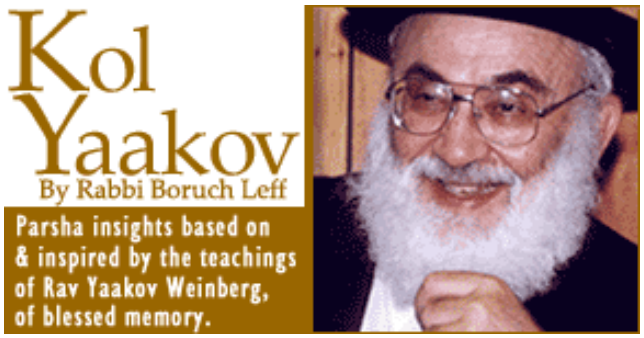
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The Pursuit of Happiness

Yes, we all are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Life and liberty come easily, but it seems that while we indeed *pursue* happiness throughout our lives, true and lasting joy evades us.

What is the secret to happiness? How can we avoid depression? As always, the Torah has the answers to our struggles and this time it is found in a profound understanding of the holiday of Sukkot.

We can begin to discover what the meaning of Sukkot is from the special prayers we recite on the holiday. In the main blessing of Shemoneh Esrai, we describe Sukkot as *Zman Simchateinu* - the Season of Our Joy. This does not mean that we enjoy ourselves in this season, (although we may love Sukkot and the pleasures of eating outdoors). Rather, the explanation is that Sukkot is a time when we can access true joy and bring it within ourselves.

A holiday is never merely a memorial for an event but a marking in time of when, due to a historical event, we changed as a nation in our very nature and soul. Every year when we meet the holiday once again we are given access to potential qualities and to grow in ways that we were not capable of doing before the festival. The holiday increases the reach of our souls.

On Sukkot, the historical event is that we dwelled in Sukkot or huts, during the 40 year sojourn in the desert after we left Egypt. God tells us to observe the holiday, "*So that your generations will know that I placed the Children of Israel in huts to dwell therein*" (Vayikra 23:43). What is the significance of this event?

The focus seems to be, "*I placed the Children of Israel in huts to dwell therein.*" God Himself directly put us in our "homes" in the desert and was distinctly involved in our lives. The Jewish people in the desert lived with a clear reality of God's presence. They witnessed daily miracles such as manna falling from heaven and water coming out of rocks. The Clouds of Glory enveloped their entire camp, protecting them from intruding enemies and bad weather. The Sukkah is actually built to remind us specifically of these Clouds of Glory as stated in Talmud Sukkah 11a. There was a special closeness between God and the Jewish people in the desert and when we leave our homes and go out to live in our Sukkot, we are reminded of that unique 40-year clear connection that we had with God.

This is why Sukkot is called the Season of Joy. You can't live with the clarity of God's presence without becoming a happier and different kind of person. Living with God in a Sukkah, even in our times, indicates that God provides. And whatever I have is not based on my own talents but what God is giving me. I'm not a success or failure. I can only try my best and God will decide if I succeed. We are always living in a Sukkah, in God's dwelling. We are never alone.

If you know that God is with you through all of life's struggles and that He is personally sending you any challenges that arise, you can more easily accept them in stride. God is Ultimate Goodness and He will never send any challenge if it is without a constructive purpose. These ideas comfort us during difficult times, allowing us to maintain equilibrium and happiness.

We are used to thinking that happiness must be triggered, that we cannot bring happiness to ourselves. If I have a child, I am happy. If I win the lottery, I am joyful. But the truth is quite the opposite. Joy is not based on what we are given in our lot in life. We **can** increase our own joy. If we are being commanded to celebrate a holiday and experience a season of joy, we are being told by God that joy is not a reaction to outside events but something we can bring to ourselves.

How do we bring joy into our lives? This is an art we must learn and Sukkot is the time of year when we can access it. Sukkot then becomes the most crucial holiday in terms of dealing with life.

