

## Time of Blessing

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

*Sukkos* is a wonderful time of year when we celebrate many *mitzvos*. Loved and cherished by all, the *mitzvos* include, of course, the *sukkah* and the *daled minim*. Much effort is involved in procuring a nice *esrog*, *lulav*, *hadasim* and *aravos*. The joy of those who worked so hard is evident when you see them proudly holding aloft the *daled minim*, heading off to *shul* with an extra bounce in their step and a smile on their faces.

No matter a person's situation, when *Sukkos* comes and he gets to hold his *daled minim*, a wave of joy sweeps over him. The same goes for the *sukkah*. Irrespective of a *Yid's* personal plight, from that first night of *Sukkos* onward, when he sits in his *sukkah* and takes in the sights around him, he feels like a newly installed king on his throne in Buckingham Palace. His problems and anxieties fade away, as he contemplates his blessings, enveloped in the *mitzvah* and thoughts of "*vesomachta bechagecha, vehayisa ach someiach.*"

Throughout the centuries of Jewish history, in hospitable lands and non-welcoming environs, in times of great wealth and deep recession, on the hills of Yerushalayim and in the depths of Auschwitz, in the warmth of Marakesh and the bitter cold of Kovno, in large *sukkos* and small ones, flimsy and strong, covered with pine branches, wheat shafts, and bamboo mats, that smile has been ever-present, the inner joy spreading warmth across a Jew's sometimes battered body, as he and his family celebrated in the shadow of the Divine.

*Shir Hashirim* focuses on Hashem's love for His people. With flowing poetry, Shlomo Hamelech portrays *Klal Yisroel's* departure from Mitzrayim and how the

newly-formed nation followed Hashem into a desert, a *zechus* we still call upon as a source of merit in our day, many centuries later.

One of those gloriously poetic *pesukim* is “*Uri tzafon uvo’ie Seimon – A call to the winds from the north (tzafon) and the south (Teimon) to blow on to my garden*” (*Shir Hashirim* 4:16). The *Rokeach* understands this *posuk* as a plea for the mercy and goodness of *tzafon*, which the Vilna Gaon teaches is a repository of good, and *Teimon*, where *middas hachessed* resides.

Essentially, the *posuk* represents the cry of the Jew in *gulus*, beseeching Heaven for a bounty of goodness and *chesed*. The *Rokeach* adds an interesting tidbit. He writes that the words *uri tzafon* are the acronym of *eitz* [referring to the *lulav*]. We hold the *lulav* and wave it in all four directions, pleading for Hashem, *kevayachol*, to come to us, *bo’i Seiman*, with *middas hachessed*.

Even if we understand the allusion to the garden at the end of the *posuk* as a hint to the species that come forth from the ground and serve as a *cheftzah shel mitzvah*, what connection is there between the words *uri tzafon* and the *mitzvah* of *lulav*? What is the connection between waving the *lulav* and asking Hashem to come join us?

The Torah describes the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos* as *Chag Ha’asif*, the festival celebrating successful harvests. It is a season of ingathering.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (324) develops this idea and writes that the *mitzvah* of *daled minim* is also part of this theme. We take in our hands the four *minim* because they bring joy to those who behold them. It is a time of “*yemei simcha gedolah l’Yisroel, ki eis asifas hatevuos upeiros ha’llan babayis, ve’oz yismichu*

*bnei odom simcha rabbah, umipnei chein nikra Chag Ha'asif.*" As we celebrate the bounty that Hashem has given us, we translate that joy into *kedusha* and *mitzvos*.

The *Chiddushei Horim* shares a similar thought to explain why Yaakov Avinu recited *Krias Shema* when he was reunited with his beloved son, Yosef, in Mitzrayim (*Rashi, Vayigash, 46:29*). Yaakov had waited many long years for this moment. When it finally arrived, he channeled his happiness of the moment into service of Hashem and recited *Shema Yisroel*.

