

## G-d's Shelter



The Succot holiday celebrates G-d's protection of the Jews in shelters for 40 years in the desert.

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## Succot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"You should dwell in Succot for seven days. Every member of the nation of Israel must dwell in Succot. This is so that your future generations will know that I caused Bnai Yisrael to dwell in Succot when I brought them forth from the land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d." (VaYikra 23:42-43)

Our passages describe a fundamental mitzvah of the festival of

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G-d sheltered the Jews for 40 years in the desert with His clouds; one cloud was above, protecting the Jews from the elements, and four other clouds protected the Jews from all four sides while also smoothing the terrain. (Rashi) Today, our Succah of one covering and four walls imitates G-d's clouds, according to one view.

## SUCCOT

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** Can you please explain the relationship of the Lulav and Etrog to Succah. On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvot and the holiday like maztah on Pesach, or the succah and Succos. What is the purpose of the Lulav and Etrog? I am finding it very hard to find any information. Of the many I have spoken to, little information is known. The main response

I get is "we do it because we are commanded to by G-d". Well this of course is a given, but find it hard to accept as an answer.

**Mesora:** In his book entitled Horeb(1), Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the Succah, and the Etrog and Lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts - stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch.

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The Succah, a minimalistic structure, is to focus man on a minimizing his material lifestyle. This teaches man that pursuit of the physical world is not the goal of our temporary, Earthly existence. The lulav too embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good. We demonstrate our thanks to G-d for His bountiful harvest. We realize G-d alone has complete dominion over the world.

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b) "Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, we wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth". Rabbi Yochanan - in my opinion - separated the two acts of waving "in/out" from "up/down" to teach us that there are two areas of G-d's dominion which we need to realize: G-d owning all four directions refers to something other than heaven and Earth. We see this clearly, i.e. that He is the Creator of all. This is why we wave up/down. But if up and down waving covers heaven and Earth, i.e., all creation, what is left to recognize about G-d's greatness? I believe it is to emphasize His dominion over man's actions - that G-d has complete knowledge of our travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by the "four directions", which is limited to Earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which we must attest to G-d's greatness:

- 1) G-d is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth,
- 2) G-d is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions.

Interestingly, these are the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, "Malchios" (omnipotence), and "Zichronos" (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan's view is that our waving of the four species on Succos must demonstrate G-d's dominion in all areas; in His creation, and in His government of man.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Succah breaks man away from his insecurities regarding his wealth. Man continuously and falsely attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches. Man must strive to focus on G-d as his Sole Benefactor, instead of relying on the work of his hands. The drive towards the physical as an ends, removes G-d from man's life. Lulav contrasts Succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank G-d - the Source of our bounty - replacing our faulted view of the physical, with this proper thanks to G-d for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the 'Supplier' of these fruits, and not to reaffirm our own physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah - not Lulav - is used to demonstrate man's required break from the physical. Man's home is the one object which embodies Earthly permanence,...not so man's food. Therefore, I believe a frail home - a Succah - is used as opposed to fruits - which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break.

Perhaps this is why we also read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy for man, in relation to work, wealth, happiness, sadness, and primarily, in accomplishments. King Solomon states numerous times, "what extra is there for man in all is toil that he toils under the sun?" He even commences his work with his summary, "All is futility of futility...". The Rabbis questioned King Solomon's statement, "How can King Solomon say all is futile, when G-d said in Genesis that the world is very good?" The answer is that Solomon was referring only to the physical as an ends in itself as futile. When G-d said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a 'means' to man's pursuit of wisdom. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and G-d.

In summary, Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical. Lulav redirects that attachment towards G-d, the source of all our sustenance.

Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the scach (Succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo, so you may gaze through the gaps at the stars as you lie on your bed - recognizing your Creator, the Creator of the universe. Wave the lulav and esrog in all four horizontal directions demonstrating G-d's exclusive dominion over all man's affairs. Wave the lulav upwards and downwards, demonstrating G-d's exclusive creation of that which is up and down - heaven and Earth.

By living in these frail huts, may we strip ourselves of our own false security, and may our waving of the lulav and esrog redirect our security towards the One who provides a bountiful life - realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from G-d. ■

(1) Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132

# Succot, Shemini Atzeret, & Simchat Torah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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Succot. We are required to live in thatched huts – Succot – for seven days. The Torah explains the reason for this commandment. The mitzvah reminds us of the Succot of the wilderness. During the sojourn in the wilderness, the nation dwelled in these insignificant structures. These huts provided minimal protection from the harsh elements of the wilderness. Nonetheless, the nation survived the sojourn and even thrived. This experience provides testimony to the providence of the Almighty over His people. During the festival of Succot, we reenact the experience of the wilderness. Through this process we are reminded of the Almighty's providence.

In Tractate Succah, the Talmud suggests that an important law can be derived from these passages. The first mishna of the Tractate records various laws regarding the structure of the succah. One of these requirements is that the structure may not be higher than twenty cubits – the equivalent of thirty to forty feet. The mishna does not state the reason for this restriction. However, the Gemarra poses the question. What is the reason for the limit on the succah's height? The Talmud offers various explanations. One is derived from our passages.