We all know that everything depends on attitude. Take this example:

> *Two patients are in an old age home. One says, "Thank God, my family cares so much about me. Not a week goes by without a visit and when they come they always bring something! It could be an apple or a candy."*
>
> *The other patient says, "What a horrible family I have. Once a week is all the time they have for me, after all I have done for them as a mother? All I'm worth is a candy or an apple!"*

They're describing the same thing, yet they're describing opposite experiences.

The essential ingredient of our joy is not what we have but what we are and how we think. We can strive to have more but we must also love what we have already. Even simple, commonplace pleasures must be highlighted.

There is a Yiddish story written solely about an orange. It is called The Morantz, "The Orange." The orange was received as a present on Purim in Russia. Oranges in that part of the world were rare in the 1800's. The first day people from all over town came to look at it. Wow! What an unbelievable sight!

The second day they came to smell it - an incredible aroma. The next day they peeled it, saving each piece of peel with care in order to make marmalade. Then they divided the sections of the orange and crushed it in their mouths, feeling the delicious juices. An incredible experience.

And then they had the marmalade that lasted for weeks. A memory for a lifetime - the Orange.

Most of the time, we hardly stop to even notice the blessing and the pleasurable taste of the food we are eating. Oftentimes, before we realize it, we are finished eating without having focused on an appreciation for the pleasure that God has given us. We must focus on the many pleasures we enjoy already in order to attain happiness.

This is what the Mishna states in Avot 4:1, "Who is rich? One who takes pleasure and joy in
his lot." Bill Gates is not necessarily the richest man in the world. You can have a net worth of 50 billion dollars but if you don't enjoy and appreciate your wealth and are always looking for ways to get more, you will never be happy nor rich. A homeless man may only have $100 to his name but if he is satisfied with it and counts his blessings, he is richer than you.

On Sukkot, by going out of homes to a

temporary dwelling, we show that we don't need all of our material possessions to be happy. Happiness is not based on having but is based on being and enjoying. We train ourselves to appreciate the very basics of life. Whatever we have is appreciated and enjoyed.

Our taking and waving the Four Species on Sukkot also expresses an aspect of joy. The Midrash Rabbah (30:12) in Emor sees in the Four Species a oneness in the diversity of the Jewish people. The *etrog* (citron) has taste and fragrance, representing Jews who possess knowledge and good deeds. The *lulav* (palm branch) has taste but no fragrance, symbolizing Jews who have knowledge without righteous deeds. The *hadas* (myrtle branch) possesses only fragrance, representing those who have good deeds without knowledge. Finally, the *aravah* (willow branch) has neither taste nor smell because some Jews have neither good deeds nor knowledge.

We take all these species, which together represent the entire Jewish people, and we proclaim a oneness with all types of Jews. We accept upon ourselves the fostering of relationships with the totality of the Jewish people. We realize that everyone contributes to the nation and we attempt to see the positive qualities in other people rather then the negatives. This brings joy to ourselves and to others.

This concept of focusing on the positives of others is also learned from the order of sacrifices that is brought on Sukkot. Throughout the holiday, we bring 70 sacrifices, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. (The Torah views the nations of the world as 70 roots with many other nations as branches.) This is because we see all nations of the world as important. Each has a specific role to fulfill in God's world and we pray to God, through these offerings, that He inspire them to true service of Him. It is especially on Sukkot that we do this because, as mentioned, it is called "The Season of Rejoicing." When we are happy with ourselves, we look at the world positively and can see good in others, even other nations, even if those nations are presently our enemies.

Sukkot is perhaps the most important time of year. It is a time when we receive divine help in attaining happiness and joy. Without happiness, life can be one long misery. God will grant us this assistance as long as we show Him that we are trying to access it.



Sukkot: The Universal Holiday

The Talmud relates that in the future, when the pagans will complain to God about His preferential treatment of the Jews, He will tell them that this is because the Jews accepted and followed the Torah. They were not so much the "chosen people," as the "choosing people," so to speak; they chose to follow God's law.

