

## Celebrating the Journey

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There's a well-known story of a young monk who joins a monastery. He is assigned to the task of helping his fellow monks copy by hand the institution's most sacred documents. He notices, though, that the texts they are copying are themselves copies as opposed to original manuscripts.

So he innocently approaches the head abbot and poses his question.

The senior monk carefully considers the issue. "We have been copying from these copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son." So, he descends into the subterranean archives of the monastery where the original manuscripts are held and secludes himself down below.

Wondering what's happened, the young monk makes his way into the archive in search of his teacher. In the corner of the room, he spots the older monk. He's poring over an ancient text and he's crying. "We missed the "R", he says, "We missed the "R".

The young monk is at a loss. "What's wrong, father?" he says.  
With a choking voice, the old abbot looks up, "The word was *Celebrate!*"

### דברים פרק טז פסוק טו

שְׂבַעַת יָמִים תַּחֲג לִיקְנוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְקֹנֶךָ פִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְקֹנֶךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֶיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אֶדְ שְׂמִחָה:

Sukkot isn't just a seven day celebration – it's the epitome of celebration. Nowhere else in the Torah are we called on to be nothing but joyous. And no other holiday is referred to so many times in terms of simcha. In the language of Chazal, Sukkos is just called הַג – the celebration – because it's the epitome of simcha. And of course this notion bleeds into our Tefillah and our Kiddush as we use the words זמן שמחתינו.

But we're left to wonder why? Here we are three days into this beautiful Yontif. But just what is it that we're supposed to be celebrating?

We all know famous מחלוקת:

כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל - ענני כבוד היו, דברי רבי אליעזר. רבי עקיבא אומר סוכות ממש עשו להם.

According to R. Eliezer our Sukkahs commemorate the clouds of glory; according to R. Akiva we're rebuilding the huts in which we sat in the wilderness.

And yet any way you slice it, these answers seem woefully insufficient.

I understand Pesach. Freedom warrants celebration.

And I understand Shavuot. Revelation is life-altering.

And if you told me we had a holiday to celebrate our entry into the Land of Israel, I would understand that, too.

But God's protection in the wilderness?

Do we have a holiday to commemorate the well that accompanied us?

The מן gets an extra חלה on Shabbos. The עונני הכבוד get a seven day holiday?

To help shed light on what's happening here, let me ask you a different question: What are the Ushpizin all about? Just who are these visitors and who decided who makes the guest list and who doesn't?

You'll notice on review that there's a common denominator that links every one of our seven Sukkos guests. They are all people who never witness the fulfillment of their life dreams.

- Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov are promised that their descendants will be a great people in a special land, but they don't live to see it happen.
- Yosef is able eventually to be buried in Israel, but he never makes it there in his lifetime.
- Moshe and Aharon wish more than anything to be granted access to the Holy Land; they make it as far as Transjordan, but no farther.
- And King David never builds the Temple he dreamed of.

To put it differently, these seven Ushpizin were journeymen who never reached their destinations. And the clearest proof is the conspicuous absence of Yehoshua and Shlomo – both of whom certainly qualify as Jewish heroes worthy of invitations to our Sukkah. They're absent because they don't fit the pattern. Yehoshua *did* live to fulfill his dream of crossing over into the Promised Land. And unlike his father, Shlomo *did* succeed in building the Beit Hamikdash.

The Ushpizin come into our Sukkah to help orient us. They remind us that we need to celebrate not just the moment we reach our destination, but the moments along the path of our journey, too.

The Torah goes out of its way to emphasize – and perhaps over-emphasize – the importance of simcha on this holiday because it's not obvious. It's only on reflection that we begin to appreciate that the smaller steps along the way warrant our celebration, too. Left to our own devices, we would surely take for granted the clouds or the huts that sustained us on our journey. Sukkos reminds us to celebrate the unheralded moments as much as the heralded ones.

When Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was here two years ago, he mentioned the following story. The head of a school in London came to seek his advice. As she explained to him, the school was floundering. Morale was low. Enrollment was falling. Test scores were dreadful.

Rabbi Sacks suggested that the school needed to undergo a culture shift. "You need to celebrate," he said.

She turned to him with a sigh. "You don't understand," she said. "We have nothing to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong."

"In that case," Rabbi Sacks said, "*Find* something to celebrate. If a single student has done better, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it's Tuesday, celebrate."

In time, the school turned around – in large measure thanks to Rabbi Sacks' advice.

Sukkot is the great reminder that we should be developing an ethos in which we recognize and appreciate the seemingly most insignificant blessings in our lives. And if it's true in our relationship with Hashem, it's of course equally true in our human relationships. It's not just pausing to recite a bracha or stopping to thank someone for a job well done. It's about devoting our most precious resource to this endeavor. It's about committing real time to the ethic of **הכרת הטוב**.

Consider these seven days an incubation period. Sukkos is the rehearsal at the beginning of our new year – the seven day party that's meant to fill our celebratory tanks and empower us to keep on celebrating well after the holiday has ended.

Today – and every day – is the creation of Hashem. Let us be exultant in our celebration.

זה היום עשה ה' נגילה ונשמחה בו.