

A Taste of Torah – Nourishment in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

The Holiday of Sukkot: “The Ingathering Festival”

What Are the Deeper Layers of Ingathering on Sukkot?

Why Is Sukkot the Festival of Our Greatest Joy?

I always look forward to Sukkot more than to any other holiday. The scent of our Jewish school's sukkah from my early childhood still lingers in my sensory memory. Every year I try to replicate it. This Sukkot, I will try picking a lot of sweet-smelling myrtles from my back garden and hanging them in the Sukkah!

I also love Sukkot because of the feeling of emerging as a new and better person from all the teshuva on Yom Kippur, ready to bring this purity into my relationships, especially within my family.

Lastly, I rejoice in relief that most of the summer's produce has been harvested and organized. Containers of dried figs, prunes, and apricots line our pantry; our refrigerators are loaded with fruit jams, compotes, and preserves, while apples and pomegranates fill our fruit baskets.

All our holidays are connected to the agricultural cycle. Pesach is called “the Festival of Spring,” Shavuot “the Day of the First Fruits,” while Sukkot is called “the Festival of Ingathering.” At this culmination of the agricultural year, when all the fruits have been harvested, it is natural to be happy and celebrate. Yet the Jewish holidays are so much more than agricultural celebrations. Sukkot teaches us how to elevate the physical nourishment Hashem bestows upon us and become spiritually nourished through recognizing its Divine source.

How Do We Elevate the Joy of Our Harvest?

The Torah emphasizes the connection between Sukkot and gathering the produce of the Land:

ספר ויקרא פרק כג פסוק לט

אך בחמשה עשר יום לחודש השביעי באספכם את תבואת הארץ תחגו את חג השם שבועת ימים...

“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the festival of Hashem for seven days...” (*Vayikra* 23:39).

Sukkot is called **זמן שמחתנו**/zman simchateinu – “the time of our rejoicing.” The language of simcha is not mentioned in the Torah regarding Pesach; it appears once regarding Shavuot, but three times regarding Sukkot. *Da'at Zekenim* explains that at Pesach none of the new produce has yet been harvested. By Shavuot, the grain has been gathered, but the fruits remain on the trees. Only when Sukkot arrives has everything been brought into the home. Moreover, following Yom Kippur, we also rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins. Thus, Sukkot encompasses multiple layers of joy – the nourishment of the grain, the sweetness of the fruit, and the spiritual renewal of forgiveness.

Yet Hashem asks us to elevate even this wholesome joy of abundance. The Torah states:

ספר דברים פרק טז פסוקים יג-טו

חג הסוכת תעשה לך שבועת ימים באספך מגרנך ומיקרבך ושמחת בחגך... שבועת ימים תחג להשם אלהיך... כי יברכך השם אלהיך בכל תבואתך ובכל מעשה ידיך והיית אך שמח:

“You shall observe the festival of Sukkot for yourself seven days when you have gathered in from your threshing floor and from your winepress. You shall rejoice in your festival... Seven days you shall celebrate a festival to Hashem your G-d... because Hashem your G-d will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, and you shall be only happy” (*Devarim* 16:13-15).

Malbim notes that the ingathering celebration is repeated. First, it states to keep the holiday **לך/lecha** – “for

your own sake,” referring to our natural happiness in gathering the fruits of our labor. Then the Torah commands us to transform this happiness into “a festival to Hashem your G-d.” Rather than rejoicing merely because our own needs have been fulfilled, we elevate our physical pleasure into spiritual delight in Hashem. Our full pantry then becomes more than security for the winter. Every jar, fruit, and grain becomes an expression of Hashem’s blessing.

Why Do We Leave Our Homes Precisely When Our Storehouses Are Full?

There is something paradoxical about Sukkot. Just when we have finished gathering our produce safely into our homes, Hashem tells us to leave those homes and dwell in a fragile sukkah. At the very moment when we could most easily feel materially secure, we exchange our sturdy roof for branches through which we can glimpse the heavens.

The Torah explains:

ספר ויקרא פרק כג פסוקים מב-מג בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשֵׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת: לְמַעַן יָדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם..

“You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days. Every resident among Israel shall dwell in sukkot, so that your generations shall know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt...” (*Vayikra* 23:42-43).

Why must we relive the desert experience specifically at harvest time? In the desert, we had no fields, vineyards, orchards, or overflowing pantries. Hashem nourished us directly through the manna. This miraculous “training food” taught us that our sustenance ultimately comes from Hashem. Yet this lesson would become more difficult upon entering the fertile Land of Israel, where we would plow, sow, reap, press our grapes, and gather our own produce. Therefore, Moshe warned us not to say, “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth” (*Devarim* 8:17).

It is easy to recognize Hashem when manna falls from Heaven. The greater spiritual challenge is to recognize Him within the bread we seemingly produce ourselves. Therefore, specifically when our harvest is gathered, and our material security is greatest, we leave our permanent homes and enter the sukkah. We do not merely remember that Hashem once sustained us in the desert. We physically relive our dependence upon Him. The sukkah teaches us that the walls surrounding us do not nourish and protect us. Hashem does.

How Do the Fruits and Plants of the Land Nourish Our Spiritual Joy?

