

Good Yom Tov and Chag Sameach, everyone.

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May the neshamos have an aliya and may the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with bracha, hatzlacha, and good health.

This Yom Tov is called שמיני עצרת, the eighth day of the Yom Tov of Sukkos. But it is also its own Yom Tov, a רגל בפני עצמו as the Gemara in Sukka 48a teaches us. **Rashi** says that the unique nature of this day is expressed in the fact that in Eretz Yisrael, where there is no *sfeika d'yoma*, we do not sit in the sukka on Shemini Atzeres.

רש"י מסכת סוכה דף מה עמוד א: רגל בפני עצמו - שאין יושבין בסוכה.

Rav Zevin, in his *HaMoadim Bahalacha*, writes the defining feature of the day is **that we reenter our homes** with the lessons learned from the sukka...something that should lead to intense celebration. As **Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel** writes, it is a day “to go **from** the sukka **into** the home.”

במדבר (פרשת פינחס) פרק כט פסוק לה: ביום השמיני עצרת תהיה לכם כל-מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו: תרגום המיוחס ליונתן ב'יומא תמינא קנישין תהוון בתדנא מן משילכו לבתכו פנישת תדנא ו'יומא טבא ואירוע קדיש תהוין. . .

It is a day to gather all the lessons of the sukka and bring them into our homes. For the duration of the just-completed Yom Tov, we were told, as the Talmud puts it: צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת עראי: to leave our permanent dwelling place and live in a temporary, make-shift hut called a sukka - - just, as our ancestors did during their journey in the desert after leaving Mitzrayim.

What are the lessons of the sukka? We find a debate in the Gemara in Sukka 11b about the meaning of these booths.

Rabbi Akiva writes that we are remembering *sukkos mamash*. Our ancestors lived in makeshift huts that had to be dismantled and reassembled very frequently. Therefore, we too must experience this transience.

Rabbi Eliezer writes that we are remembering the *ananei hakavod*---the clouds of glory that Hashem sent to protect our ancestors on their journey, in their time of vulnerability.

The **Chayei Adam** writes that these two views are not really in conflict. Rather, they focus on different aspects of the experience we are meant to remember. He notes that the first time the word Sukkos appears in the Torah, it is written without a *vav*, and the next time it is written with a *vav*—to hint to both these meanings of the word *sukka*. We are to remember both the *sukkos mamash* and the *ananei hakavod*.

חיי אדם חלק ב-ג (הלכות שבת ומועדים) כלל קמו סעיף א

כתיב בסכת תשבו ז' ימים למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל וגו' מארץ מצרים. מתחלה כתיב בסכת חסר, וכאן בסכות הושבתי כתיב מלא, אלא להורות ב' מיני סכות שישבו, א' סכות של ענני כבוד, וא' סכות ממש. . .

Building on this idea, I would like to suggest that these are not really two separate meanings. One message leads to the other--**the sukkos mamash lead us to appreciate the ananei hakavod**. Sometimes, our focus on our secure homes and abundance of possessions, our illusion of כחי ועוצם ידי, our perceived ability to protect and sustain ourselves, and our fascination with all types of *gashmius* block us from seeing the hand of God in our lives and from living meaningful lives, focused on spirituality.

Moving out of our homes is meant to inspire something similar to what **Henry David Thoreau** wrote about in *Walden*, about his move to nature: “*Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.*”

He continues “*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.*”

When the Jewish people left Mitzrayim, they left with only the basics--the clothing on their backs and basic ingredients for matza---and were therefore able to clearly see the hand of God in their lives...the *ananei hakavod* supporting them and protecting them...

As **Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair** teaches in Sota 49a, sometimes, when we are stripped of all the things we put our faith in--and all that distracts us--the silver lining is that we can see Hashem...

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוטה דף מט עמוד א
[גמ'. ת"ר,] ר' פנחס בן יאיר אומר: משחרב בהמ"ק - ונדלדלו אנשי מעשה... על מי לנו להשען? על אבינו שבשמים.
Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: From the time when the Second Temple was destroyed, and men of action dwindled... Upon whom is there for us to rely? Only upon our Father in Heaven.

When Rabbi Akiva says that our sukkos are comparable to our ancestors' *sukkos mamash*, he is suggesting that living in a sukka shows that we can live on a minimum subsistence level--even in a hut, without a permanent roof over our heads--and learn that it is possible to survive that way, too. It teaches us that there are many things we assume are absolutely indispensable that, in fact, we can actually do without. It is possible to survive even without a permanent house, a home. It is a time to realize that many times luxuries distract us from what is important.

The **Yerushalmi** teaches בגופך התפלל שלא תכנס מעדנים בגופך before a person can expect to absorb Torah values, he needs to ensure that a focus on physicality and luxuries does not totally suffuse his being.

But at the same time, we must realize that there are, indeed, certain things we cannot do without. And that is what the ענני הכבוד--divine protection--lead us to focus upon. Our relationship with Hashem; our path to transcendence that derives from a relationship with our Creator. This is something without which no one can survive and find sense and meaning in his existence.

And when we come to realize what is really important, we find Hashem in our lives.

Sitting in a sukka should prompt us to ask ourselves about the focus of our lives...What are our goals? What is our ambition? What do we live for? In whom and in what do we put our faith? What values do we want to leave for the next generation? How do we want to be remembered?

And the question each of us must ask ourselves, while sitting in our huts, is: What are the things we can do without and the things we absolutely cannot do without?