> *The pagans will then plead, "Offer us the Torah anew and we will follow it." "You foolish people," God will answer, "he who prepares in advance of Shabbat can eat on Shabbat, but he who made no preparations, what can he eat? Nevertheless, I have an easy commandment called Sukkah, go and fulfill it..." Why is it called an easy commandment? Because it has no expense. Immediately each one will build a booth, a Sukkah, on his roof,*

> *but God will cause the sun to blaze as if it were the summer solstice. Each one will then kick his Sukkah, and leave... Thereupon God will laugh, as it is said, "He that sits in heaven and laughs." (Talmud - Avoda Zara 3a)*

Although this passage is difficult for several reasons, I would like to focus on one of its main themes: that pagans will not be able to keep the commandment of Sukkah. The reason this is so strange is that of all the holidays, Sukkot has been perceived as the most universal, encompassing all the nations of the world.

The Talmud teaches:

> *Rabbi Eliezer said: "Why are 70 offerings brought on Sukkot? For the (merit of the) 70 nations of the world." (Sukkah 55b)*

Rashi comments:

> *To bring forgiveness for them (the 70 nations which comprise the world), so that rain shall fall all over the earth.*

The Sages stress that Sukkot has a universal element which is clearly absent in the other festivals: Passover represents the exodus from Egypt and the emergence of a Jewish nation; Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jews. It seems paradoxical to find this expression of the inability of the pagans to relate to God specifically in the context of Sukkot.

COMING UP TO JERUSALEM

We may theorize that specifically on Sukkot, when the Jews concerned themselves with the welfare of non-Jews, pagans were expected to respond and to relate to God directly. There is, however, another passage which makes this approach untenable.

> *"And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations who came up against Jerusalem, shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the God of Hosts, and to keep the holiday of Sukkot. And whoever does not come ... to Jerusalem ... upon them there will be no rain." (Zechariah 14:16)*

This passage from the prophecy of Zechariah describes the aftermath of apocalyptic battles, when the vanquished nations will celebrate Sukkot. This heightens the difficulty of the story from the Talmud quoted earlier. While the Talmud contains many explanations of biblical teachings, it does not have a mandate to argue with the prophets. Our question, then, is quite simple: How can the Talmud relate that in the future the pagans will be unable to keep Sukkot - when the Prophet tells us clearly that they will?

I believe that in the resolution of this apparent contradiction lies the essence of Sukkot. There are two distinct aspects to the holiday of Sukkot, represented by two commandments in the Torah:

> *"Also in the 15th day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast to the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath. And you shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. And you shall keep it a feast to the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations; you shall celebrate it in*

> *the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths seven days; all who are Israelites born shall dwell in booths. That your generations may know that I made the people of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God."* (Leviticus 23:39-43)

The Torah speaks on the one hand of taking four species of fruit at harvest time, and on the other hand of sitting in the Sukkah, as the people who left Egypt did. We therefore see two commandments: 1) taking the four species, and 2) living in booths. One commandment has an agricultural impetus, the other a historical one. The agricultural aspect of the holiday is clearly universal, while the historical aspect is particular to the Jews.

THE TWO COMMANDMENTS OF SUKKOT

Let us analyze these two commandments.

The relationship between the gathering of the fruit and the four species seems clear: After gathering the new fruits, to express our gratitude to God, we collect these four species. The species which we gather are a tool used for prayer, in order to thank God for the produce we have just harvested and implore that a generous amount be allocated for the coming year. Our rabbis teach that the allocation of water for the year takes place on Sukkot:

> *On [the] holiday [of Sukkot] we are judged regarding water. (Talmud - Rosh Hashana 16a)*

In fact, much of the celebration which took place in Jerusalem on Sukkot was connected to water, including prayers for rain and the *Simchat Beit HaShoeva* ceremony. This, too, was a ritual connected to water, of which the Mishnah says:

> *Whoever did not see the Simchat Beit HaShoeva never saw real joy in their life. (Mishnah Sukkah 5:1)*

The verse spoke of "rejoicing before your God", referring to the Temple in Jerusalem. Sukkot was uniquely celebrated in Jerusalem - armed with the four species, the Jews would come to the Temple and pray for more rain and bounty. [The four species were used in the Temple for all seven days of the Festival. In the rest of the Land of Israel they were used only on the first day. The rabbis legislated the use of the four species for the duration of Sukkot even outside of the Temple.]

