



The Sukkot-Shemini Atzeret dynamic

Rabbi Elan Mazer

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Is Shemini Atzeret a new holiday?

Immediately following Sukkot, we begin our fourth holiday of the month of Tishrei: Shemini Atzeret. There is an interesting discussion in the Gemara in Masechet Sukkah (47) as well as in Masechet Rosh Hashanah (4b), as to whether or not Shemini Atzeret is a separate holiday from Sukkot. On one hand, the holidays are definitely connected, for if one doesn't bring the holiday sacrifice on Sukkot they can make up for it on Shemini Atzeret. On the other hand, the Gemara says that they are distinct holidays since they have different communal sacrifices and mitzvot, and because we even say a new Shehechyanu blessing specifically for Shemini Atzeret.

This relationship is further developed by Rebbe Elazar later on in Masechet Sukkah (55b), "The seventy cows [offered as sacrifices on Sukkot] correlate to the seventy nations of the world while the single cow [offered on Shemini Atzeret] corresponds to the singular nation of Israel. Just as a king asks his personal servant to make a grand feast for all his

subjects, afterwards requests of him to make an exclusive feast so that he can enjoy his company." Again, we see that the holidays are linked, but with unique themes and goals.

Universal and unique

Sukkot is a universal and inclusive holiday, and Rashi explains that the purpose of the seventy sacrifices is to ask

Success is seeing oneself as a unique, essential part of the greater whole.

for rain and sustenance for all the nations. Zecharia also views Sukkot in this light as he prophesizes that the in the end of days Sukkot will be the time when all the nations of the world will come together in Jerusalem to serve Hashem. Shemini Atzeret on the other hand, is a time for the chosen nation to celebrate their unique relationship with Hashem.

Throughout history, the discrepancy between these two themes has been at the focal point of conflict between the Jewish people and other nations, as well as between camps within the Jewish people. Are we supposed to be an exclusive nation, isolated, not to be considered amongst the nations, as Bilaam prophesies (Bamidbar 23)? Or are we an integral part of the international community, responsible for their wellbeing, a light unto the nations, with our temple serving as a house of prayer for all nations (Yeshayahu 49, 56)?

The dangers of both

History has proven that following either school of thought to the extreme can easily lead to hate. When a nation believes that they are unique and therefore better than all others, it can lead to hatred towards them from the nations, and genocide. Likewise, the call for complete equality amongst nations to the point of neutrality has proven to be equally dangerous, as with the communists in Russia murdering all religious leaders, as well as the path the provincial government of Quebec took ►

► in recent years, all under the banner of equality.

Balancing the extremes

Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret call for a balance between these two extremes. In his book, *Ein Ayah* (Berachot 1), Rav Kook explains that the reason that we say Shema – the acceptance of Hashem as our God – twice daily, every morning and night, is to represent these two missions of the Jewish people. Just as the night is a time to settle down from all the day's work, so, too, the night-time Shema represents a more passive and reflective religious experience, focusing on building one's personal devotion to God. The day-time Shema represents a more outward active acceptance of God, by spreading

His Word to the nations of the world. Rav Kook explains that both of these aspects are essential to accomplish the goals that the Torah has set for us. Rav Kook in *Orot* (Israel 1:5) further defines Am Yisrael's status as the chosen nation, not as a separate entity removed from the rest of mankind but rather as an essential part of materializing the potential that lies within all of reality.

Completing Tishrei

The dynamic of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret, of being unique but only as a part of something bigger, is the final step in the process of the month of Tishrei. This message is not only a national one, but also a personal – human and Jewish – one. Our ambitions should not be only

to succeed as an individual, to make our distinct marks on the world; nor should success be defined only by one's ability to do what is expected as a part of society. Rather, success is a synthesis of the two. Success is seeing oneself as a unique, essential part of the greater whole. This is also how we should view our friends, family, students and colleagues – as distinct individuals who are intrinsic parts of the puzzle.

