

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

How do we express that joyful spirit on this holiday known in Rabbinic literature simply as *Ha-hag*, the holiday par excellence? Today most of us are not involved in gathering our crops during the harvest season. Instead we celebrate it by showing our appreciation for nature's gifts. Throughout the festival we use the four species (except on Shabbat) and leave our homes to reside in Sukkot.

But there is another way to commemorate the joy of the festival. Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Festivals 6:17-18) writes: "It is one's duty to rejoice and be of cheerful heart together with his children, his wife, his grandchildren, and all the members of his household... And while one eats and drinks himself, it is his duty to feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and other poor and unfortunate people, for he who locks the doors to his courtyard and eats and drinks with his wife and family, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and bitter in soul – his meal is not a rejoicing in a divine commandment, but a rejoicing in his own stomach."

Maimonides teaches us that if you want to experience true joy – share your bounty with others. As Rabbi Irving Greenberg writes: "On this holiday Jews are commanded to eat, drink, be happy, dance and relish life to the fullest in celebrating the harvest and personal wealth. But making joy holy means being selective in the enjoyment of God's gifts, not worshipping those gifts or those who own them. The first and foremost expression of this insight is to share the bounty and joy." (The Jewish Way p.112)

Sukkot allows us to celebrate the bounties of nature and reminds us to share those gifts with others. Thus, one of the most meaningful customs of Sukkot is *Ushpizin*. With a formula established by the Kabbalists in the 16th century, based on the earlier Zohar, on each night of Sukkot we invite one of the seven exalted men (in some customs women as well) of Israel into our Sukkah. By symbolically showing our hospitality to our revered ancestors we recognize our ongoing responsibility to invite others into our Sukkah, and into our lives.

The holiday of Sukkot is truly "the season of our rejoicing." We need to make it so for those less fortunate than ourselves as well. While this year we may not be able to have many guests in our Sukkah, due to the Covid 19 virus, it does not exempt us from sharing our gifts with others, expressing our appreciation to God for our health and well-being, and enjoying the bounties of nature which daily attend us. May our joy be palpable as we celebrate this beloved festival.



Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center Conservative Yeshiva

TORAH SPARKS

Sukkot

October 3-4, 2020 | Tishrei 15-16 5781

Torah (both days) Vayikra 22:26-23:44; Maftir 29:12-16
Haftarah First Day: Zechariah 14:1-21; **Second Day** | Kings 8:2-21

D'var Torah: The Season of Rejoicing

Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, Rabbi Emeritus, NSSBE Highland Park, IL, FJC Faculty

According to the Torah the holiday of Sukkot is the most joyous of all the festivals. The Torah instructs us: "After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female servant, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities... you shall have nothing but joy." (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)

From this source it is clear that Sukkot is a harvest festival. A late Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni (654), states: "the expression of rejoicing occurs three times in connection with Sukkot... but no such expression occurs even once with regard to Pesach. Why? Because the fate of one's crops is still in the balance on Pesach, and one does not know whether there will be a yield or not." The key phrase is *vehayita akh sameakh*, "you shall have nothing but joy," which is mentioned only in connection with Sukkot. As the biblical commentator Bekhor Shor (12th century France) writes, "The harvest is all gathered under lock and key, and now that Yom Kippur has passed and our sins forgiven (it is time to be joyful)."

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D'var Haftarah: The Unity of God and God's Name

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

This haftarah identifies Sukkot as the time when the ultimate redemption of the world will take place. An essential part of this redemption will be the gathering of all of the nations of the world in Jerusalem where all of the nations will announce their acknowledgment of God. Zechariah marks this idealized future with a phrase now familiar to us because it marks the end of the Aleinu prayer: “[And the Lord shall be king over all the earth;] in that day the Lord will be One and His name will be one.” (Zechariah 14:9 – old JPS translation)

The medieval commentators struggled over the meaning of this religiously significant verse. Radak, the 12th century Provencal commentator, building upon Rashi's interpretation, explains: “when the nations of the world come to Jerusalem and see the marvels which God has wrought, they will recognize that God is the Master of the world, who tends to the world, causing nature to do the will of those who worship Him because all are the works of His hands. As a result all will recognize that God is one and that there are no other deities. Then God's name will also be one for everyone will call only His name....” (adapted translation) Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, the 11th century Spanish grammarian and exegete, based his interpretation on one found in the Talmud (Pesachim 50a). He notes that the redemption of the world will bring with it an acknowledgment of God's four letter divine name (hashem hameforash). Everyone will call God by this name rather than by the names now in use. Maimonides, in his Guide to the Perplexed (1:61), adds a philosophical perspective to Ibn Ezra's interpretation. He asserts that the different names for God grew out of people's experience of God's actions in the world. This appreciation of God is something good but has the potential to lead people away from God, since people might assume that different names might signify different gods. When the world is redeemed, everyone will become aware of this error and call God by His true name.

The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) offers another interpretation: “And the Lord shall be King over all the world, on that day the Lord will be one and His name shall be one”: Is He not one now? – Said Rabbi Aha bar Hanina: This world is not like the future world. In this world, when good things happen we say the blessing: ‘He is good and His name is good’ (hatov u'meitiv), while when we hear bad news we say: ‘blessed be the true Judge’ (Dayyan haemet). In the future, we will only have to say the blessing ‘He is good and His name is good.’”

May we draw closer to the day when all of us will be cognizant of God in the spirit of Rabbi Aha's vision.

Parashah Self-Study: Why Would You Leave Your Comfortable House?

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

Text: Vayikra 39-44

(39) Yet on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the yield of the land, you shall celebrate the LORD's festival seven days – on the first day a sabbath and on the eighth day a sabbath. (40)...and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days (41)...in huts (succot) you shall dwell seven days...(42) All native in Israel shall swell in huts, so that you generations will know that I made the Israelites dwell in huts when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

- Why do you think that “the LORD's festival” is set for the time that we gather the yield of the land? Do we have any similar ceremonies in modern times?
- There is a historic memory component to Succot – we were made to dwell in Succot (huts) after leaving Egypt. Why do you think that this gets its own festival, not merely linked to Pesach which commemorate leaving Egypt?

Commentary: Rashbam Vayikra 23:43

***So that your generations will know** – The festival of huts (Succot) you shall do...when you gather the produce of your land and your houses are full of all goodness, grain, wine and oil, so that you will remember **that I made the Israelites dwell in huts** for forty years in the wilderness, without any settlements and without owning any land. As a result of this, you will give thanks to the One who allows you to own your land and your houses which are filled with all goodness. And do not say to yourselves, ‘My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me’ (Deut. 8:17)...*

That is why they leave houses that are full of all goodness and live in booths, so that they will remember that in the wilderness they had no land and no houses in which to live.

It is for that reason that God set the holiday of Sukkot at the time of the harvest... so that their hearts will not grow haughty about their houses that are full of all goodness, lest they say “Our own hands have won this wealth for us.”

- According to Rashbam, why was the historic aspect of Succot (the nomadic life in the desert) attached to the agricultural aspect of Succot (bringing in the harvest)?
- Based on Rashbam's understanding of Succot, when might it be appropriate in our time to stop, appreciate what we have, and remember how we got to it?

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We welcome your comments: torahsparks@uscj.org

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