

After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

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The Hebrew month of Tishrei is replete with significant Jewish holidays. Rosh Hashana falls on the first of the month, Yom Kippur on the tenth and Sukkot which lasts for 8 days (9 in the Diaspora) on the fifteenth. There seems to be a natural connection between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as the former initiates the Ten Day's of Repentance and the latter completes it. But what about Sukkot which falls five days after the Day of Atonement; is it completely unrelated or intimately connected to the holidays which precede it?

In my opinion it is not by accident that Sukkot comes just days after the High Holidays. The fact that there is a significant connection between them can be seen from Rambam. In his Mishne Torah he combines the laws pertaining to Shofar with those of Sukka and Lulav and places them in one Section. This is a clear indication of a relationship between these mitzvot. What might it be? What follows is my own speculation on this topic.

A key feature of Sukkot is that of Simcha (joy). Rambam says, "Even though it is a *Mitzvah* to rejoice on the other festivals, on the holiday of Sukkot there was an additional celebration as it says, 'You shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days.'" He further says that, "The joy that one experiences in performing the *Mitzvot* and in the love of G-d is a great service."

The essence of the joy one is obliged to experience is that it is "*Lifnei Hashem*" (before G-d). In my opinion one cannot experience that emotion without the proper preparation, ie. without first achieving the appropriate relationship with Hashem.

The process that leads to this begins on Rosh Hashanah. That is the time when we crown Hashem as the Ruler of the universe and thus acknowledge Him in all His glory and majesty.

Rosh Hashanah initiates the period known as the Ten Days of Repentance. The sense of awe we experience in recognizing the Ultimate Being impels us to reflect on our spiritual condition to see if our lives are in line with the reality of Hashem. The goal of man's existence is poignantly expressed in the *Ne'ilah* prayer of Yom Kippur: "You set man apart from the beginning and You considered him worthy to stand before you...Now You gave us, Hashem, our G-d, with love this Day of Atonement for redemption, pardon and forgiveness...and return to You, to carry out the decrees of Your Will, wholeheartedly."

Are we living a life that conforms to His Will? Man cannot stand before Hashem if he is behaving in a manner which is contrary to the commandments. He must therefore engage in *Teshuva* so that his sins can be removed and he can joyfully enter into Hashem's presence. When he has done that he is ready to observe Sukkot.

The *Mitzvah* of dwelling in the Sukkah calls on a person to leave the "security" of his abode and take refuge under the "wings of the *Shechina*." It teaches that no matter how much we try to obtain

material protection for ourselves and our families there is just so far that we can go. Ultimately, the only true security one can attain in this life stems from the Providence of Hashem.

Just as the Jews left the land of Egypt and, in entering the Wilderness, placed their faith in Hashem, so do we abandon our well fortified homes and take residence in flimsy huts which afford no visible protection and thus proclaim our absolute trust in G-d. The experience of this special closeness to Hashem produces an intense feeling of joy.

There is another dimension to the *Mitzvah* of *Sukkah*. It forces us to leave our homes which are filled with *excessive* material possessions which are way beyond what we truly need. In the *Sukkah* we recognize that we have everything that we actually require in order to be happy. When a person contemplates his life and is "*Sameiach BeChelko*" (rejoices in his portion) he then feels great gratitude to Hashem and experiences the special joy of Sukkot, in the presence of Hashem.

This lesson has great significance for our lives. One who is constantly pursuing more "things" cannot attain any deep sense of peace and satisfaction. It is only when man immerses himself in the study of Torah and pursuit of wisdom and good deeds that he realizes what he was created for and partakes of a new type of happiness. May the High Holiday period which culminates with Sukkot, the "season of our joyfulness," afford us a new perspective on life and a taste of the happiness that each of us was created for.

Chag Sameach.