We culminate this fusion of ideals by celebrating our Torah, the Divine Book that defines us as a nation as well as guides us in realizing our responsibility to the world. 🌟



The full-body experience

Rabbi Daniel Thwaites

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On Yom Kippur, we stand before God like angels on high, completely refraining from all physical activity. We focus on refining ourselves and reaching great spiritual heights. The question becomes, what can we do next? How can we use this spiritual height to reach even higher?

One might expect that, with the spiritual buzz that we leave Yom Kippur with, we'd be commanded to engage in a mitzvah of great importance. Perhaps everyone should go out and give tzedakah. Or else we should all engage in learning Torah, or some form of gemilut chasadim. Yet the widely accepted custom on motzai Yom Kippur is that the first mitzvah we engage in is building the sukkah. Why is this the mitzvah of choice? How can this mitzvah

take us to our next spiritual high?

Even more difficult is the fact that, although living in the sukkah is a mitzvah, the actual building of the sukkah is regarded only as a preparatory mitzvah at best. Why would this be our focus on motzai Yom Kippur?

Rav Kook suggests that the reason for this custom is that over Yom Kippur our souls were fully engaged in the spiritual mitzvot of teshuvah and tefillah, however this may create an imbalance, and therefore, on motzai Yom Kippur we give our bodies an opportunity to catch up by engaging in the physical mitzvah of building the sukkah. Rav Kook here is teaching us a fundamental lesson. Growing religiously is not only a spiritual act, as we are not only spiritual

beings. Torah is about growing in all aspects of our being, both physical and spiritual.

Over Sukkot we should continue to take the great spirituality that we have attained over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and channel it into acts of great physical growth as well. 🌟

Rabbi Daniel Thwaites was born and raised in Manchester, England. After making aliyah at the end of high school, Rabbi Thwaites studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion for eight years where he combined Torah study with his service as an infantryman in the IDF and also studied for Rabbinic Ordination. In addition, Rabbi Thwaites worked extensively with the overseas program, as well as studying History and English Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Survival of the weakest

Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen

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As a child and later as a teenager, I would get frustrated each year when I would see how quickly the Arava leaves lose their vitality, shrivel up and die, on the last few days of Sukkot. In my attempts to keep them fresh like the beautiful Hadas branches, I kept the Aravot rolled up in a wet towel in the fridge, standing in a bucket of fresh water, even tucked away inside the freezer, but to no avail. Nothing seemed to work. Recently, however, I have a new outlook on those pale, dried leaves. Here is why.

At first glance, the Arava is indeed the least impressive of the Four Species. Even our Sages, when discussing the Four Species, wrote: “The Lulav has taste but no smell, symbolizing those who study Torah but do not possess good deeds. The Hadas smells good but has no taste, symbolizing those who do good deeds but don’t study Torah. The Arava has neither taste nor smell, symbolizing those who lack both Torah and good deeds. The Etrog has both good taste & good smell, symbolizing those who have both Torah and good deeds. And Hashem said, “Let them be bound together, so that they atone for one another” (Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 30:12).

Apparently the Arava is the least worthy in comparison to the Etrog, Lulav and Hadas. It has some value only if bound together with the other species, which are of higher importance and can therefore atone for it. How surprising it is, therefore, to find two Sukkot practices focusing on the Arava alone. I’m referring to the *murbiyot* (the long Arava branches 5.5 metres tall, picked by a river outside Jerusalem and erected at the four corners of the

altar in the courtyard of the Temple throughout the seven days of Sukkot, with their ends bent onto the top of the altar (Mishnah, Sukkah 4:5), and the *chavata* (the five Aravot we tie together and beat on the floor in shul at the end of the hoshanot on Hoshanah Rabah, a custom originated by the early Prophets (Mishnah Torah, Lulav 7:24).

So here is a fresh look at the Arava: Sukkot is known as the “judgment day


When seeing how easily even the fresh leaves fall off the Arava branches, we are reminded of our eternal state of mortal helplessness.

for rain” (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:2), and the Arava, whose leaves are the fastest to dry once removed from a water source, is the most fitting tree through which to show man’s absolute dependency on rain, his primordial fear of famine and his inherent thirst for water – all of which are strongly felt in a desert land like Israel.