We merit Hashem's kindness when we appreciate the goodness He has blessed us with and use it for *kedusha*. We turn to Hashem and say, "Thank you for all you have done for me in the past year. Please bless me in the coming year."

*Sukkos* is when we gather in the harvest. We grasp the *daled minim* close to our hearts. We focus on the blessings, pulling together the various streams of good in our lives in a single ode of thanks.

*Sukkos* is the most joyful time of year. We gather our hard-earned bounty, place it over our heads as *s'chach*, and recognize that everything we have is thanks to Hashem's *chesed*. We hold onto what He has given us and turn it in all directions, spreading *kedusha* wherever and however we can. As we do so, we whisper a *tefillah*: "*Uvena'anui osam tashpia shefa brachos*. Hashem, we appreciate what You have done for us. We pledge to do more for You and ask that, in return, You continue to bless us. *Mimcha hakol*."

Yet, there is another element to this wonderful *Yom Tov*. While the Torah in *Parshas Mishpotim* (23:15) and *Parshas Ki Sisa* (34:22) describes *Sukkos* as

*Chag Ha'asif*, a festival celebrating the annual harvest, the Torah later refers to the *Yom Tov* by the name with which we refer to it, *Sukkos*. The Torah states in *Parshas Emor* (23:42) that the reason for the *mitzvah* is so that future generations will know that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* fashioned *sukkos* for the *Bnei Yisroel* to live in when He redeemed them from *Mitzrayim*. (The *Bach* says that it is necessary to bear this in mind to fulfill the *mitzvah*.)

How are we to understand the dual message? Is *Sukkos* a celebration of a good harvest or is it a memorial commemorating the *sukkos* in which we took refuge in the desert?

The *Meshech Chochmah* (*Parshas Mishpotim* 23:15) explains based on the Vilna Gaon that until the time the *Luchos Shniyos* were given, *Sukkos* was *Chag Ha'asif*, a celebration marking the end of the harvest season. After Hashem forgave *Am Yisroel* for the *chet ha'Eigel*, and after Moshe returned with the second *Luchos* and the *Ananei Hakavod* returned on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of *Tishrei*, *Sukkos* became a *Yom Tov* commemorating the *sukkos* in the *midbor*, namely, the *Ananei Hakavod*, which covered and protected us wherever we went. We celebrate the great joy of *teshuvah*.

The two concepts – the joy of accomplishment and the joy of proximity to His Presence – are interwoven. *Chag Ha'asif* celebrates man's efforts invested in planting, cultivating and eventually harvesting his produce, yet recognizing that the fruits those labors produce are essentially a gift from Hashem. Man knows that it wasn't his toil or expertise that brought forth the fruits. It was not *kocho ve'otzem yado*, but a gift from *Shomayim*. *Chazal* refer to *Seder Zeraim* as "emunos" because of the inherent faith of the farmer as he plants yet another season of crops.

With this in mind, we can appreciate the unique joy of that first *Sukkos*. A people redeemed through *bitachon* and who followed Hashem blindly into the *midbor* fell into the abyss of sin and were misled into fashioning the *Eigel*. After they were admonished, they lifted themselves and repented. And their *teshuvah* was accepted. Their *emunah* and *bitachon* were once again intact, and the *Anonim* returned, remaining with them throughout their sojourn in the *midbor*.

Additionally, according to the Vilna Gaon, the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tishrei* was not only the day on which the *Ananei Hakavod* returned to *Am Yisroel*. It was also the day on which the *Mishkon* was first assembled and the *Bais Hamikdosh* was completed. It is a day that marks what we can reach with proper *emunah* and *bitachon*, and the heights we can attain.

It is because they appreciated that everything they have is from Hashem, and because they celebrated *Chag Ha'asif*, thanking Hashem for His goodness and kindness, that they merited the protection of the *Anonim*. "*Lemaan yeidu doroseichem ki basukkos hoshavti*" is a lesson that those who believe in Hashem and appreciate what He does for them merit His protection.

