

SUKKOS INSIGHTS

by NCSY's National Ambassadors of Education

SHUA FRIEDMAN

LIVING IN THE CLOUDS



Each of the 3 Jewish festivals - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos - have extra names. Pesach is called Zman Cheiruseinu (The Time of Our Freedom), Shavuot is called Zman Matan Toraseinu (The Time of The Giving of the Torah), and Sukkos is called Zman Simchaseinu (The Time of Our Joy). What does Sukkos have to do with joy? What are we so happy about?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the joy of Sukkos comes from the returning of the ananei hakavod, the Clouds of Glory that protected the Jewish people in the desert. After the Jews left Egypt, God put these miraculous clouds in place to protect them throughout their travels. However, when the Jews sinned by creating the Golden Calf, God took away the clouds. Then Moshe came down from Har Sinai, saw how the Jews had sinned, and begged God for their atonement. The day that Moshe came down and helped the Jews achieve forgiveness was Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei.

Five days later, on the 15th of Tishrei, the Jews began building the Mishkan. That was the day that God brought back the protective clouds, and on this day we begin celebrating Sukkos. The Vilna Gaon says that this is why Sukkos is a holiday of joy: The protective walls of the Sukkah remind us of the Clouds of Glory (Talmud Sukkah 11b), and we are so happy and appreciative that God brought the clouds back to the Jews in the desert, and that He continues to protect us even today.

However, this timeline begs the question: Why did God bring the clouds back on the 15th of Tishrei, if the Jews were forgiven 5 days earlier, on the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur)? Why the delay?

Rabeinu Yonah, in Shaarei Teshuva, explains that God was trying to teach us about the process of teshuvah. Even though God forgave the Jewish people on the 10th of Tishrei, the Jews' teshuvah was not complete until 5 days later, the 15th of Tishrei, when they built the Mishkan. Forgiveness is just the first step in the teshuvah process; after begging God for forgiveness, a person must then prove their devotion to God by doing more mitzvos and showing God how much they care about their relationship with Him. This is why God did not bring back the Clouds of Glory until the 15th of Tishrei, when the Jews proved their devotion to God by building the Mishkan. The forgiveness of Yom Kippur was not complete until the Jews began building the Mishkan.

We are now coming off of Yom Kippur, a time of compassion and forgiveness, where we were absolved of our sins. God has forgiven us, but it is now up to us to show God that we are dedicated to our relationship with Him. By investing ourselves in the mitzvos of Sukkah and Lulav, we show God how happy we are to do His mitzvos and how loyal and dedicated we are to this relationship.

We call Sukkos "The Time of Our Joy" because we are joyful for the opportunity to prove to God how devoted we are, through the performance of the mitzvos related to Sukkos.

SOPHIA STEPANSKY

NO LULAV LEFT BEHIND



What makes me special? Why should anyone care about me? I don't feel extraordinary in any way! There are so many people that are better than me... Why should God care about simple little me? Would it even matter if I disappeared?

Self-deprecating comments like these pop up in everyone's mind. These self-degrading remarks not only bring us down, but they are not even true! They are antithetical to the Judaism's view of the tremendous value of every single person. On Sukkos, we shake the arba'a minim (four species) to remind us of this important message. How so?

Each of the four species represents a different type of Jew. The Esrog has a good taste and a pleasant fragrance, symbolizing the Jew who learns a lot of Torah and also does many good deeds. The Lulav, which has a good taste but lacks a pleasant smell, represents the Jew who learns a lot of Torah but does not have lots of good deeds. The Hadas, myrtle branch, is the opposite. It has a nice smell, but no taste, representing the Jew who is filled with good actions, but no Torah learning. Lastly, the Aravim, the willow, has a bland smell and bland taste. The willow symbolizes the Jew who does not act nicely, nor do they bother to learn any amount of Torah.

At first glance, one would think that the willow is the worst, and the Esrog is the best. But that is a huge mistake! Just because the four species represent different types of Jews, that does not make one any less valuable than the next. The commandment to take the four species and shake them can only be fulfilled when we hold all four species together - not one may be left behind. The reason is because every single Jew is special, unique, and essential to God. One person does not have any less value than the next person. If the Jewish nation would be missing even one member, we would be incomplete, because every single person has so much to contribute to the world.

This Sukkos, as we hold the four species together, we should remember and appreciate the tremendous value inherent in each one of us. Recognize your true value and disregard those negative comments running through your head.

You are unique and precious to God, precisely because of all the strengths, talents, and personality traits, and tendencies you were created with. You are an essential part of the Jewish nation. We need you!

PHILLIP DOLITSKY

WHY DON'T WE PUT AN XBOX IN OUR SUKKAH?