The *murbiyot* branches of the Arava, which naturally grow on the riverbanks and need lots of water to survive [the one growing in my own back yard consumes three times as much water as the rest of my fruit trees], are placed at the corners of the altar, not far from the large fire burning on top of it. Within a matter of minutes, the fresh, beautifully shaped leaves darken, twist and dry,

hanging there lifeless and miserable right in front of the massive celebrating crowds. On top of being a catalyst for the upcoming prayer for rain recited on the last day of Sukkot, this sight serves as a symbolic reminder of our complete dependency on Hashem, and of the thirst for Torah one should feel.

The same applies to the *chavata*, the beating of the Arava on the floor. Remember what the shul’s floor looks like at the end of tefillah that day? When seeing how easily even the fresh leaves fall off the Arava branches, we are reminded of our eternal state of mortal helplessness. I personally try to apply this idea to various aspects of Jewish practice which include humbling experiences such as dipping in a mikvah [how long can we survive under water?] or the horrible weakness I feel at the end of fast days.

The need for such visual effects and physical actions which reinforce and impress spiritual messages into our thoughts is obvious, but it makes even more sense if we keep in mind that after the festival of Sukkot there are six [and on leap years, seven] long months until all Jewish pilgrims from across the world gather again at the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach together. Since Sukkot is followed by the year’s longest break between holidays, it is especially imperative to raise awareness to our neediness of Hashem’s loving, caring, protecting and providing hand in our daily lives while we are far from the place which He chose. The Arava was selected, due to its evident weakness, as the medium through which to convey this important value in Jewish life. In that sense, I’m happy to see my Aravot begin to dry. 

Sukkot and Shabbat – What type of happiness?

Rabbi Daniel Mann

Dayan and senior respondent on the Ask the Rabbi internet responsa program, Eretz Hemdah

The Vilna Gaon famously pointed out that there are two mitzvot that one fulfills with his whole body: living in Israel and living in a sukkah. Of course this can be a cute physical observation, that there is no specific part of the body to which the mitzvah applies. However, it is more likely that the intention is that these mitzvot apply to one's whole persona.

Others explain how the mitzvah of sukkah relates in a very deep way to the whole relationship between the fulfiller of the mitzvah and his Maker. The Slonimer Rebbe (Netivot Shalom, Sukkot 3) refers to the Mahari Weil, cited by the Baer Heitev (639:1), who says that whoever fulfills the mitzvah of sukkah is like one who is a partner with Hashem in the creation of the world. Despite our love for the sukkah, this seems surprising. Chazal have a similar statement — “Whoever recites the Torah’s account of the “creation of Shabbat” is like one who is His partner in Creation” (Shabbat 119b).

The Netivot Shalom explains that both Shabbat and Yom Tov are like reunions between the king, and his son who has been distanced from him. The difference is that on Shabbat, the son comes to “visit” the father, and on Yom Tov the father comes to visit his

son. Of course, this fits as well or better regarding Sukkot, where the Zohar says that the sukkah itself is infused with a special divine presence. However, the Slonimer Rebbe takes it a step further in explaining the element of simcha that we find both in regard to Shabbat and to Sukkot. Regarding Sukkot, there is a very clear command to be joyful (Devarim 16:14). Regarding Shabbat, we find Chazal explaining the pasuk in regard to

Both Shabbat and Sukkot are like days of marriage between the Jewish people and Hashem.

the use of the trumpet (Bamidbar 10:10, see Sifrei ad loc.) that “the day of your joy” refers to Shabbat. The commentaries have trouble with this, considering that there does not seem to be a mitzvah of simcha on Shabbat.