The Sage Rabba suggests that our passages provide a reason for restricting the height of the succah. According to Rabba's interpretation, the passage requires the height of the succah to be consistent with the purpose or character of the structure. The essential component of the succah is its roof or covering. This covering must be composed of sechach – branches or vegetation. The character of the roof must be evident to its occupant. A person's immediate range of vision extends to a height of only twenty cubits. If the succah is within twenty cubits, the occupant is aware of the sechach. If the height exceeds twenty cubits, the sechach is above the person's range of vision. The occupant will not be cognizant of the sechach.[1]

Rabba's position raises a number of questions. First, how does Rabba derive his principle from our passages? Our passages state that we are required to dwell in the succah during the festival. The passages also explain the reason for this mitzvah. It is intended to remind us of the huts in the wilderness. The passage does not seem to state any structural restriction.

The second difficulty with Rabba's position requires a brief introduction. The Torah contains 613 commandments. Each commandment has a reason or purpose. In some instances, the purpose of a commandment is not revealed. In other cases, the reason is revealed. What intentions or thoughts must a person have in performing a commandment? Certainly, a full understanding of a commandment enhances its performance. But what is the minimum cognizance required in performing a mitzvah?

There is a dispute among the Sages regarding this issue. Some maintain that a person must be aware that the activity is a commandment. Others take a different position. They assert that the person must consciously perform the activity required by the mitzvah. However, the person is not required to recognize that the performance is a commandment.

An example will illustrate the dispute. Assume a person picks up the Four Species. The person is not thinking about the activity and is barely aware of the action. Both authorities agree that the commandment has not been performed. Now, assume a person picks up the species. The action is done with intention

and forethought. However, the person is not aware of the mitzvah of the Four Species. Has the commandment been performed? The more lenient view is that the mitzvah has been fulfilled. The more stringent view is that the commandment has not been performed. The person was not aware of performing a commandment.

It must be noted that neither position maintains that the person must be aware of the purpose of the mitzvah! This higher level of understanding and thought is not required for the minimal performance of a mitzvah.

We can now understand the second question on Rabba's position. Rabba maintains that the occupant of the succah must be aware of the sechach. Why is this necessary? The most obvious explanation is that the sechach reminds us of the purpose of the commandment. The occupant's awareness of the sechach assures recognition of the purpose of the mitzvah. In other words, performance of the mitzvah of succah requires cognizance of its purpose!

This requirement is an anomaly in halacha. At most, we are required to be aware that we are performing a commandment. Generally, a mitzvah is achieved without awareness of its purpose. In other words, Rabba posits that it is insufficient for the succah to merely reflect the purpose of the mitzvah. The height must assure that the occupant is actually aware of the purpose in performing the commandment. This level of awareness is not generally required.

The commentaries offer a number of responses to our first question. One of the simple explanations is provided by Rabbaynu Nissim. He begins by acknowledging that the passages have a clear simple interpretation. The passages state a commandment and its purpose. He then explains that these objectives could be accomplished in a more concise manner. The passages could have merely stated that we are required to live in the succah during the festival because Hashem caused us to live in huts during the sojourn in the wilderness. Instead, the passages contain a seemingly superfluous phrase. This

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phrase is, "This is so that your future generations will know". This entire phrase could have been replaced by the single word "because". Every word and phrase in the Torah has a message. Rabba is providing an interpretation of the seeming verbose wording of the passages. The additional phrase has a message. The message is that the succah must be constructed in a manner that makes known to its occupants the purpose of the commandment. This is accomplished by restricting the height of the succah. Through this regulation, the sechach is within the visual range of the occupants. The sechach reminds these occupants of the purpose of the mitzvah.[2]

BaCh extends Rabbaynu Nissim's reasoning in order to answer our second question. He begins by noting an oddity in the Tur's discussion of the mitzvah of succah. The Tur is a code of halacha. Generally, the Tur does not expound upon the theological purpose of commandments. However, in a few instances the Tur deviates from this policy. One of these instances is the mitzvah of succah. The Tur's discussion begins with an elaboration on the purpose of the mitzvah. The Tur then explain various laws and requirements of the mitzvah in light of its purpose.[3] BaCh asks the obvious question. Why does the Tur deviate from its usual method of presentation and digress into this theological discussion?

BaCh responds that the answer lies in our passages. Rabbaynu Nissim observes that the passages are apparently verbose. He explains that the seemingly extra phrase is establishing a structural requirement. BaCh asks a simple question. How do the passages communicate this message? He responds that the passages tell us that it is not sufficient for the succah to reflect its purpose. The succah must effectively communicate its message to the occupants. This communication is accomplished through fostering an awareness of the sechach. In other words, the passages establish a unique requirement for this mitzvah. The reason for the mitzvah must be communicated. Cognizance of purpose is fundamental to performance of the commandment.

