

THE TIME OF OUR HAPPINESS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Throughout the works of our Sages, we find that the holiday of Sukkos is referred to as "Zman Simchaseinu," "The time of our happiness." While it is true that the other of the Shalosh Regalim (Pilgrimage Festivals) are referred to by similar descriptions, the connection between their common names and the description is more readily apparent than by Sukkos. Pesach is called "Zman Chayrusainu," "The time of our freedom, as it celebrates our freedom from Egypt. Shavuot is called "Zman Mattan Toraseinu " The time of our receiving the Torah," as it celebrates the day on which the nation of Israel received the Torah. However, what joyous occasion does Sukkos commemorate? What connection is there between happiness and building and dwelling in a Sukkah?

The Vilna Gaon addresses another question. There is an opinion in the Talmud (Sukkah 11b) that the Sukkah we build represents the Clouds of Glory, Ananei HaKavod. These clouds surrounded the entire nation of Israel, and acted as a protective barrier. (See vol. I: 46 for further information.) The nation of Israel first became protected by the Ananei HaKavod, in the month of Nissan. Why then, the Gaon asks, do we commemorate this gift of protection in the month of Tishrei? He answers that when the nation of Israel sinned by constructing the Egel HaZahav, the Golden Calf, the protective clouds were removed. The clouds did not return until after Moshe had secured the complete atonement of the nation of Israel, and the nation began to construct the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. The date Moshe returned to the camp of Israel was Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, and the nation began the construction of the Mishkan on the 15th of Tishrei. For this reason, the Gaon writes, we celebrate Sukkos on the 15th of Tishrei.

From this, we see that we are celebrating not just the gift of the protective clouds, but the return of the clouds after the nation of Israel had sinned. Indeed, one could understand that this would be a joyous time: a miraculous form of protection which had been revoked was now returned. Furthermore, one could understand why we are celebrating the holiday of Sukkos at the time we do: after we have just experienced Yom Kippur, and we have been forgiven for our sins, we celebrate the gift of the protective clouds which were returned to Israel after they sinned. The events concerning the clouds happened at this time of the year, and therefore we celebrate Sukkos at this time of the year. Hence, there is a joy connected with the clouds, and the holiday is aptly named the time of our happiness.

However, this leaves us with another question: If the clouds were taken away from the nation of Israel because they sinned, why then did the clouds not reappear when they were forgiven, on Yom

Kippur? Why did the clouds return only five days later?

Rabbeinu Yona, in his work Sha'arei Teshuva, writes that there is more to forgiveness than meets the eye. It is possible that a person may have begged G-d for forgiveness with all of his might, and that G-d forgave that individual. That individual will receive no punishment for his wrongdoing. However, this does not mean that this person has now once again found favor in the eyes of G-d. G-d may not desire the prayers of this person, nor any further gestures of devotion towards Him. In order to reach this next level of forgiveness, a person must continue beseeching G-d's kindness and mercy. He must continue to pray, to perform mitzvos, and increase his devotion to G-d. A person will know that G-d has fully forgiven him when he finds himself presented with the opportunities to do Mitzvos. When a person discovers that Hashem is lending him a hand when it comes to listening the word of G-d, that his urges to do wrong are not as powerful, that his desire to act correctly has increased, he knows that his repentance has been accepted.

After G-d forgave the nation of Israel for the sin of the golden calf, He wanted to finalize the forgiveness. He wanted to give the nation a commandment where they would be able to demonstrate how great their closeness was to Him. He commanded the nation to build the Mishkan. The construction necessitated donations of personal wealth and of manual labor. Everyone was able to contribute in some manner, shape, or form to the cause of the Mishkan. Everyone did contribute, thereby demonstrating their dedication to and love of Hashem. When the time came to actually construct the Mishkan, one thing was clear: the nation of Israel had truly repented, and had made a great effort to come close to G-d. It was at this point that the final forgiveness came. Hashem returned the protective clouds to the nation, and they began the construction of the Mishkan.

The joy that the nation of Israel experienced at this time was overwhelming. They knew that their repentance had been completely accepted. They were presented with an opportunity to serve G-d, to build the Mishkan. They had the protective clouds back. They knew that they had again found favor in the eyes of G-d. When we celebrate Sukkos, we are not merely commemorating the joy experienced by our forefathers upon the return of the protective clouds. We are in a time of joy ourselves! We have just gone through a repentance process, and hope that we have found favor in G-d's eyes. Soon after the holiest day of the year, G-d gives us an opportunity to perform many mitzvos: to take the Lulav, to sit in the Sukkah, and to sanctify the holiday. We ourselves should be overjoyed to find ourselves presented with all these opportunities - it indicates that G-d has found favor with us!

For this reason, the Talmud in the tractate of Sukkah (28b) compares the situation of rain during Sukkos to a servant who comes to pour a drink for his master, and the master throws the water in the servant's face. Why is this situation when we are unable to perform a Mitzvah different than any other time when we are unable to perform a Mitzvah, to the extent that rain during Sukkos is called a curse? It is precisely because of the fact that if we are not presented with the opportunity to do this Mitzvah right after Yom Kippur, it means that G-d is not happy with us. We have yet to find favor in

the eyes of G-d, and we therefore need to increase our prayers and repentance efforts. We are not able to experience the same joy that our forefathers did.

Sukkos, as we know, is called the time of our happiness. This happiness is one that our forefathers were privileged to experience. It is a time for us to experience this same happiness. It is a time when we all can feel assured that our prayers on Yom Kippur were fully accepted. It is a time when we can rejoice as we perform the many Mitzvos associated with the holiday. We should all take this opportunity to rejoice, to serve G-d with great happiness and merriment. Sukkos should truly be the time of happiness for each and every one of us.

(From Sefer Matnas Chaim)

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