The Slonimer Rebbe posits that the happiness is not referring to the way one is supposed to act on those days

but to the essence of the days. Both Shabbat and Sukkot, he demonstrates, are like days of marriage between the Jewish people and Hashem. In fact the Avudraham says that different parts of Shabbat correspond to different stages in the creation of the nuptial union. The night is compared to the kiddushin (betrothal); the morning is compared to the time of engagement during which presents are given; and the afternoon corresponds to the final stage of marriage when they start living together. Similarly, the sukkah functions as a chupah (bridal canopy), so to speak, which makes Sukkot a time of internal happiness in addition to performing acts that create happiness.

As we who take part in these special days form a partnership of “marriage” with Hashem, we become partners in His world. In that way, it is as if one is a partner in the creation of the world, as he is a partner in everything that relates to Hashem. May we feel the joy of the great relationship we forge with Hashem every Shabbat and, uniquely, on this holiday of Sukkot. 🌟



SPOTLIGHT ON: ERETZ HEMDAH

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Q & A with Eretz Hemdah

Conditions for keeping a restaurant open during Sukkot

Question: *I own a kosher restaurant and would like to keep it open on Sukkot. However, there is no place for me to put a sukkah. May it operate anyway, and, if so, are there conditions I must meet?*

Answer: You do not want your restaurant to be responsible for people eating improperly. While women's eating in a sukkah is optional, a male is generally forbidden to eat a meal outside the sukkah. On the other hand, is it your job to play police any more than you do regarding people making berachot on the food? Actually, there is a difference between the issues. Normally, you provide your customers with kosher food, which is the most you can do. Regarding many people, you can assume they will or may make berachot as they should, and if there is someone who you are sure will not, he would act the same wherever he eats! (This is a simplified treatment; see also Minchat Shlomo I, 35). Here, though, some of the customers would likely eat in a sukkah at home or another kosher eatery if yours is closed.

Let us take a look at the prevalence of people who are exempt from eating in a sukkah. Travelers, even for non-mitzvah purposes, are exempt from sitting in the sukkah during their travels (SA, OC 640:8). That may apply to many men who will visit your restaurant. There are limitations on the use of this leniency (see Igrot Moshe, OC III, 93, who is particularly strict). The most important one is that it



must be that he does not have easy access to a sukkah (MB 640:40). Even if you can assume that most people do not need a sukkah (which we cannot determine from here), it will not help when you recognize people as locals, who prefer your cuisine to their sukkah.

Anyone may eat outside a sukkah when he is not having a halachically recognized set meal (SA, OC 639:2). This means eating bread the size of an egg, but also applies to foods from the major grains (foods upon which one makes Mezonot, except for rice) eaten in a serious manner (ibid.). Exactly how much one has to eat of non-bread products is a matter of dispute, as is the question if other foods can be eaten in a meal-like manner outside the sukkah (see MB, ad loc.:16; Biur Halacha, ad loc.; Teshuvot V'hanhagot I, 178). If you wanted to use this avenue of leniency, there is what to talk about with a reasonable amount of improvising (which we could try to help you with). If you set up a situation whereby you have reasonable menus that can be eaten out of a sukkah, then you could even serve some bread with a visible note

that says that those who need a sukkah should have less than x amount of bread. Then you can use the rule of *te'ilah*, that you may assume that an object you give someone will be used properly if there is a reasonable possibility that this is the case, even if the person may be apt to use it in a forbidden manner (see Avodah Zarah 15b). This idea would help regarding most scenarios of take-out.

It is usually problematic to get paid for work done on Chol Hamo'ed, but it is permitted when done for *ochel nefesh* (to facilitate eating on the chag) (see Biur Halacha 542:1). While it might be against the spirit of the law to use a leniency for the needs of the chag in a manner that lessens the mitzvah of sukkah, halachically, it is still *ochel nefesh*.