BaCh explains that now we can understand the Tur's digression into the purpose of the mitzvah of succah. In the case of most mitzvot this discussion is irrelevant. Performance of the commandment does not require appreciation of its purpose. The Tur's mission is to define the elements required for proper performance of the mitzvah. A discussion of the mitzvah's purpose is not relevant to this objective.

The mitzvah of succah is different. Our passages establish a unique requirement for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of succah. In this instance, cognizance of purpose is fundamental to the proper performance of the mitzvah. Therefore, it is appropriate for the Tur to discuss this purpose.[4]

We can now answer our second question on Rabba. Our interpretation of Rabba is correct. He does acknowledge the role of a special cognizance in the performance of the mitzvah of succah. The structure must foster an awareness of purpose. Generally, this level of awareness is not needed. However, our passages establish a special requirement for the mitzvah of succah. In the performance of this mitzvah, cognizance of purpose is fundamental to the performance.

**"If rain begins to fall, one enters the house. At what point can one leave? Once enough drops are falling so that were they to fall into the food, they would ruin it... Rama: This applies even if there is no food present. If one is not competent in making this measurement, one can evaluate the rain as follows: If this much rain leaked into one's house, would one leave the house? If so, one leaves the succah."** (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 639:5)

**"Anyone who is exempt from the succah and does not leave it, does not receive a reward for this behavior. Rather he is considered simple-minded..."** (Rama, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 639:7)

During the festival of Succot we are commanded to live in the succah. We must make the succah our dwelling or residence. This mitzvah is fulfilled through transferring basic daily activities to the succah. At a minimum, we should eat and sleep in the succah. Performing additional activities in the succah increases the fulfillment of the mitzvah.

Generally, we are exempt from the mitzvah of living in the succah if rain renders it unfit for use. At what point is the succah unfit? Rama provides a simple rule. The succah should be treated as one's house. If the rain would cause a person to leave one's house and seek better shelter, one can leave the succah.

This raises an important question. Assume it is raining. The downpour is heavy enough to exempt me from dwelling in my succah. Is there any reason to stay in the succah? In the case of most commandments we would respond in the affirmative. Even if one is exempt from a

commandment, one is still rewarded for its fulfillment. Women are exempt from the commandment of Shofar. Yet, common practice is for women to hear the shofar blasts. We would expect the same principle to apply here. Based on this reasoning, there would be a reward for eating in a dripping succah.

Rama explains that this is not the case. In the instance of a succah that is dripping rain, there is no benefit in remaining in the succah. He supports his view by quoting the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Talmud explains that anyone who is exempt from a command and nonetheless performs it, is considered a simpleton.[5]

As we have shown above, the rule of the Yerushalmi cannot be universally applied. In many cases, we recognize the validity of an exempt person performing a mitzvah. When does the Yerushalmi's principle apply? Why does it apply to the rain sodden succah?

It seems that there are two circumstances under which a person is exempt from a mitzvah. First, a person can be exempt because the obligation to perform the command does not extend to this individual. Our case of a woman and the mitzvah of shofar is an example of this situation. Women are not obligated in the mitzvah. Similarly, women are not obligated in the mitzvah of shaking the four species. However, if a woman executes these commandments, the performance is valid. Therefore, a woman is rewarded for listening to the shofar blasts and shaking the four species. Despite their exemption, they have executed a valid performance of the mitzvah.

Second, a person can be exempt from a mitzvah because this individual cannot perform the commandment. Imagine a person who, unfortunately, has lost both arms. This person cannot perform the mitzvah of placing one of the tefillin on his arm. This person is not merely exempted from the mitzvah. Performance is impossible. In such a case, any attempt to perform the commandment is obviously foolish. Apparently, the Yerushalmi refers to this situation.

Based on this distinction, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik Zt"l explains the position of Rama. We are required to dwell in the succah. If a person cannot be comfortable in the succah because of rain, extreme cold or some other condition, the person is exempt. Rav Chaim explained that this exemption is not because the obligation does not extend to this

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# Succot, Shemini Atzeret, & Simchat Torah

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person. The exemption results from a more basic issue. Dwelling in the succah, under such circumstances, is not recognized as the type of dwelling required by the mitzvah. As Rama explains, we must evaluate whether a person would dwell in one's house under such circumstances. If the answer is negative, then this is not the type of dwelling required by the mitzvah. The rain makes it impossible to perform the commandment. Therefore, remaining in the succah serves no purpose.[6]

**“The Holy One Blessed Be He wished to benefit Israel. Therefore He provided them with many laws and commandments.”** (Tractate Makkot 23b)

On Simchat Torah we celebrate the annual completion of reading of the Torah and the initiation of a new cycle. This celebration is an acknowledgement of the importance of the Torah. Implicitly, we affirm the Almighty's kindness in providing us with the Torah.

