
SUCCOS**Sukkah-rella**

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

SUKKOS "Sukkah-rella"

The holiday of Sukkos will begin on the 15th of the month of Tishrei, this Friday night. Sukkos is the Cinderella, the forgotten stepsister, in the Tishrei family of holidays.

Most American calendars list Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur among the holidays of the year. Most Gentiles and almost all Jews are aware of the existence of these "High Holidays." Simchas Torah, which comes two days after the end of Sukkos, also gets quite a bit of notice. (More about Simchas Torah next week, G-d willing.) Somehow, Sukkos seems to have fallen through the cracks.

And that is a shame. Sukkos is a beautiful, inspiring festival. During Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we expressed our hope that G-d, who controls our destinies, will give us a good year.

On Sukkos, we show our FAITH that G-d, will, in fact, watch over and protect us. We say goodbye to our comfortable homes, and step out into the tentative protection of a simple hut. Rather than eating our meals in a fancy heated (or air conditioned) dining room, we compete with the bees to see who gets to lick the honey off our Challah. Rather than sleeping on our comfortable Posturepedic mattresses, we bring our sleeping bags out into the Sukkah and pray that it won't start to rain at 3:00 in the morning.

On Rosh Hashanah, we state our belief that G-d runs the world. On Sukkos, we live it. Events of the past year have made us painfully aware that locks and burglar alarms do little if anything to keep us safe and secure.

G-d provided booths for the Israelites to live in while they traveled in the desert. A booth provides no protection from the elements, or from wild animals or enemies. Rather, it is He who "*spreads over us a Sukkah of Mercy, Life, and Peace.*" (from the Sabbath/Holiday Evening Service -- Sephardic Version)

Sukkos also gives us an opportunity to express Jewish unity.

On each of the seven days of Sukkos (except on Shabbos--see "The Silent Shofar") we hold four kinds of produce--three types of branches, and a fruit--together and shake them. Palm, willow, and myrtle branches, plus a citron, a lemon-like citrus fruit, are held during various parts of the prayers.

There is a great deal of significance to the inclusion of these items in our Services. One of my favorite reasons has to do with the unique properties of each individual item. It is the issue of taste and smell.

The *Lulav*, or palm branch, comes from the date tree. The date palm produces a delicious, unscented fruit. The *Hadas*, or myrtle, is a plant that produces fragrant branches, but no fruit. The *Esrog*, or citron, has both properties. The *Aravah*, or willow, has neither.

Fruit is considered to represent good deeds, while fragrance implies learning. Each of us has strong points and weak points. Some of us, like the date palm, have many good deeds to our credit. We're not so learned, but it's better than nothing. Others, like the myrtle, smell great; we're quite learned, but a little short in the action department. A few of us, like the citron, possess both qualities, and many of us, like the willow, come up lacking in both.

The lesson of the Four Species is that each of us is unique and important. It would be nice if everyone was learned and righteous. But that's not the way it is. You can't fulfill the Mitzvah with four citrons. We are not an elitist society; everyone is important. Even the lowly willow, representing the unlearned, unaccomplished Jew, has to be included. Everyone is essential; no one is expendable.

After going through the Days of Judgment and Atonement, we enter G-d's house, the Sukkah, to celebrate G-d's Divine Providence. No one should be excluded. We take these four varieties of produce, representing all of Israel, and bring them together in a statement of peace, harmony, and love.

Ahmadinejad and bin Ladin hate you regardless of whether you are orthodox, conservative, reform, reconstructionist, or vegetarian! We should use the same criteria in determining whom to love.

May the coming holiday allow us all to see and enjoy G-d's Sukkah of Peace. May we soon merit seeing the rebuilding of the fallen Sukkah of David in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Have a Good Shabbos and a Good Yom Tov.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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