

בס"ד

Shluchim Sermons



Holidays

THE THREEFOLD JOY AFTER THE REAL TEST

Why is the celebration of Sukkos and Simchas Torah greater than the joy of Pesach and Shavuot? The Rebbe's deeper look into the Midrash on the issue will shed light on the true reason.

Why Celebrate on Sukkos

Tonight we are celebrating Simchat Torah. Every year on this day we read the final portion of the Torah and this is cause for celebration, L'chaims and dancing. There is one question, however. Why don't we celebrate Simchat Torah on the day the Torah was given, on Shavuot? It would seem that there could be no better time to rejoice with the Torah than on the anniversary of our receiving it from G-d?

When you think about the Jewish festivals (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot) you find a very interesting phenomenon. Jews are required to rejoice on all three festivals. It's a mitzvah to drink a cup of wine and to buy gifts for the wife and kids. But biblically there are different levels of joy for each of the different festivals.

On Pesach and Shavuot there is just a general commandment to "rejoice on the festival" a normal festive joy. But on Sukkot we are commanded to "increase in joy" and to keep increasing, infinitely to the joy of the festival.

In the Torah where the festivals are written the concept of joy isn't mentioned at all while discussing Pesach and it's mentioned only once when referring to Shavuot.

But with Sukkot, “joy” is mentioned three times in the Torah.

The Midrash explains that “Pesach is the beginning of the harvest season and people don’t know how big their harvest will be. At such a time people are worried and can’t be expected to really rejoice. Even during Shavuot when the grains have already been harvested, still the fruits have not yet been gathered so the Torah mentions “rejoicing” just once. But when Sukkot comes around, and everything has already been gathered and the farmers can see how G-d has blessed the work of their hands, then we can indeed greatly rejoice.”

So it’s a practical or factual issue that people cannot rejoice when the success of their business is still a mystery. But by the time Sukkot arrives everyone knows how well their businesses have done and they are able to rejoice.

A Deeper Look at the Midrash

The Rebbe gives the words of this Midrash a deeper and more spiritual meaning; a Chassidic twist.

The three festivals – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot – represent three different periods in a person’s life.

Pesach is the birth of the Jewish nation. When a child is born there is joy, but the joy is shadowed by worry, for we don’t know yet what the future holds for this child. The parents can only wonder, “Will he grow up to be the pride and joy of our family or Heaven forbid, the opposite. This was the state of the Jewish people, as they stood at Mt. Sinai waiting to receive the Torah. Their future was still a mystery.

Even Shavuot, which was after the Jews had already accepted the Torah and made the commitment of “Naaseh Venishmah,” it was still only the beginning. They had only made the commitment to fulfill the Mitzvos from then on – but it had not yet been done. The Torah therefore can mention “Joy” only once.

So the period of life represented by the festival of Shavuot would be the Bar Mitzvah. The young Jew is already able to stand on his own. He's learned a little, done Mitzvos and has already given his parents and grandparents nachas. However this is only the very beginning of his adult life, when he hasn't really had the chance to prove himself. So the joy at the Bar Mitzvah is somewhat reserved, for he hasn't shown himself to be an independent, mature person when it comes to his Judaism.

And now we come to Sukkot.

It is important to note that between Shavuot and Sukkot a very great historic thing happened: The Jewish people sinned with the golden calf. Only forty days after their "Bar Mitzvah" they abandoned the Torah and in effect rebelled against G-d and worshipped Avodah Zarah. All of this caused the Luchot (the tablets with the Ten Commandments) to be broken. But Moses was able to bring the Jewish people to teshuvah and in the forty days between the beginning of Elul and Yom Kippur they all returned wholeheartedly to G-d and His Torah. G-d told Moses "I have forgiven them, as you said" and He gave us the second set of Luchot.

So, Sukkot represents "real life" after we've faced the hardest tests. We joined the Big Leagues. We stumbled and fell but we got back up and did an honest Teshuvah. We've returned to the Torah way of life for good.

Now it is time to rejoice for real. Because now we can be sure that we will remain true- blue to G-d after having passed such a trial. Therefore, on Sukkot we are commanded to rejoice three times over!

We've Passed the Test

Every child goes through this maturation period. When the child goes out into the real world or goes off to college he will have his "ups and

downs” which are characteristic of kids that age. If, after all that he will have to go through, he comes back home with a Jewish fiancé, this is truly grounds for celebration. At his wedding we can rejoice because we know for sure that his Judaism is ingrained in him forever and he will bring wonderful Jewish grandchildren who will be a true source of pride for the whole mishpacha.

And this is why Simchat Torah, the true Torah celebration is now and not Shavuot. By Shavuot we still haven't proven ourselves to be strong and independent Jews. When have we established our credentials and proven that we are prepared to follow the ways of the Torah and Mitzvos? That is only after the Teshuvah of Yom Kippur and the giving of the second Luchos.

So today is the day, the very best day for us to celebrate Simchat Torah - because now the Torah truly belongs to each and every one of us.