

If you have ever had the merit to spend Succos in Eretz Yisroel, then your idea of Succos, like mine, is forever colored by that experience. Succos in Eretz Yisroel is everywhere you turn: the streets full of the sounds of families in their succahs, the sounds of a simchas bais hashoevah coming from every other corner and continuing deep into the night, the marketplaces and every public area and of course all the holy places that are taken over by the joy of yom tov. And we know from the Gemara that it was the same in the times of Bais Hamikdash; it is Succos, particularly, that is a public, national, all-encompassing celebration.

And then, we come to this year. And while I do not want to overload us with Covid yet again, I hope you will permit me to ask vicariously, from the shelter of my quarantined succah: when that public simcha is missing, when the familiar celebrations are different or taken away -- what is zman simchaseinu? How will we experience our joy this year?

At first glance, it seems a little curious that the yom tov of Succos, which is so full of joy and celebration, comes so soon after Yom Kippur, the most solemn day on our calendar. In our childish way, we sometimes imagine that the celebration and enjoyment of Succos is a reward for our commitment and devotion during the Yamim Noraim. But we know that it is no coincidence. We know that the judgement of Rosh Hashanah and the forgiveness of Yom Kippur lead us naturally to the joy of Succos. And this year, I think, we understand it even a little better.

On Yom Kippur, we spoke about the lev, the heart. We spoke about what happens when you strip away everything external, as we do on Yom Kippur; what happens when you toss aside all the distractions and spend a day considering what is on the inside and what really matters. And what the Torah teaches us is that when you live with your heart, what you will always find is joy. Because at the center of every Jewish heart beats an unbreakable connection to Hashem. At the center of every Jewish heart lives the understanding that the life we have been asking for throughout the Yamim Noraim is not just the fact of being alive but the life that comes from living with Hashem. At the center of every Jewish heart lives the awareness that the most precious things in life are not what we strive to accrue but the gifts that we already have inside of us. הקדוש ברוך הוא -- Hashem is the heart of the Jewish people. And when you learn how to find your heart, you will find joy. Always.

We read in the book of Shmuel about the day Dovid Hamelech brought the Aron Kodesh to Yerushalayim, how we danced with such devotion and joyous abandon that his wife Michal, accustomed to more dignified and aristocratic behavior, took him to task. Dovid is unfazed -- 'ושחקתי לפני ה', I will rejoice with all my might before Hashem. If you open any page of Tehilim, Dovid would not seem to be the obvious candidate to model what it looks like to give yourself completely over to joy. His life was full of the troubles and challenges that he poured into nearly every part of Tehilim. But Dovid, perhaps more than anyone, lived with his heart. He felt everything and saw Hashem everywhere. And when you live with your heart -- no matter what you experience -- there is always joy.

I miss all of you very much. But truth be told, if I had to pick seven days out of the year to be quarantined, I might very well have chosen Succos. On Yom Kippur, only the

Kohen Gadol goes into the place of Hashem's presence; on Succos, the Gemara says, Hashem's presence comes to rest on all of our succahs. And to live in Hashem's presence, to know that on the inside of the succah and the inside of your heart is where the most important things are found -- that is the greatest joy there is.

As Succos is the climax of the year, let us hope together that we can crown everything that has happened with connection, with meaning and with the greatest simcha. A chag kasher v'sameach to everyone.