The Yom Tov of Sukkos helps provide the nuanced answer to that crucial question. Jewish tradition does not tell us to do without the comforts and luxuries of life. Certainly not. We are not asked to live in huts year-round. That is the message of Shemini Atzeres; we are told to return to our homes--as part of the Yom Tov. As Rashi writes about this day, אין יושבין בסוכה, we have reached the climax of this Yom Tov--and we must return to our homes...

Similarly, our tradition demands that the High Priest, the כהן גדול, be a man of means, and if he is pious but poor, upon his election to his sacred office, his fellow kohanim must share their wealth with him.

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) (פרשת אמור) פרשה כו סימן ט

ט מה כתיב אחר הענין והכהן הגדול מאחיו למה נקרא שמו כהן גדול שהוא גדול בה' דברים בחכמה בכח בנוי בעושר ובשנים, בנוי שהוא נאה מאחיו, בכח שהוא גבור... בעושר מנין שאם לא היה עשיר אחיו הכהנים מעשרין אותו,

wealth and honor are things we ask for in our tefillos. A person can do a world of good by wisely and charitably distributing his material riches.

Sukkos does not tell you that you should do without that. **But it does tell us that we can do without it**. It reminds us of the proper scale of values, to discriminate between what is vital and what is peripheral, what is indispensable and what is expendable, what we can and what we cannot do without. What is the goal, what is our ambition, and what is a means to an end? Sukkos reminds us of what Thoreau said "*The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.*"

Sukkos also reminds us that while we can survive without many material things, **we cannot survive without Hashem in our lives**; the *ananei ha-kavod*, over our heads. A sense of dignity and noble purpose, the aspiration for a life of holiness is an imperative, an absolute requirement.

פרי מגדים אורח חיים אשל אברהם סימן תרלא ס"ק ב: ויראה דלכתחלה שיהא כוכבים נראים מתוכו אפשר די בכל הסוכה במקום אחד סגי, שיזכור מי ברא אלה ולהיות גר בארץ, כמו שכתוב [תהלים ח, ד] ירה וכוכבים אשר כוננת

The **Pri Megadim** writes that--through the *schach*--we should be able to see the stars, to look up at the heavens and realize that there is so much above and beyond us. No matter our technical achievements, we must remember that we can never do without our Creator, as distant as He may sometimes seem from us.

The sukka also tells us we cannot get along without **a sense of history**. To our sukka, we invite the *ushpizin*; Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and David; one each night. We cannot do without them, without an awareness of Jewish continuity, a sense of being rooted, a familiarity with the spiritual giants who influence our national character and to our nation's influence in the world. We remember where we came from; our history which is meant to shape our destiny.

Sukkos teaches us both the negative and positive scale of values. With Rabbi Akiva, we focus on what we can temporarily do without. With Rabbi Eliezer, we focus on that which we can never do without.

Sukkos is meant to help us develop a clear conception of what is enduring and what is ephemeral in all that we have. We do not always discriminate between the essential and the expendable, between what we can do without and what we cannot and ought not be able to do without. The proper appreciation of the meaning of Sukkos can, therefore, make the difference between a life of happiness, contentment, serenity, and meaning, on the one hand or disillusionment, misery, and a sense of futility on the other.

Indeed, in this sense, Sukkos is a continuation of the spirit of Yom Kippur. **Rav Hirsch** points out that abstaining from food and drink and wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur is called *inui*, a word which comes from the word *ani*, a poor person. וענייתם את נפשותיכם “*You shall afflict your souls*” really means: visualize yourselves as poor people, try for one day to experience the life of a poor person, who must go hungry and thirsty, who cannot afford shoes to cover and protect his feet from the hard, cold earth. Learn from this one day's experience that, if necessary, you can even get along for a whole day without anything in your mouth, that food and clothing, important as they are, should not be the major focus of our lives. Rather, holiness and spirituality should be our major focus. Sukkos continues this lesson. What Yom Kippur teaches about food and clothing, Sukkos teaches about shelter and protection-- צא מדירת עראי, for seven days live in a hut and appreciate that this too is something which, in the final analysis, man can do without. Everyone must learn by this symbolic experience that you can be an עני in the material things of life, as long as you retain and enhance your spirit, your dignity, your awareness of ענני הכבוד, the divine cloud of glory which hovers over every human being, and gives our lives meaning.

When we have learned this powerful lesson, when we have studied our own lives and decided upon the things we really cannot do without and those which we can do without, then our lot will be one of tranquility, fulfillment, and peace. Sukkos will have made for us--not only these several days, but the whole year-- a *zeman simchasenu*, a time of happiness and serenity.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky makes an interesting observation. He says Shlomo Hamelech teaches us, in Koheles, that the physical world is הבל. When physical pursuits are our ambition, we are running after futility. Rav Galinsky says that if you go into any nursing home, you will hear people talking like that---about what really matters when all is said and done; about the futility of wealth, honor, and possessions. As a person gets close to the end, they naturally come to the conclusion האדם כל זה לא יצא לו. Rav Galinsky wonders: is this conclusion so mysterious that we need the wisest of all men to teach it to us?

He answers that reaching this understanding at the end of one's life does not take incredible wisdom, but Shlomo came to this conclusion when he was 30 years old, at his height of power and wealth. The message of Sukkos is a message to be internalized now---not when we are at the end of our lives—but when we still have our strength and vigor...to live life to the fullest focused on what is really important.

We are about to recite Yizkor. This is a time to think of past generations. What they invested in us. What is really important in life; the message of Sukkos. And we think now of how to incorporate these perspectives into our lives; the message of Shemini Atzeres. May we use this inspiration to rededicate ourselves now, to living life properly, and may we merit a year of good health, happiness, and true meaning...and bring honor to past generations and the future generations we have a responsibility to nurture. May we celebrate next year in *Yerushalayim habenuya*...amen.