The quotation above discusses the benefit we derive from the Torah. In order to understand this insight, we must begin with the simple meaning of the quotation. The Torah is composed of six hundred thirteen commandments. Each of these commandments includes a multitude of laws. The laws define the manner in which the commandment is fulfilled. For example, the Torah directs us to dwell in a succah during the celebration of Succot. This is a mitzvah. Various laws are needed to define the means of fulfilling this obligation. The laws describe the structure of the succah. The laws also define the meaning of “dwelling”. In other words, the laws delineate the specific acts required to establish a state of dwelling in the succah.

Many of these mitzvot seem to serve similar purposes. We are required to dwell in the succah in order to remember our exodus from Egypt and our sojourn in the wilderness. The celebration of Pesach also recalls our exodus from Egypt. Shabbat is associated with the redemption from Egypt. The requirement to recite the last paragraph of the Shema is designed to remind us of our rescue from bondage. Why are so many mitzvot required? Why is a single theme reinforced by a multiplicity of commandments?

This is the issue addressed by our Sages in the above quotation. The Sages respond that this very redundancy somehow enriches us. The Sages do not clearly explain the nature of this benefit. We must

solve this mystery. We must identify the exact benefit to which they allude.

Sefer HaChinuch provides a solution to this problem. He explains that the Torah is both a system of laws and a personal philosophy and outlook. Clearly, an objective of the Torah is to teach us this outlook and encourage our assimilation of this philosophy.

How is this objective met? Commonly, a teacher or scholar wishing to teach a novel philosophy communicates its tenets. The student must master these tenets and incorporate them into a personal world-view. This is a formidable task. If the philosophy is truly unique, it will be difficult to assimilate. The student may clearly understand its principles. Yet, it is difficult to revise one's perspective and world-view. These attitudes are ingrained. They are part of the personality. Therefore, this new philosophy fails to effect a real change in the student.

The Torah solved this problem through combining its philosophy with mitzvot. The commandments provide the means for assimilating the Torah outlook. These mitzvot train us to see reality through the perspective of the Torah. Let us return to our example. There are many mitzvot that share the goal of reminding us of our redemption from Egypt. These mitzvot are redundant. But there is a reason for the redundancy. Though repeated actions that reinforce the message of redemption, we assimilate this concept into our personal outlook. The mitzvot translate the Torah's philosophy into a personal outlook.

We can now understand the insight of our Sages. The Almighty wanted us to actually benefit from the wisdom of the Torah. This requires that we absorb this wisdom and incorporate it into our personal world-view. Therefore, He gave us a multitude of laws and mitzvot. These laws and mitzvot enable us to mold our personal perspective.[7] □

[1] Mesechet Succah 2a.

[2] Rabbaynu Nissim ben Reuven, (Ran) Notes to Commentary of Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi, Mesechet Succah 1a.

[3] Rabbaynu Yaakov ben HaRash, Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 625.

[4] Rav Yoel Sircus, (BaCh), Bayit Chadash Commentary on Tur, Orech Chayim 625.

[5] Talmud Yerushalmi, Mesechet Berachot 2:9.

[6] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Reshimat Shuirim, Succah, pp. 92-93.

[7] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16.

Dear Friends:

This edition of "Thoughts" completes the seventh year of this publication. With a tremendous amount of *seyata de'shmaya* — assistance from the Almighty — we have succeeded in publishing "Thoughts" every week.

The Yeshiva has served the Seattle Jewish community for twenty-five years. Yet, we feel that the Yeshiva needs to continue to communicate the nature of the education it provides. It is difficult to describe a Torah education. It is far easier to provide examples. We hope that through this publication we have provided concrete examples of the Yeshiva's approach to Torah learning. We have also aspired to communicate some of the essential themes that we transmit to our students.

Many individuals have been essential to this publication, and deserve special acknowledgement. Our Administrative Assistant Mrs. Rita Hart is responsible for the production of "Thoughts". Rabbi Benjamin Owen, is in charge of distribution in Seattle. Mrs. Sharon Karrer, our receptionist and secretary, copies "Thoughts".

During the course of the past seven years, "Thoughts" has had many sponsors. Foremost among sponsors is Mr. Dan and Dr. Minnette Almoslino. We appreciate the support of all our sponsors. Through supporting "Thoughts" you share in the merit for encouraging Torah learning.

I must acknowledge the influence of my teacher, Rabbi Israel Chait. For too few years I had the remarkable good fortune to study under Rabbi Chait. Each shiur — class — was characterized with the Rosh HaYeshiva's overwhelming love for Torah and learning. This love was expressed through a pure joy which flowed from our teacher and filled the room. Rabbi Chait also encouraged of us to grow in our own unique manner. Students have different strengths. Each must learn how to best apply his or her talents to Torah study. I hope that, to some modest extent, I have succeeded in transmitting these messages to my own students.

I dedicate this publication to my beloved mother, and my father of blessed memory.

