity culminates in simcha of being in Hashem's presence. We are supposed to feel this closeness today as well—without a Bais Hamikdosh. The simchas bais hashoeivoh then was focused around those who devoted their lives to limud haTorah—not the pop Jewish entertainers and music bands of today. The idea of a simchas bais hashoeivoh is bringing the entire process of purity to a culmination of simcha of being in Hashem's presence.

People don't always feel comfortable living a life in the presence of Hashem. They would prefer to put Hashem off into a corner somewhere and forget about Him so they can be in control of their lives. But we have a Rosh Hashono specifically at this time of year to remind us that we are under malchus shomayim and there is a decree being sealed in Heaven about our future. Hashem is actively involved in our lives and He responds to our mitzvos and aveiros in a very real way. We live with Hashem on a daily basis. Coming to Sukkos we walk out of our secure houses into the vulnerable shacks which are exposed to the rain knowing that Hashem will protect us. The essential mitzvah of Sukkos is contemplating Klal Yisroel's experience in the midbor where they were completely dependent on Hashem moment by moment to protect them from the harsh conditions of the desert. This is why our sukkos have to be flimsy structures—in order to feel we cannot protect ourselves and we are putting ourselves completely in Hashem's hands. This is supposed to bring simcha.

This simcha is the culmination of a process of achieving a state of taharoh. Rebbi Akiva says in Yoma, Hashem Himself is the one who purifies Klal Yisroel. The more we immerse ourselves in the presence of Hashem, the more purity we will achieve and the more we will release control over our life into Hashem's hands and enter Sukkos with a simcha of being in Hashem's hands. This is how all the yomim tovim come together and form a single theme of living a life in the presence of Hashem with tremendous simcha.