

SUCCESS IS A LIFELONG EFFORT

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Our liturgy declares the holiday of Succos to be the "z'man simchaseinu", the Time of our Gladness. It is readily understood why Pesach is called the Time of our Freedom and Shavuot is the Time of Receiving the Torah. Our Sages offer numerous interpretations of the designation given Succos. One of the more common explanations is the climactic role of Succos and Simchas Torah in the Tishrei holiday season. We have devoted the previous two weeks to the recognition of G-d's dominion over the entirety of creation on Rosh Hashanah, the introspection and self-correction of the Ten Days of Repentance and the cleansing and rededication to G-d's way on Yom Kippur. We now enter Succos, the opportunity to focus on the basic blessings with which G-d showers us daily. We are elated in our recognition and appreciation of both His protection, as demonstrated by our leaving our "secure" homes for unfortified, temporary Succah booths, and His gift of water, which is the focus of the Simchas Beis HaSho'evah (the Celebration of the Drawing of Water, a service that was practiced in the Bais HaMikdash/Holy Temple in Jerusalem, which is commemorated on the second day of Succos), the special Hoshanah Rabah supplications on the seventh day of Succos, and the Prayer for Rain on Shmini Atzeres. One who has truly grown closer to G-d through the reflective process of Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur possesses the faith to experience pure joy in the realization of G-d's love demonstrated in these simple, yet most essential, gifts.

The pinnacle of our ecstasy is our celebration of the Divine gift which continues to define us as a nation, the Torah. Simchas Torah, as part of the Shmini Atzeres celebration, is actually a holiday separate from Succos, with no species to wave, no Succah to sit in. We are left with one focus: the Torah remains as G-d's revelation of His commitment to the Jewish people and our guidebook in how to express our commitment to Him. We celebrate that each of us has a share in the Torah, and it is through the maximization of the potential of that share that we forge a stronger bond with our Creator.

Yet, it is at this moment when we are flying highest that the Torah sends us a sobering, grounding message not to take all of this potential energy for granted. The highlight of the Simchas Torah morning service is the completion of the Five Books of Moses with the reading of the final two chapters of Devarim/Deuteronomy and the immediate launching of the new cycle of Torah reading with the first 34 verses of Beraishis/Genesis. The closing of Devarim is the final events of the final day of Moshe's life: his blessing of the Jewish people and his death and mourning. "So Moshe, servant of G-d, died there in the Land of Moav..." (34:5) This is the first and only time that Moshe is

called the "servant of G-d". In the first verse of the portion he is called a "man of G-d". For forty years, throughout the last four books of the Bible, Moshe is the bearer of the word of G-d and its teacher to the Children of Israel. A few verses later (10) the Torah itself testifies that "Never again has there risen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom G-d had known face to face." Moshe had a familiarity with G-d, an ability to request "an audience", that no other prophet has ever enjoyed. Why is he now first called G-d's servant?

Rabbeinu Bachya (1263-1340; author of Biblical commentary containing four modes of interpretation: plain meaning of the text, and midrashic, philosophical and kabbalistic exegesis) explains that the term servant is really most appropriate, since a servant accompanies his master into the innermost chambers of the residence and is always in his presence. But the Medrash on Psalms explains that G-d never calls the righteous "holy" until their deaths, because throughout their time in this world they are hounded by their Yetzer Hara (evil inclination) and G-d does not trust them until they die.

Moshe Rabbeinu, our teacher Moshe, the mortal who spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai without food or drink to receive the Torah for the Jewish people, who time and time again beseeched G-d on the people's behalf, who had to wear a veil to shield the public from the radiance of his face following his meeting with G-d, who spent the last five weeks of his life, the entire Book of Devarim, trying to cajole the Jewish nation to fortify itself in the service of G-d, who moments earlier was called "a man of G-d"...G-d did not trust him to be called a true "servant of G-d" until after his demise, until after he could positively claim victory in his lifelong battle with his evil inclination. Who are we to be sure of our footing as we climb our way to higher heights in our relationship with the Almighty?

It has been a wonderful season of growth throughout these past weeks. As we head into the final days, as the z'man simchaseinu comes to a thunderous climax with our final days in the Succah, our prayers for our simple life source called water, our celebration of our share in the spiritual life source called the Torah, let us capture the energy of these days to catapult us to soar ever higher as true "servants" of G-d.

Have a good Yom Tov.

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