Sincerely, Rabbi Bernie Fox

On a personal note, I thank you Rabbi Fox, for contributing your teachings to the JewishTimes. I have learned much from your writings, and your shiurim. May you continue to imbue many with the beauty of Torah. -Shanna Tova, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

# The Joy of Succot

RIVKA OLENICK

**"So that your generations may know that in the tabernacles did I make the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am God, your Lord." Leviticus 23:43**

**"And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, Thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and Thy maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the Fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates." Deuteronomy 16:14**

Just four days ago on Yom Kippur, we all stood before God; we confessed our sins and pleaded for His forgiveness. We have hopefully fulfilled our requirements on Yom Kippur and with renewed life we now look forward to the festival of Succos. God has granted all of us physical and spiritual survival; so with tremendous joy, together we partake of this beautiful Yom Tov. What is the joy of Succos and what should it mean to us individually as Jews and as a community? All the Yom Tovim and the Sabbath are considered to be as sanctuaries, places of refuge and protection, the true reality that is meant for us as Jews.

We treat the entire time allotted to Yom Tov and Sabbath differently, not only by refraining from all work, malacha but with regard to our recognition of our Creator. Each time we observe the Sabbath or Yom Tov it should illuminate in our minds a joyous and constant awareness of Who the Creator of the Universe is and what our relationship to our Creator should be. Otherwise, what is the purpose of these observances and what joy should we partake of in recognizing God during these designated holidays? Of course we celebrate with our family and friends, with special food, with wine and with special clothing set aside for our physical enjoyment, the enjoyment that adds to the simcha, of the Yom Tov. We can engage in all of the normal physical enjoyments as well, that are performed with the intention of Divine service.

But what is also the real simcha of Yom Tov, the true happiness we feel in our minds? We are asked not to burden ourselves with thoughts or conversations involving physical matters or anything pertaining to our occupational or weekday activities. We don't read our business documents, our bills or our mail - this is all prohibited for positive reasons, not only for restriction of work. All of the prohibitions of malacha are in place to bring about a different reality for us. The reality of Yom Tov, as mentioned before is to be perceived as a sanctuary a place also in our minds that is a place of protection and a place of peace. We make room in our minds for our own spiritual growth through mental activity - for the ideas related to the service of God, and to Torah since

God has once again given us spiritual survival. Since we have invested most of our energies into the physical preparation of Succos, how do we make use of this "spiritual gift" from God? We are now ready to embrace Succos outdoors, by dwelling in booths. Succos falls during the Autumn, when the strong heat of summer is over. We are used to our comfortable and secure homes, but now we are asked to come out of our homes and immerse ourselves in the beauty and bounty of nature, another gift from God. However, in our minds we should remember that we lived and wandered forty years in the wilderness and then God took us out of Egypt to bring us to Israel. Our lives in the wilderness were deficient, we struggled and were overwhelmed with worry in maintaining our existence, yet we lacked nothing! We were tested by God in every way; with the manna and with little possessions, but we were under God's protection! By our living in the "wilderness", our own prowess and skill

were put to the test by God. Our reliance for existence would have to come from God, and not from our own creativity. This was our realization then, right now, and should be the awareness for future generations.

God saw that we were worthy and that we would actually keep the commandments. Our realization is that God did maintain us, and He did shelter and care for us during those forty years just as He still does now. "Thy clothes did not wear out, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years." Deuteronomy Chapter 8. We understand from this important truth that it is only God that sustains us, not man. The succah represents the happiness, the joy of living "deficiently" in the wilderness under God's protection, as this is what we are commanded to do! The succah isn't man's mastery of the earth, it is not a building or a strong structure. The succah itself is temporary

and "deficient," yet God commands us to live this way now and in the future. This is the way our forefathers "lived" in simple huts with their families and with the happiness in serving God, happiness even before we entered Israel, "the land of milk and honey." Israel, the land God gave us is where we would use all of our human talent and skill to build it successfully and beautifully. We were to build it as our "permanent" home with God as the "foundation" of our existence and nothing else. Everything we had and everything we have now is only because of God. This is the idea of, "that your generations may know." These are the truths we should understand and internalize. It is these truths that we pass along to our future generations. Even in the "wilderness" we "Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before Him in exultation." Psalms 100:2.

**Chag Sameach!**



# Tolerating Religions

ROY NEAL GRISSOM

*Response to an article in defense of Vatican Council II:*

"As a former convert to Catholicism who is now a practicing Ben Noach, I am no friend of any form of Catholicism--leftwing or rightwing. However, I found one aspect of your article on Mel Gibson's "The Passion" extremely troubling.

Your endorsement of Vatican Council II as positive "in every way" is extremely shortsighted. True, one outcome of that Council was a lessening of the Church's anti-Semitism. However, this solitary jewel was buried in a mountain of dung. Vatican Council II was a triumph for liberal Catholics who subscribed to the "new age" doctrines of Teilhard de Chardin and to the notorious German Protestant higher criticism of the Torah. One reason I left my new "home" in the Catholic Church for Noachut was the post Vatican II Church's irreverent attitude towards the Torah, which it believes is the work of "redactors" who spliced together a number of Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths. Needless to say, liberal Catholics (for all their "philo-semitism") do not believe that HaShem actually commanded the extermination of the Seven Nations of Canaan, but that the blood-thirsty, primitive Jews merely "thought" He did. Liberal Catholics, you see, believe in "progressive revelation," that G-d is "a work

in progress." And do you know who the ultimate negation of this "vicious" "old testament" G-d is? That's right--the same J\*sus whom you seem to think they despise.

