



EATING, THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Why is this holiday so focused on eating?

What is the Sukkos Food?

Every holiday has its own special food. Shabbat has challah, Pesach has matzah, Shavuot has cheese cake, Rosh Hashanah has apples in honey, Chanukah has latkes and Purim has Hamentashen. But what does Sukkos have?

I once heard that stuffed cabbage is Sukkos food but research showed that stuffed cabbage is actually a Simchat Torah food – it is rolled up like the Torah. So we're back to the question, what is Sukkos food?

Don't worry. Sukkos is very much connected with food. The mitzvah on Sukkos is to move into your Sukkah and "dwell" there for seven days as you would in your home. But the performance of this mitzvah is mainly expressed through eating and drinking. As we know the only blessing made "Leishev BaSukkah" is over food.

Eating in the Sukkah on the first night of Sukkos is as big a mitzvah as eating matzah on Pesach. Even if it's cold or rainy, which usually exempts one from eating in the Sukkah, yet on the first night, the obligation still holds. Again, we see that the mitzvah is expressed through eating and drinking.

What is Sukkos About?

But this is a bit strange, for usually 'dwelling' means sleeping. Eating somewhere doesn't make the place your dwelling, sleeping there does. These days you can hardly go three days without going to a restaurant or a friend's house for dinner. But you always return to your own house, to your own bed to sleep. So, if the mitzvah is to 'dwell' in the Sukkah why is the main stress on the eating?

Every Jewish holiday is a commemoration for a certain miracle G-d

performed for us at one time or another. Pesach we celebrate the exodus. Purim we celebrate the victory over Haman. Chanukah we celebrate the miracle of the oil. But what is Sukkos a celebration of?

Now, I'm sure we all know the answer; we commemorate the Clouds of Glory that protected us from sand and sun in the desert. I'm glad that you all know that answer, but I have some news for you. In the Talmud only Rabbi Eliezer said that Sukkos is in commemoration of the Clouds of Glory. But Rabbi Akiva maintains that we are simply remembering the actual booths we built for ourselves in the desert.

Now, what's so miraculous about booths?

Perhaps Sukkos isn't just a celebration of booths. Perhaps it's a celebration of the longest miracle we ever experienced, Manna. All other miracles were quick. The sea split for one night and then it went back to normal. But the Manna fell every day for forty years straight and we do nothing to commemorate this tremendous miracle!

Therefore I suggest that Sukkos commemorates the fact that we were able to survive in the barren wilderness for forty years, which we could not have done without the Manna. We leave our comfortable homes to get the feel of the wilderness. The reason the mitzvah of Sukkos is expressed mainly through eating and drinking is to commemorate the miracle of the Manna. It's no great miracle that we were able to sleep in the desert; when you're tired, you sleep whether you want to or not. The miracle that deserves commemoration is the fact that G-d fed us well throughout our stay in the desert.

Why Eating?

Why in fact are Jews so obsessed with eating? It's not just folklore that we eat a lot — there are many times when it's a mitzvah to eat, like Shabbat, holidays and even the day before Yom Kippur. Why is eating so revered in our culture?

Food is the only thing that sustains life. Food is the only physical thing that we can clearly see gives life to a spiritual thing. The breath of life cannot be touched by the physical hand — it is essentially a spirit. Yet physical food sustains it. Without food that spirit becomes extinguished.

Eating plays such an important role in our tradition because our mission in this world is to elevate the physical and make it spiritual. Our tradition is full of examples of this and I'll give you one. By working leather into parchment for a Torah scroll we've taken the hide

of an animal and turned it into a vehicle for holiness.

The area where this transition is clearest is eating. So eat, drink and enjoy yourselves but always allow the eating you engage in to remind you of your mission in this world: To turn the physical into vehicles for G-d's presence.