After mentioning the ingathering of the harvest, the Torah immediately commands us to take the Four Species:

ספר ויקרא פרק כג פסוק מ וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ־עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי־נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

“You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree, date palm fronds, a branch of a braided tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days” (*Vayikra* 23:40).

Sukkot is deeply connected with the holiness of the Land of Israel and the joy of her fruits. Rambam explains that one reason for choosing these particular Four Species is their abundance in the Land of Israel. Each of them represents another region of the Holy Land that becomes unified through the shaking of the Lulav. The lulav – grown in the desert; the etrog – the coastal plains; the hadassim – the mountains; the aravot – the riverbeds. Together they unify the vegetation growing from the diverse parts of the land and elevate them in the service of Hashem.

In the land of Israel, we do not need to reject our physical enjoyment to become spiritual; its yields nourish both body and soul.

The fruits themselves connect us with Hashem. The etrog's beauty and fragrance, the stately lulav, the aromatic hadassim, and the humble aravot become part of our avodat Hashem. The physical and spiritual are not necessarily competing realms. In Eretz Yisrael there is no dichotomy between body and soul. By gathering the Four Species into one bundle, we furthermore transform individual growth into unified wholeness. Our sages compare the Four Species to different kinds of Jews – the good scent corresponds to mitzvot while their good taste corresponds to Torah. Yet the mitzvah cannot be fulfilled by celebrating only the fragrant or fruitful among us. We must bind everyone together. Each kind needs and completes the others. Even the willow lacking both scent and taste is indispensable for the greater whole – it holds space for the other kinds. Just as no healthy body can exist through one organ alone, the Jewish people becomes whole through the contribution of each of its different members. Thus, the Festival of Ingathering gathers not only fruits. It gathers people. Our greatest spiritual nourishment does not come from remaining separate and self-sufficient, but from recognizing how much we need one another.

How Can We Gather the Fruits of Our Mitzvot into Our Hearts?

Sukkot follows immediately after the intense teshuvah of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. By the time we enter the sukkah, we have examined not only our transgressions but also the way we have performed our mitzvot. Were our prayers always heartfelt? Did our Torah learning truly penetrate us? Did we perform our mitzvot with love, joy, and awareness?

Another level of ingathering on Sukkot is the ingathering of our mitzvot. Throughout the year we perform mitzvot, yet sometimes they remain external to us. On Sukkot we gather them inward. Just as the farmer brings his scattered produce from the field into his home, we gather our Torah, our Shabbatot, our tefilot, and all the mitzvot of the past year into the inner chambers of our hearts.

After the brokenheartedness and cleansing of Yom Kippur, we can begin to discover the fragrance of our mitzvot anew. A myrtle leaf releases its fragrance most strongly when it is crushed. Likewise, sometimes it is precisely through our brokenhearted teshuvah that the hidden fragrance of our mitzvot emerges. We can finally begin to “taste” their holiness rather than performing them merely by habit.

Physical harvest means that the fruits we have worked for all year finally become ours to enjoy. Spiritual harvest means allowing the mitzvot we have performed throughout the year finally to become part of who we are. Sukkot invites us to taste their sweetness and allow them to nourish our souls (Rav Shlomo Carlebach, *Lev HaShamayim, Sukkot*).

What if We Ourselves Are Hashem's Harvest?

Maharal takes the meaning of “the Festival of Ingathering” to its deepest level. The world cannot exist independently of its Creator. Ultimately, everything must return and become gathered to its Divine source. On Sukkot, when we gather our harvest, Hashem gathers us.

ספר גבורות השם פרק מו וחג הסוכות הושיב אותם בענני הכבוד וזהו נראה שישראל נאספים אליו יתברך ותחת כנפיו יחסו. לפיכך מצות סוכה לצאת מביתו של אדם שהוא מקומו לשבת בצל סוכה...

“On the Festival of Sukkot, He made them sit inside the Clouds of Glory. This indicates that Israel is gathered to Hashem, and we take refuge under His wing. Therefore, the mitzvah of Sukkot is to go out from our house – our own place – to sit in the shade of the sukkah...” (Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, Chapter 46).

We may think that we are the ones doing the gathering – gathering our grain, our fruits, the Four Species, our family and guests into the sukkah, and the mitzvot of the year into our hearts. Yet on the deepest level, Hashem is harvesting us for Himself.

We ourselves are Hashem's precious crop. At the end of the agricultural year, we are harvested and gathered beneath the wings of the Shechinah. The sukkah embraces us like the Clouds of Glory, reminding us that our ultimate security comes not from what we have accumulated but from belonging to Hashem. After Sukkot, as the winter sowing begins, we too are spiritually "re-sown" into the coming year, renewed and ready to grow again. The lulav gathers the different kinds of Jews into one bundle. The sukkah gathers us beneath Hashem's protection. Our mitzvot are gathered into our hearts, and the produce of the Land is gathered into holiness. Thus, the deepest nourishment of Sukkot is the realization that we are never separate from our Source. As we rejoice in the bounty Hashem has bestowed upon us, may we allow ourselves to be gathered into His embrace, nourished beneath the wings of the Shechinah, and re-sown for a new year of fruitful growth.

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