I have yet to see a Sukkah that contained an Xbox hooked up to a flat screen TV. Nor have I seen a Sukkah that had plush leather couches. But why not? Doesn't the Gemara (Sukkah 28b) say that we should live in our Sukkah תשבו כעין תדורו, in the same manner that we live in our homes? Yet, virtually no one moves all the luxuries of their home into their Sukkah. Why not?

The Book of Koheles tells us, "דור הלך ודור בא" - Each generation comes and goes" (Koheles 1:4). This means to say that the world, and all physicality contained therein, is just temporary. The Sukkah represents this concept because it is a temporary dwelling. When we live in our temporary Sukkah, we remember that the physical aspects of this world are merely temporary, and we make sure to focus only on the things that are everlasting and central to our lives: our family, our friends, Torah, and mitvos.

When push comes to shove, these are the only things that give meaning and purpose to our lives. Let's use the Sukkah this year as a reminder to strengthen our relationships with these essential values, and let go of all that is frivolous and emptiness in our lives!

NOT ALL HAPPINESS WAS CREATED EQUAL

Why do we read The Book of Koheles (Ecclesiastes) during Sukkos? The messages of Koheles seem to directly contradict the theme of Sukkos: The holiday of Sukkos is called "Zman Simchaseinu," a holiday of joy, whereas the book of Koheles seems to negate happiness as an empty pursuit, saying: "I said of laughter that it is emptiness, and joy, what does it accomplish?" [Koheles 2:2] In fact, the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 490:8) quotes this verse to explain the reason why we read Koheles on Sukkos.

How does Shlomo HaMelech's philosophical work, which at its core challenges the benefits of joy, line up with overall theme of happiness on Sukkos?

Perhaps the answer lies in the type of happiness that King Solomon warns us about. Not all types of happiness are the same. There is one type of happiness which is frivolous and empty in nature. That type of happiness is something to be avoided, and that is what King Solomon warns us about in Koheles. But there is a different type of happiness that is real and good - that is the joy that comes from doing mitzvos and serving God.

In the words of the Pri Megadim (Sefer HaMagid, Vol. III Second Derasha for Sukkos): "We read Koheles on Sukkos so that we wont think of rejoicing before Hashem for seven days with frivolity, eating and drinking. Rather, we should rejoice with the joy of observing mitzvos." Let us therefore turn to bettering ourselves and commit ourselves to growing in our Torah and Mitzvos.

SHANEE MARKOVITZ

THE MODEL OF YOUR SUKKAH: IN GOD WE TRUST



Every year, during Sukkos here in Florida, the struggle is real. We build the entire Sukkah, decorate it, set up the table with our most prized utensils, and invite our neighbors and loved ones inside. Everyone is ready... but wait! Inevitably, every year, at least one of the following happens: someone forgets the mosquito spray, a fan breaks, or it starts pouring (there go the paper decorations!)

Why do we go through this every year? Why are we even sitting in huts to begin with, in the middle of the hurricane season? Even for those of you who are non-Floridians, hopefully enjoying calmer weather... Why do we leave our comfortable, luxurious homes, and sit, eat, and even sleep in huts? Outdoors? This seems like a huge throwback to the wrong century.

But it's not. In fact, there's no better way to connect to our inner selves. Yes, Sukkos forces us to let go of our household luxuries and step foot outside of our comfort zones. But when else do we ever get a chance to detach from our usual materialism and distractions? When else do we get days to spend with the people we love, and days to focus on being happy? Too often, we let ourselves get lost in the world surrounding us and we forget our priorities. But not this week! Not during Sukkos.

In the desert, God led the Jews every step of the way. He protected us from the brutal heat of the desert, the wild animals, the sandstorms, the dehydration, and the lack of food. We were completely dependent on God, day after day. When God sent us the miraculous *Man* falling from the sky, He was trying to teach us that He is the One taking care of us. The Ibn Ezra writes that the purpose of this holy food was to see if the Jews would accept and appreciate the fact that we are totally and utterly dependent on God.

We do not have the miraculous *Man* today. It is so easy to forget that we are dependent on God. To say that burglars stay out of our houses because of our security systems, to say that food is provided by the grocery store, or to say that the lights in our houses are powered by electricians - these are terrible mistakes. We have these special days of Sukkos to show God that we know the truth. We know that He is the only One protecting us. We can leave everything behind and simply trust in Him. We understand that every blessing, every gift, every type of material comfort we have, is given directly to us from His Hand.

Living in Sukkahs is our way of demonstrating our belief in "פִּתְחֵהָ וּמְשֻׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן אֵת יְדֶיךָ, וּמְשֻׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן - You open Your Hand and satisfy the desires of every living creature" (Psalms 145:16). We prove to God and to ourselves that we trust in Him to satisfy our needs and desires, and that everything comes only directly from Him.

So what's my motto for Sukkot 2015? It's simple: In God We Trust.



Inspiring the Jewish Future