What, however, is the meaning of the other aspect of Sukkot, dwelling in booths?

We are commanded to dwell in booths, because God delivered us in booths. But what is the symbolism of these booths?

THE SYMBOLISM OF BOOTHS

The Talmud records two opinions. According to Rabbi Eliezer, the word "sukkot" refers to the clouds of glory with which God protected the Jews. Rabbi Akiva teaches that it refers to actual booths. Both opinions agree that the "sukkot" - whether clouds or booths - signify the special relationship which the Jews have enjoyed with God.

The difference lies in respect to the historical reality. Were we protected metaphysically by a cloud, or were we protected via a physical entity, a Sukkah?

Either way, the Jews ventured into the desert, vulnerable to the elements, putting their faith in God. This is what we commemorate today. This faith in God is the key to Sukkot. For the Jew to leave the comforts of his home and live in a booth, a temporary abode, is the essence of the Sukkah experience.

We are commanded to make these temporary abodes into our homes for the duration of the seven days of Sukkot. This serves as a reminder of the temporary nature of our existence, helping us focus on the proper relationship between the physical and the spiritual. But most importantly, the Sukkah is an expression of trust, the trust that we had in the desert and the trust that we hope to have today.

Now, perhaps we can resolve the seeming contradiction regarding the pagan ability to observe Sukkot, as indicated in the verses in Zechariah, and the inability as indicated in the Talmud.

There are two sides to Sukkot: the need for the physical, on the one hand, and the need to replace the physical with trust in God, on the other. The need for physicality is real, and nothing is as representative of our physical needs as rain. The Hebrew word for rain is *geshem*, which means "physical." Yet the source of rain is the clouds referred to by Rabbi Eliezer -- clouds of glory, symbolizing the spiritual, the metaphysical. Clouds are ethereal, beyond our grasp, beyond our understanding.

PRAYING FOR RAIN

Specifically on Sukkot, we pray for rain. In the wake of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when we prayed for our very existence, on Sukkot we are concerned with "quality of life." We pray for the physical; we pray for rain. With dialectical elegance a synthesis is created. We are commanded to leave our homes, the physical anchor in our lives, and enter a home under the clouds, protected by our trust in God. Our physical existence is brought into sharp contrast with our spiritual life, and the two aspects of Sukkot coexist.

Now we return to our original question: Will the pagans be able to observe the holiday of Sukkot? Surely, the answer must consider each aspect of the holiday separately. The passage in Zechariah that spoke of the pagans' observance of Sukkot stressed that it was in Jerusalem "before God." This aspect of Sukkot finds unique expression in Jerusalem; this is the aspect of thanks and prayer for rain. In fact, the verse explicitly states:

> *"And whoever does not come ... to Jerusalem ... upon them there will be no rain."*

The reason for coming to Jerusalem was to receive the blessing for rain. This aspect of Sukkot surely can be fulfilled by pagans. It is, in essence, a recognition of cause and effect; it is pragmatic. The pagans can perform this type of service, although Zechariah states later (14:18-19) that not all the peoples of the world will be willing to keep Sukkot in Jerusalem.

However, the other aspect of Sukkot, the building of the Sukkah, what the Talmud called a "simple Mitzvah," is what the pagan religious experience found so foreign. Here there was no pragmatism, merely trust - trust and love.

> *"Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says God: I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, when you followed me into the wilderness, into land that was not sown.'" (Jeremiah 2:2)*

The Sukkah is testimony to that love, expressed by simply being "with God," transcending the physical. Perhaps minimizing the physical is foreign idea to the pagan mindset. The pagans were accustomed to difficult commandments which involved giving, sacrificing something dear, in order to find favor with the gods. Conversely, the Talmud reports that God said: I have a simple Mitzvah, an "easy Mitzvah," involving no expense.

This the pagans found bizarre: What is a god who asks for nothing?