Let us summarize as follows. If you are in a place that lacks kosher eateries, it would be religiously worthwhile to use legitimate leniencies to stay open and try to arrange things so that few if any people will violate their obligation to eat in the sukkah. If there are plenty of options with a sukkah (in which case, the volume of customers at a kosher restaurant without a sukkah would not be that great), it would be best to give yourself and your workers a deserved rest on the chag. (We also would understand if your hashgachah would not allow you to open.) However, in these difficult economic times, we do not want to rule out the possibility of working things out, as we began to outline. 🌟

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Rav Kook: The Sukkah

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook

From Ma'amarei Hareaya

The sukkah represents a fortress of protection for us, "Shelter us in the sukkah from conflicts of the nations" (Tehillim 31:21). However, you should ask, how could a flimsy temporary structure, that could be removed in a moment, act as a symbol of our protection? How could a structure that Halachically only needs "two full walls and a handbreadth" act as a fortress against all adversaries and enemy?

We are forced to say, that the eternal truth that is apparent to all, is that specifically the sukkah, which is built in such a fragile manner, which generally would not be considered a livable structure, is fitting to act as a fortress against all enemies and antagonists.

For how can we consider a sukkah, which is open to the elements, to be a habitable structure? It is not because of the physical strength of its walls, rather because of the [Torah] statute, the word of G-d, which decided that during the holiday of Sukkot, it would be considered our homes.

This is a lesson for generations, that the effort that is needed to build our national home is specifically spiritual effort, the sukkot effort, and effort of Hashem's word. For there will always be new weapons, that can destroy the strongest of structures, they can penetrate the thickest of armor, however these is no weapon that can topple a wall that is forged in the statutes [of the Torah]. From here, we understand that the statutes [of the Torah] are our eternal fortress.

Also, today, when we are working to rebuild the national homeland, we must internalize this truth. That spiritual law, that word of God, that has decreed, that the Jewish people will rebuild, is our greatest strength, even if externally we may seem weak and our true strength and courage cannot be discerned.

הסוכה היא בעדנו מבצר הגנה, "תצפנם בסוכה מריב לשונות"... ואם יפלא בעינינו איך תוכל דירת עראי כסוכה להגן עד שבלא היסוס נוכל עוד לקחת אותה, כדוגמא להגנה והבטחון שלנו. איך יוכל בנין של "שתים כהלכתן ושלישית אפילו טפח" ליהפך למבצר ולמגן נגד כל צר ואויב?

מוכרחים אנחנו להגיד גלוי לפני כל באי עולם שאמת נצחית היא, שדוקא זאת הסוכה שהיא נבנית דוקא בצורה כל כך קלושה עד שמצד צורתה החיצונה אינה ראויה לכאורה להיות נקראת אפילו בשם של בית דירה, היא היא הראויה להיות לנו למגדל עוז ולמבצר מפני כל אויב ומתנקם.

כי באיזה אופן תוכל הסוכה הפרוצה ופתוחה מעברים ליהפך לבית דירה, הוי אומר לא מפני החוק החמרי שבמחיצותיה הקלושות והחלשות, אלא מפני שהחוק, דבר ד', הוא אשר גזר. אומר שבימי החג הקדוש הזה חג האסיף, זאת היא בית דירתנו.

זה יהיה לנו למוד לדורות, כי להאומץ הדרוש לנו לבנין ביתנו, כלומר בנין הבית הלאומי שלנו, זקוקים אנו דוקא לאימוץ הרוחני, לאימוצו של החג, לאימוצו של דבר ד' הקיים לעד. ואם כלי המשחית היותר חדישים יכולים לפרוץ פרץ נבעה גם במבצרים היותר חזקים, יכולים למגר גם חומות נחושת עבים, הרי אין בכחם ולא בכח שום כלי יוצר שבועלם להפיל את החומה החזקה והבצורה של החוק, ומה נדע שהחוק, הוא יהיה מבצרנו הנצחי ומשגב לנו.

גם כעת בשעה שאנו נגשים לבנות מחדש את ביתנו הלאומי על ארץ אבותינו, נכיר נא את האמת המוחלטת שהחוק הרוחני שהוא דבר ד' אשר גזר אומר, שבית ישראל יבנה, הוא הוא חומתנו הבצורה, למרות מה שהעין הקלושה של האדם לא תוכל להכיר חסנו ועוזו.

