

## Sukkot: The Ingathering Festival

All our holidays are connected to the agricultural cycle. Pesach is called “the holiday of spring”, Shavuot “the day of the first fruits” and Sukkot is called “the ingathering festival.” “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruits of the land, you shall keep the feast of Hashem for seven days...” (*Vayikra* 23:39).

All the fruits have been harvested, containers of dried figs, prunes and apricots line our pantry, our refrigerators are loaded with fruit-jams, compotes and preserves and apples and pomegranates fill our fruit baskets. When we gather the fruits of our harvest into our homes and ensure their undamaged preservation, it is natural to be happy and celebrate. However, the Jewish Holidays are so much more than just agricultural celebrations.

You shall keep for yourself the holiday of Sukkot after you have gathered in from your threshing-floor and from thy winepress... You will rejoice in your festival, you, and your son, and your daughter... Seven days you must keep a festival unto Hashem your G-d... (*Devarim* 16:13-14).

Malbim notes that in these verses the ingathering celebration is repeated. The first celebration mentioned is not a command but rather a factual statement; “after gathering in the produce of your threshing floor and your wine press, you will rejoice in your festival.” The commandment to be happy is articulated in the following verse; “Seven days you must celebrate a festival unto Hashem your G-d.” Hashem desired that rather than celebrating the fulfillment of our personal needs, we should celebrate for the sake of Heaven alone. Therefore, Hashem commanded us to elevate our own celebration “You shall keep for yourself the holiday of Sukkot” in order to become a total spiritual delight for the sake of Heaven, “... you shall keep a festival unto Hashem your G-d.” Our spiritual elation in Hashem transcends even the great delight in the harvest.

Maharal explains that during Sukkot everything is gathered to its prime cause. We ourselves are actually being ingathered by G-d to be re-sown after Sukkot. This ingathering makes us realize, acknowledge and experience Hashem’s protection and our total dependence on Him. We shake the lulav with its bunch to allude to the highest level of unification between all different kinds of Jews and our ingathering to the Land of Israel. The Sukkah embraces us and calls us to take refuge under Hashem’s wing and ingathers Israel within the cloud of His glory. This essential ingathering and unity is the ultimate expression of all Joy. Our mitzvot themselves become elevated and ingathered to Hashem and part of our eternal unity with His Divine presence, as we become His everlasting people during the wedding ceremony when Israel extends the finger (the lulav) and G-d places the ring (the Sukkah).