

CHABAD  
  
RESEARCH UNIT

סנה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 5 October 2012 - 19 Tishrei 5773  
Shabbat in Succot - Simchat Torah

### EVERYTHING IS HOLY (POTENTIALLY)

**WE ALL KNOW WHAT A SUCCAH IS: A HUT WITH A ROOF MADE OF BRANCHES and leaves<sup>1</sup>. Ideally, during Succot one eats in the Succah, whether one's own or that belonging to the Synagogue or to a friend. One spends time there relaxing. The Sages tell us that for the week of the festival, the Succah becomes one's real home.**

Every aspect of Judaism communicates something to us. The Succah expresses something about our relationship with G-d. We might imagine that our bond with the Creator of the Universe is based only on obviously holy and spiritual activities, such as praying and study of Torah. In fact, Judaism emphasises the idea that *every* aspect of life, however mundane or basic, is an opportunity to unite with G-d.

The Succah expresses this idea. By eating there, relaxing and chatting with friends - one is directly linking oneself to G-d. Through the medium of the Succah, ordinary activities become a means to connect with the Divine. This is because all these activities become part of the Mitzva of the Succah. The word 'Mitzva' does not only mean 'Command', which is the translation you will find in a dictionary. Chassidic teachings emphasise that a closely related word<sup>2</sup> means *connection*. A Mitzva connects us with G-d, and since the

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everyday activities in the Succah are part of the Mitzva, they too connect us with G-d.

This spiritual quality of everyday life is overtly seen when we actually spend some time in the Succah. From that perspective, no activity is 'ordinary'. Everything we do is holy. Yet this idea is relevant during the rest of the year as well. All our actions bear within them a latent power of holiness.

To reveal this power, one takes care to follow the guidelines of Jewish law: what to eat and what not to eat (kashrut), what to wear and what not to wear (modesty, *shaatnez*) and so on. We perceive our lives as being elevated in every detail. Every step we make is significant, it has a cosmic quality, linking the finite to the Infinite and transforming the world.

### **IS JOY PERMITTED?**

On Simchat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Law (Monday night and Tuesday), in the Synagogue, men and boys dance with the Torah Scrolls. The curtain concealing the women and girls is temporarily drawn aside. It is a time of spiritual revelation: the joy of the Torah. However, one can ask: is dancing really the way to serve G-d? Doesn't it contradict our English sense of 'decorum'?

We find in the Book of Samuel<sup>3</sup> that this is an ancient question. King David, at the head of a large crowd, was bringing the Holy Ark to Jerusalem. Trumpets and Shofars were blowing, and he was dancing joyfully "with all his strength". His wife Michal, the daughter of King Saul, saw his unrestrained dancing and later told him off. "Very fine indeed for the King of Israel" she said critically. King David insisted it was the right thing to do: to dance for the glory of G-d.

His example is cited by Maimonides<sup>4</sup>, for according to him and many others, an essential feature of Judaism is to rejoice openly before G-d.

1. Bamboo, certain kinds of rush matting, and some other natural materials are also suitable for the Succah roof. If in doubt, a rabbi should be consulted. 2. The Hebrew word *mitzvah* links with the Aramaic word *tzavta* which means 'connection'. 3. II Samuel 6:14-23. 4. Mishneh Torah, end of Laws of Lulav.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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### *SHABBAT IN SUCCOT*

#### ***DREAM SUCCAH***

Ari stepped out into the sunlight. 'Hmm...' he thought to himself, 'where did my bike go? I'm sure I left it outside the house last night'. Suddenly he realised he wasn't outside his house. He looked at the ground and all he saw was sand. He turned around to see which door he had just come out from.

'Oh look at that!' he exclaimed. He had just come out of a tent - a weird one with leaves on top. Not only that, but everywhere around him were these weird tents! 'These tents look like Succot' he said to no one in particular. As he looked around he realised he was in some sort of camp in the middle of a huge desert. He decided to explore. Suddenly he noticed a crowd of people nearby. He decided to go and ask them where he was.

As he got closer to them he saw they were all shouting and arguing about something. Some of them were pointing up toward the sky. Ari looked up and there, instead of the normal blue sky there was a huge cloud that spread over the camp, and it didn't stop there; it surrounded the entire camp - in all four directions.

He went over to one of the people standing on the outskirts of the crowd. 'Excuse me sir, but can you tell me where I am?' Ari asked.

The man looked surprised. 'Don't you know?' he asked, 'you are in the camp of the Jews travelling through the desert - and everybody is excited now because there is a nation who is about to attack us'.

'What?' said Ari, suddenly feeling scared. 'Who is going to attack us? And why?'

'Oh, I don't know', said the man, 'but whoever it is, doesn't seem to understand - they can't attack us because the Clouds of Glory will protect us from their spears... Oh look!' he said pointing. Ari looked and what he saw amazed him, there were spears that had been flying through the air but as soon as they entered the cloud they broke and fell to the ground, far away from the camp.

'Ari, Ari!' someone was calling his name, he turned around to look. 'Ari, wake up! You're making all sorts of weird grunts and groans in your sleep!' It was Dan, Ari's brother. Ari suddenly realised that he had been dreaming.

'Dan', said Ari excitedly, 'you'll never guess what I was just dreaming about - I was just dreaming about the Jews in the desert...' and he told Dan all about his dream. 'Wow!' said Dan, 'That sounds like the way my teacher described the Jews travelling through the desert!'

'And my teacher too!' added Ari. 'He also said that this is why we build Succot; in order to remember the protecting clouds that G-d gave to the Jews while they were travelling through the desert - and also to remember the tents the Jews lived in.' Then he paused. 'You know, I wish I could have continued that dream', he said wistfully.

'Well, when we sit in the Succah for lunch today in a sense you will be reliving it. Except that it won't be a dream, but a real Succah!'

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