I simply do not understand why Torah Jews are such enthusiastic supporters and defenders of liberal chr\*stians. Is "tolerance" so important that it trumps the universal prohibition of idolatry? Is HaShem so unimportant that it is unimportant whether or not non-Jews acknowledge Him so long as they are "tolerant" of the Jewish people? Or perhaps HaShem only wants the Jewish people to believe in Him and desires all other people to be atheists?

I for one am tired of Torah Judaism's utterly false image of being more liberal, tolerant, rational, and humanistic than chr\*stianity. I LEFT chr\*stianity because it is all those things and Judaism is NOT. Most non-Jews may be unaware of just how Fundamentalist Torah Judaism is, but I am not. I am aware that every letter (including the sizes, shapes, names, and even the spaces) were dictated to Mosheh by HaShem Yitbarakh Shemo. I am aware that there were precisely ten generations from 'Adam to Noach, ten generations from Noach to 'Avraham, and six generations from Noach to Mosheh (as well as that the number 26 is the numeric value of HaShem's Name). I know that it is a mitzvah to exterminate the

nations of Canaan and Amaleq, and that the Holy Temple must be rebuilt and the sacrifices (how do you explain THOSE away?) must be reinstated. As an observant Ben Noach I wish non-Jews to forsake false religions and embrace HaShem's demands of them, the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah. Yet what to Jews do? Do they teach us about HaShem? Do they teach us about the Torah? No. They remain absolutely silent about mankind's duties to HaShem and instead celebrate and endorse liberal chr\*stians who blaspheme HaShem and His Torah, all because of their "tolerance!" I am disgusted.

Perhaps you should do a survey to determine just how many Benei Noach started out as "tolerant" liberal chr\*stians. I think you'll find that the nature of liberalism--the denial of any sort of objective religious truth--makes it impossible for any liberal to come to HaShem. Why do even Torah Jews prefer atheist chr\*stians to sincere Noachides? Why??

For two hundred years the Jewish leadership has embraced a doctrine of "pluralism" and "tolerance" that is contrary to Torah and which Yehoshua Bin Nun would never recognize. All the "tolerance" has done is get Benei Yisra'el and Medinat Yisra'el branded as hypocrites for every time they have attempted to defend themselves. Torah Judaism cannot coexist with the

philosophy that erects "museums of tolerance" and which rewards liberal chr\*stians for blaspheming the Holy Torah. Tear down those museums (or else change them to museums of HaShem, Torah, or Likud Ha'Aretz) and instead build the Beit HaMiqdash. Expel the goyim from 'Eretz HaQodesh create the Torah Society mandated by HaShem. And instead of seeking the impossible--to coexist with the false world of the Goyim--wage Milchemet Gog uMagog to COMPEL them to accept, not tolerance, but Sheva HaMitzvot.

I recently observed elsewhere that most people are completely ignorant of the actual contents of Judaism (the prayers, Torah from Heaven, the lulav bundles, the Halakhic method of putting on one's shoes, blessing G-d after relieving oneself, etc.). This totalitarian Theocratic system clashes so radically with Judaism's public image of a modern, rational, humanistic, and above all, TOLERANT religion, that I cannot but believe Torah philosophy has been compromised in the minds of many observant Jews who have been living as Fundamentalists within the minyan and liberals outside it.

I beg you to consider the honor of HaShem and His Torah along with your concern for bigotry against the Jewish people."

Sincerely,

Roy Neal Grissom, Ben Noach

# MAIMONIDES

## "GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED", BOOK III, CHAPTER XLIII

THE precepts of the eighth class are enumerated in "the Section on Seasons" (Seler zemannim). With a few exceptions, the reasons for all of them are stated in the Law. The object of Sabbath is obvious, and requires no explanation. The rest it affords to man is known: one-seventh of the life of every man, whether small or great, passes thus in comfort, and in rest from trouble and exertion. This the Sabbath effects in addition to the perpetuation and confirmation of the grand doctrine of the Creation. The object of the Fast of Atonement is evident. The Fast creates the sense of repentance: it is the same day on which the chief of all prophets came down [from Mount Sinai] with the second tables, and announced to the people the divine pardon of their great sin: the day was therefore appointed for ever as a day devoted to repentance and true worship of God. For this reason all material enjoyment, all trouble and care for the body, are interdicted, no work may be done; the day must be spent in confession; ever-one shall confess his sins and abandon them.