The Talmud further relates:

> *But does not Rabba say whoever is vexed (by the Sukkah) is freed of the obligation of Sukkah?*

According to Jewish law, someone extremely bothered by the Sukkah is exempt; therefore, the pagans who found themselves in a hot Sukkah were technically exempt. This is even more alien to pagan ideas - if a god asks for something difficult, are you exempt? The response of the pagans was to kick down the Sukkah, as if to say: "Enough is enough. How can man be expected to relate to such a deity?"

This then is the aspect of Sukkot is a uniquely Jewish experience: living with God, remembering the days of our youth when we followed God like a bride blindly in love, not questioning, but accepting, trusting.



The Beautifcation of Mitzvot

On Sukkot we shake the Four Species – Lulav, etrog, haddas (myrtle) and aravah (willow). Let's compare two ideas that pertain to Sukkot and the Four Species to see how they interact with each other.

A central concept brought out by the Four Species is the unity of the Jewish people. The Midrash teaches that the four different species represent four different types of Jews, based on their characteristics.

The Esrog has a taste and a fragrance which represents a person with both wisdom (Torah learning) and good deeds. The myrtle has a fragrance but is inedible, indicative of a person who has good deeds but lacks wisdom. The lulav is edible but has no smell, representing a person with wisdom but no good deeds. The willow has neither taste nor smell, and represents a person with neither good deeds nor Torah learning.

On Sukkot we gather these four species, bind them, and wave them all together. Even the 'highest' of the species, the etrog is only of use if all four species are taken together. If one of the species is missing, the Mitzva is not fulfilled. Moreover, when the Four Species are taken, the etrog is held next to the willow – this alludes to the idea that the 'greatest' person should position himself to be near the 'lowest' person in order to favorably influence him. These concepts teach of the importance of having good relationships with one's fellow Jews, even if they are not all on the same level.

A second concept that is prevalent in Sukkot is the idea of hiddur Mitzva – beautifying a Mitzva. The source for this is in the Song of the Sea when the people sing, "Zeh Keili V'anveihu" – this is my God and I will glorify Him. The Talmud[1] expounds that this refers to doing Mitzvot in a beautiful manner, beyond the letter of the law. The first two examples that the Gemara gives are connected to Sukkot – make a beautiful Sukkah and a beautiful esrog.

Another way in which Sukkah involves going beyond the law is that even though it is totally permitted to eat many foods or drink outside the Sukkah it is a 'hiddur' to only eat and drink

in the Sukkah.

On superficial glance, it could seem that these two ideas – unity and hiddur – do not necessarily go together. Indeed, sometime, going beyond the letter of the law in Mitzvot relating to God can sometimes lead to failings in Inter-personal relationships. For example, the person who prays a very long prayer and thereby blocks other people from moving, or one who pushes other people in order to kiss the Sefer Torah. However, in truth there need not be any contradiction, and in reality, the two should go together. The following story related by Rabbi Berel Wein about Sukkot brings out how a person can excel in both realms.

The story was told by S.Y. Agnon, the Israeli Nobel laureate who won the prize for literature a number of years. He was a neighbor of a famous old rabbi from Russia. Both of them were now living in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Talpiot. One year before Sukkot, Agnon met his rabbinic neighbor at the neighborhood store selling etrogim. Agnon noticed how meticulous his neighbor was in choosing an esrog. Even though he was a person of limited means, the rabbi insisted on purchasing the finest, and hence most expensive, esrog available. After examining many specimens, the rabbi finally chose the one he wished and paid for it.

Walking home with Agnon, the rabbi emphasized to him how important it was to have a beautiful, flawless esrog on Sukkot, and how the beauty of the esrog was part of the fulfillment of the Divine commandment for the holiday. However, on Sukkot morning Agnon noticed that the rabbi was without an etrog at the synagogue services. Perplexed, Agnon asked the rabbi where his beautiful esrog was. The rabbi answered by relating the following incident:

“I awoke early, as is my wont, and prepared to recite the blessing over the esrog in my sukkah located on my balcony. As you know, we have a neighbor with a large family, and our balconies adjoin. As you also know, our neighbor, the father of all these children next door, is a man of short temper. Many times, he shouts at them or even hits them for violating his rules and wishes. I have spoken to him many times about his harshness but to little avail.

