

A PERFECT CYCLE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Sukkot comes at the exact right time of the year, psychologically and emotionally speaking. If it were not for the advent of Sukkot and all of the preparations involved regarding this festival of joy and happiness, we would all be very depressed at having to climb down from the pinnacle of Yom Kippur to everyday mundane existence.

The Torah allows us to contemplate our future year with a sense of happiness and satisfaction. The sukkah signifies the protection that the Lord will provide us with for the whole coming year. Though the actual sukkah may be small and relatively flimsy as compared to our homes, it nevertheless symbolizes faith, serenity and confidence in the eternity of Israel and its Torah.

The four species of vegetation that are an integral part of Sukkot reinforce our appreciation of the beauty of God's world. It reminds us that the world can be a Garden of Eden and we should endeavor not to destroy it or be expelled from it.

The different species represent the harmony of nature, the flash of its color and its built in symbiotic nature. Whereas pagans worshipped nature, Judaism stressed its role as being one of the great wonders of God's creation.

Abraham had it right when he stated that people wonder at the magnificence of a beautiful building but ignore the genius of the architect that designed it. Judaism, while always impressed by the wonder of the building itself, always looks intently to recognize and acknowledge the architect behind it.

Sukkot helps remind us of the necessity to always search for that architect in all of the facets of our lives and world.

Sukkot also reveals clearly our dependence upon Heaven for rain - for water. Without water in abundance, life cannot function and grow. The Torah tells us that the Lord sent us purposely into a land where water is a precious commodity. There are no great rivers or giant lakes that appear on the landscape of the Land of Israel. We are therefore dependent on the winter season's rains.

We pray on Sukkot for those rains to be abundant, gentle and saturating. Rain has a cleansing effect not only on the air we breathe but on the life spirit that exists within us. Hence its deep association with the joy of Sukkot.

Rain and water also symbolize Torah and purification. Moshe, in his final oration to Israel, states that

his words of Torah should be felt as gentle rain and dew descending on the Holy Land. The prophet Yeshayahu compares Torah to water as does King David in Tehillim.

The holiday of Sukkot reinforces this connection with its own link to Simchat Torah, the day that marks the conclusion of this great and noble holiday period. For as obvious as it is that the Land of Israel cannot survive and prosper without water, so too the people of Israel will be unable to prosper and survive without an attachment to Torah, its commandments and values. The message of Sukkot is the perfect conclusion to the spirituality of Yom Kippur.

Chag sameach.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com