Other holy days are appointed for rejoicing and for such pleasant gathering as people generally need. They also promote the good feeling that men should have to each other in their social and political relations. The appointment of the special days for such purposes has its cause. The reason for the Passover is well known. It is kept seven days, because the period of seven days is the unit of time intermediate between a day and a month. It is also known how great is the importance of this period in Nature, and in many religious duties. For the Law always follows Nature, and in some respects brings it to perfection: for Nature is not capable of designing and thinking, whilst the Law is the result of the wisdom and guidance of God, who is the author of the intellect of all rational beings. This, however, is not the theme of the present chapter: let us return to our subject.

The Feast of Weeks is the anniversary of the Revelation on Mount Sinai. In order to raise the importance of this day, we count the days that pass since the preceding festival, just as one who expects his most intimate friend on a certain day counts the days and even the hours. This is the reason why we count the days that pass since the offering of the Omer, between the anniversary of our departure from Egypt and the anniversary of the Lawgiving. The latter was the aim and object of the exodus from Egypt, and thus God said, "I brought you unto myself" (Exod. xix. 4). As that great revelation took place only on one day, so we keep its anniversary only one day: but if the eating of unleavened bread on Passover were only commanded for one day, we should not have noticed it, and its object would not have been manifest. For it frequently happens that we take the same kind of food for two or three days. But by our continuing for a whole period [of seven days] to eat unleavened bread, its object becomes clear and evident.

New-Year is likewise kept for one day; for it is a day of repentance, on which we are stirred up from our forgetfulness. For this reason the shofar is blown on this day, as we have shown in Mishneh-torah. The day is, as it were, a preparation for and an introduction to the day of the Fast, as is obvious from the national tradition about the days between New-Year and the Day of Atonement.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which is a feast of rejoicing and gladness, is kept seven days, in order that the idea of the festival may be more noticeable. The reason why it is kept in the autumn is stated in the Law, "When thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field" (Exod. xxiii. 16): that is to say, when you rest and are free from pressing labours. Aristotle, in the ninth book of his Ethics, mentions this as a general custom among the nations. He says: "In ancient times the sacrifices and assemblies of the people took place after the ingathering of the corn and the fruit, as if the sacrifices were offered on account of the harvest." Another reason is this-in this season it is possible to dwell in tabernacles, as there is neither great heat nor troublesome rain.

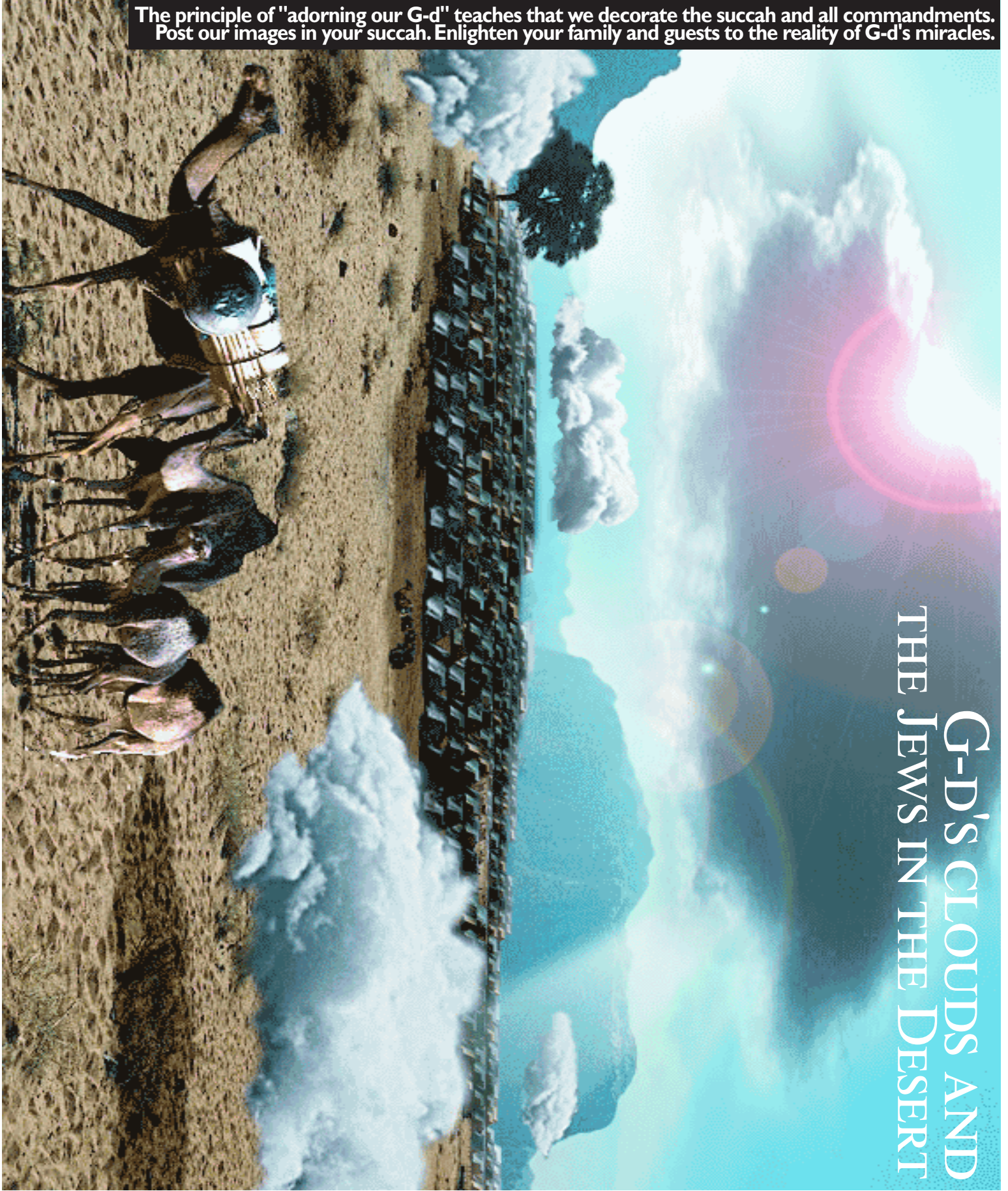
The two festivals, Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, imply also the teaching of certain truths and certain moral lessons. Passover teaches us to remember the miracles which God wrought in Egypt, and to perpetuate their memory; the Feast of Tabernacles reminds us of the miracles wrought in the