As I stood in the sukkah on my balcony, about to recite the blessing for the esrog, I heard a child’s weeping coming from the next balcony. It was a little girl crying, one of the children of our neighbor. I walked over to find out what was wrong. She told me that she too had awakened early and had gone out on her balcony to examine her father’s esrog, whose delightful appearance and fragrance fascinated her. Against her father’s instructions, she removed the esrog from its protective box to examine it. She unfortunately dropped the esrog on the stone floor, irreparably damaging it and rendering it unacceptable for use. She knew that her father would be enraged and would punish her severely, perhaps even violently. Hence the frightened tears and wails of apprehension.

I comforted her, and I then took my esrog and placed it in her father’s box, taking the damaged esrog to my premises. I told her to tell her father that his neighbor insisted that he accept the gift of the beautiful esrog, and that he would be honoring me and the holiday by so doing.”

Agnon concludes the story by saying: “My rabbinic neighbor’s damaged, bruised, ritually unusable esrog was the most beautiful etrog I have ever seen in my lifetime.”

This anonymous Rabbi epitomized both aspects of Sukkah – a desire to do the Mitzva with the greatest hiddur but at the same time, the awareness that the Jewish people are one, and there might be times, when a hiddur in a Mitzva pertaining to God may be overridden by

a hiddur in inter-personal relationships. May we all merit to excel in both areas.

1. *Shabbos, 133b*



The Active Attachment

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

The Torah says, "You shall make [literally, "make for yourself"] the holiday of Sukkot for seven days" (Deut. 16:13). The Talmud (Sukkah 11b) explains the phrase "make for yourself" to mean that every person must consciously, actively make their own sukkah, rather than having their sukkah accidentally come into being as a result of some other action.

For example, the material that forms the roof of a sukkah ("*schach*") must fulfill two conditions in order to be kosher: it must have originally grown from the ground, and it must be currently detached from the ground. Imagine that I have four walls forming an enclosed space in my backyard. All summer long, I let the grass grow, until the weeds are so tall that they reach the top of the walls and droop over the edges. Obviously, these weeds are not kosher *schach,* because they are still rooted in the ground. But a week before Sukkot, I finally mow the lawn, and the tall weeds - which are now detached from the ground - fall over onto the walls.

Now is my sukkah kosher? The answer is no! I did not make the sukkah in my backyard; it just came into being as an accidental result of my mowing the lawn. In order to transform my weed-covered hut into a sukkah, I would need to gather up the weeds and actively place them on top of the walls.

The Vilna Gaon (cited in Sefer Kol HaTor 1:7) states that the entire body is involved in only two mitzvot: the mitzvah of sukkah and the mitzvah to dwell in the Land of Israel. (Mikvah is considered to be a preparation for other mitzvot.) He suggests that, just as we must consciously, actively make a sukkah, we must also be consciously involved in building the Land of Israel to the point where everything is ready for Moshiach to come. This is not a passive waiting - "I guess it will all work out in the end" - but an active involvement in positive change.

The verse that we say every day in davening, "And a redeemer will come to Zion" (Isaiah 59:20), hints to this idea as well. Rashi explains this verse to mean that the redeemer - Moshiach - will come only to a *built* Zion. The Jerusalem Talmud (Yuma 3:2, 40b) elaborates further, saying that redemption will take place in small, gradual steps, like the sunrise. Our redemption is a process, and we must be active participants in making it come about.

Today, when the Land of Israel seems to be diminishing in size, we are faced with what could be the ultimate test in maintaining our trust in God. We must not become despairing or distraught, but rather must do everything in our power to build and strengthen our attachment to the land. In this merit, may we be able to celebrate Sukkot - not just in our individual sukkahs, but also with "*Sukkat David haNofelet*" - the Holy Temple in a rebuilt Jerusalem.