

Sukkot: Zman Simchateinu

By Rabbi Adir Posy



Sukkot, more than any other holiday on the Jewish calendar, is specifically associated with happiness. Looking throughout Jewish life we see many examples where this link exists. We say it explicitly in davening *zman simchateinu*, chazal tell us of the great happiness that occurred at the *simchat beit hashoeva*, and we know that when the Torah says *v'samachta b'chagecha*, the reference is specifically to Sukkot.

What are we so happy about specifically on this holiday? Our Rabbis offer many answers, but they generally center around three basic principles.

The first is that this is the *chag ha'asif*, the holiday of the harvest, when we recognize the bounty and the physical prosperity that Hashem has blessed us with - and let's face it, who isn't happy on payday? Of course the hope is that the happiness that we feel is a little bit more than a simple grin at the sight of our bank account, but rather a time where we express thanks to Hashem over our material gifts.

The second answer is more on the spiritual side - a perspective that recognizes the place that Sukkot holds in the calendar. Rav Soloveitchik popularized the notion that true happiness in the Torah is always associated with the concept of an intimate and close encounter with the Almighty.

We celebrate Sukkot as we come off of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur season - a season in which we spent so much time in fear and trepidation trying to repair and build up our relationship with Hashem. On Sukkot, we have the opportunity to actually enjoy that closeness. According to this approach, nothing can make us happier than to recognize and revel in that spiritual relationship.

The third answer does not focus directly on the spiritual or the physical like the first two approaches, but rather on the existential. The Great Sage R' Jacob Ba'al HaTurim in his discussion of why Sukkot is in the fall as opposed to the springtime, suggests that in fact Hashem made sure that the Holiday of Sukkot was in the fall so as not to be interpreted as a relaxing stay outdoors in the balmy spring weather. Rather, our dwelling in the Sukkah should be

noticeable as a Mitzvah in the not always pleasant fall weather - not for our own enjoyment - but as a statement of our observance of Hashem's will.

Perhaps we can suggest that the Tur is making a point not only about the timing of Sukkot but about its character as well. Perhaps there is another dimension of happiness in our observance of Sukkot. Yes it is true that receiving material things makes us happy. And yes - it is even more true that the gift of a higher level of spirituality is also meant to make us happy. But perhaps the greatest happiness can be achieved not when we receive but when we give. Sukkot achieves its full potential when we are able to turn

around and say to Hashem, we are looking outside of ourselves and doing something not for us - but for YOU.

The self sacrifice that every Jew displays when he sits in a Sukkah is a statement that "I am living a religious

life that isn't always fun, and isn't always easy, and is almost never convenient, and is absolutely never cheap - but you know what the crazy thing is - that makes us happy."

What a profound lesson. While Hashem may not need our self sacrifice, the people around us definitely do, and on a regular basis. And this Sukkot type of happiness awaits us around the corner every time we make those sacrifices.



If you think about it, examples abound in our own lives. Think about the thrill you feel when you see the look in the eyes of a child when you taught him something new or you showed her the place in the Siddur. Recall the exhilaration when someone looks lost - and you greet them and show them the right way. Remember the feeling when you come to a Shiva house and you cry bitter tears but you show your friend that they are not alone.

It's not an easy visit - it's not a convenient or fun activity - and you certainly don't laugh out loud when you walk out of there - but somewhere deep in your heart you feel this incredible sense of fulfillment of *I did something for another* - that is Sukkot happiness.

According to this approach, Sukkot is the happiest holiday of the year because it's when we have the opportunity to walk outside of the cozy little world that we may have built for ourselves and say hey - I'm doing this not because it's fun, and not because it's easy - but because it's what we do. We say it's not for us - it's for YOU. **BJ**