wilderness. The moral lessons derived from these feasts is this: man ought to remember his evil days in his days of prosperity. He will thereby be induced to thank God repeatedly, to lead a modest and humble life. We eat, therefore, unleavened bread and bitter herbs on Passover in memory of what has happened unto us, and leave (on Succoth) our houses in order to dwell in tabernacles, as inhabitants of deserts do that are in want of comfort. We shall thereby remember that this has once been our condition; [comp.] "I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths" (Lev. xxiii. 43): although we dwell now in elegant houses, in the best and most fertile land, by the kindness of God, and because of His promises to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were perfect in their opinions and in their conduct. This idea is likewise an important element in our religion; that whatever good we have received and ever will receive of God, is owing to the merits of the Patriarchs, who "kept the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment" (Gen. xviii. 19). We join to the Feast of Tabernacles the Feast of the Eighth Day, in order to complete our rejoicings, which cannot be perfect in booths, but in comfortable and well-built houses. As regards the four species [the branches of the palm tree, the citron, the myrtle, and the willows of the brook] our Sages gave a reason for their use by way of Agadic interpretation, the method of which is well known to those who are acquainted with the style of our Sages. They use the text of the Bible only as a kind of poetical language [for their own ideas], and do not intend thereby to give an interpretation of the text. As to the value of these Midrashic interpretations, we meet with two different opinions. For some think that the Midrash contains the real explanation of the text, whilst others, finding that it cannot be reconciled with the words quoted, reject and ridicule it. The former struggle and fight to prove and to confirm such interpretations according to their opinion, and to keep them as the real meaning of the text; they consider them in the same light as traditional laws. Neither of the two classes understood it, that our Sages employ biblical texts merely as poetical expressions, the meaning of which is clear to every reasonable reader. This style was general in ancient days; all adopted it in the same way as poets [adopt a certain style]. Our Sages say, in reference to the words, "and a paddle (yated) thou shalt have upon thy weapon" [azeneka, Dent. xxiii. 14]: Do not read azeneka, "thy weapon," but ozneka, "thy ear". You are thus told, that if you hear a person uttering something disgraceful, put your fingers into your ears. Now, I wonder whether those ignorant persons [who take the Midrashic interpretations literally] believe that the author of this saying gave it as the true interpretation of the text quoted, and as the meaning of this precept: that in truth yated, "the paddle," is used for "the finger," and azeneka denotes "thy ear". I cannot think that any person whose intellect is sound can admit this. The author employed the text as a beautiful poetical phrase, in teaching an excellent moral lesson, namely this: It is as bad to listen to bad language as it is to use it. This lesson is poetically connected with the above text. In the same sense you must understand the phrase, "Do not read so, but so," wherever it occurs in the Midrash. I have departed from my subject, but it was for the purpose of making a remark useful to every intellectual member of the Rabbanites. I now return to our theme.

I believe that the four species are a symbolical expression of our rejoicing that the Israelites changed the wilderness, "no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates, or of water to drink" (Num. xx. 5), with a country full of fruit-trees and rivers. In order to remember this we take the fruit which is the most pleasant of the fruit of the land, branches which smell best, most beautiful leaves, and also the best of herbs, i.e., the willows of the brook. These four kinds have also those three purposes: First, they were plentiful in those days in Palestine, so that every one could easily get them. Secondly, they have a good appearance, they are green; some of them, viz., the citron and the myrtle, are also excellent as regards their smell, the branches of the palm-tree and the willow having neither good nor bad smell. Thirdly, they keep fresh and green for seven days, which is not the case with peaches, pomegranates, asparagus, nuts, and the like.



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