The joy of *Chag Ha'asif*, and the mandate to use that euphoria as a springboard for gratitude, is just as relevant in our society. Too often, we work very hard to earn a living, but when we look at other people, it seems as if they lead much easier lives. They seem better off and happier, and we become jealous of them and of what we view as their accomplishments.

It appears that for some, earning a livelihood comes easier than for others, and therefore their lives are more blissful. Outer portrayals of success cover the struggles and challenges others endure.

People whose belief in Hashem is not complete wonder why they can't have as good a life as the other guy. They lose sight of the fact that Hashem cares for everyone. Sometimes the blessings are evident and sometimes they are concealed for now and revealed later. But we must know that they are there.

People who believe in Hashem and know that their lives here are for a purpose and everybody has their own personal mission are granted the strength and ability to cope with their situation and remain focused on a goal. People whose focus revolves around themselves and what they perceive is good for them are never as successful as those whose focus is on accomplishing and putting aside personal selfish interests to advance the greater good.

Those who accomplish much and help many often don't care about personal honor, or attention, and aren't motivated by the need for public affection. They derive their satisfaction from knowing that because of them, another child is in school, another family has food for *Yom Tov*, another person has a job, another family has new clothes for *Yom Tov*, and more people are smiling.

On *Chag Ha'asif*, everyone celebrates equally the fruits of their *shlichus*. The *posuk* doesn't say that only the top one percent who can afford a private jet, a personal chef, and housekeepers should observe *Chag Ha'asif*. The *Yom Tov* is for the farmer who plows one acre by himself and the mega-producer whose expanse is thousands of acres. Every person appreciates his gifts and the challenges overcome on the path to achievement, arriving in Yerushalayim to say thank you, bring *korbanos*, and live in the *sukkah* for one week.

*Chag Ha'asif* offers everyone a moment of rest and time to catch their breath and assess their accomplishments. The *nisayon* of pride is daunting, but the

ability to raise eyes heavenward and give thanks, with the recognition that we are nothing without Hashem's blessing, is liberating and empowering. We are thankful for this interlude to take inventory and count our blessings.

Everyone needs *chizuk*. Everyone has their own *pekel* of tension, challenges, and things that don't seem to be going right. Sometimes people look happy, but if you scratch the veneer, you'll find pain looking to be assuaged, loneliness looking to be comforted, and a black hole looking to be filled.

Sometimes, all they need is someone like you to commiserate with them and help them appreciate the good they have. We can help them turn their pessimism into optimism and gloom into hope for a boom, and instead of being sad, we can help them to be glad.

We all have what to be thankful for and should offer thanks to Hashem, who enables us to work, providing us with strength and ability, and presenting opportunities to allow us to feel a sense of achievement, satisfaction and pride.

Perhaps we can derive a similar message from the *minhag* of *Hakafos*, when we circle the *bimah*. Every day of *Sukkos*, we walk around with our *daled minim*. And on *Simchas Torah*, we again circle the *bimah* and dance with the *Sifrei Torah*.

The circles we complete reflect the circle of *osif* that we celebrate on *Sukkos*, from when the seeds are sown until a complete fruit merges. *Chag Simchoseinu* reflects the joy of seeing a process culminated, dreams realized and hopes fulfilled.

Let us appreciate the gifts we have. Let us appreciate the *lulav, esrog, hadassim* and *aravos*, and the *sukkah*, and their messages. Let us appreciate the *Yom Tov* and *Chol Hamoed*, suffused with happiness and joy.

Whatever we have and whatever we do, whether our bank account is overflowing or overdrawn, regardless of whether our *sukkah* is large or small, whether we are in a rented super apartment in Yerushalayim or a Lakewood basement, let us allow the *mitzvos* to overtake and energize us, for the week and the year, keeping our hearts aflutter, our souls aflame, and our intelligence invigorated, bodies enthused so that we may attain perfection and prepare ourselves and those around us for the day when the *Tzeila Dimehemnusah* will envelop all and the great light will shine *bimeheirah beyomeinu, amen*.

*Chag someiach.*