In the early 1900's, as the foundations of the State of Israel were being laid, Rav Kook threw his support behind the early Zionists. However, beyond only supporting the cause, Rav Kook thought it integral that he use his influence to infuse the movement with a higher mindset and encourage the secular builders to internalize a love of G-d and the Torah in addition to their love of the land. He realized that for the Zionist dream to become a reality we must internalize the message of the sukkah, that true protection from external dangers comes from the word of G-d. 🕍



True summer vacation

Rabbi Gal Ben-Meir

Sgan Menahel, Yeshivat Or Chaim

Sukkot is famously known as the holiday of simcha, of happiness. This is one of the only holidays where the Torah specifically focuses on the theme of simcha, commanding us to be happy. Many people may ask how the Torah can command happiness; is it possible for us to control our happiness? However, I believe that the real question that we must ask is what type of happiness does the Torah expect from us? Is it a feeling of enjoyment? Having fun? Or something more fundamental?

The Talmud in Masechet Shabbat (30b) deals with this question. The gemara brings up two contradicting verses in Kohelet (2:2, 8:15): “Simcha, what good is it?” and “I therefore praised simcha.” The former statement seems to denigrate simcha, while the latter verse seems to put simcha in a positive light. The Talmud therefore differentiates between ‘false happiness’ and ‘true happiness’. True happiness is “simcha shel mitzvah”, the happiness of (doing) mitzvot, while ‘false happiness’ is when mitzvot are not involved. Building on this difference, the Talmud in Masechet Sukkah (53a) tells the story of Hillel who stopped everyone in the middle of the Simchat Beit Hashoeva celebration in the temple, and made sure that the experience was one of true and meaningful happiness.

Based on this, one could ask what is unique about the holiday of Sukkot? According to this gemara, all mitzvot accomplish true happiness; why, then, are we specifically focusing on simcha during Sukkot?


A possible reason is due to the uniqueness of the mitzvah of sukkah as one of the few mitzvot that we fulfill with our entire body (when we are present inside the sukkah). The Torah, then, is

teaching us that the way to achieving true happiness is by fully immersing ourselves in meaning.

I believe that there is another way that Sukkot teaches us how to achieve true, meaningful simcha. During summer vacation, we try to fully disconnect from our regular daily routine, in order to gain strength for the coming year’s adventures and challenges. During an effective summer vacation, we think about the past year and look ahead to the coming one, and usually have more time to simply relax, reflect, and recharge. The same idea is found in the holiday of Sukkot, in which we are required to take a break, to leave our permanent homes and go out into a ‘vacation home’, the sukkah.

We have just been through the intensity and solemnity of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In order

to use this intensity to create true meaningful simcha we require a ‘vacation’ which connects us to our roots and our past. The sukkot that we had in the desert while traveling to Israel are part of our history and remind us about the journey which we once started and which we are still continuing.

May we take advantage of this coming national vacation and use it for our benefit. 

Rabbi Gal has extensive experience in formal and informal education, having served served as a school rabbi and music director in Israel and as Vice Principal of Judaic Studies and Director of Jewish programs for the Robert M. Beren Academy in Houston, Texas. He is a graduate of Yeshivat Hakotel and received his Semicha from Rabbi Shlomo Riskin and the Chief Rabbinate. Rabbi Gal is a graduate of the Straus-Amiel Institute which provides practical training for rabbis and educators heading to the Diaspora.



ISRAEL AT 70

Israel's third president, Zalman Shazar (standing) raises his cup for a l'chaim at a reception in the sukkah at Beit Hanassi (the President's residence) in Jerusalem on the fourth day of Chol Hamoed Sukkot, 1967 (18 Tishrei, 5728). Seated to his left are Israel's third Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isser Unterman and the founder and longtime president of the World Jewish Congress, Mr. Nahum Goldmann. GPO photo by Fritz Cohen

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