



58

THE INNER UNITY

THE BEAUTIFUL FESTIVAL OF SUCCOT (TABERNACLES) BEGINS ON WEDNESDAY EVENING (18 Sept.) and continues till the end of next week. One of the main themes of this festival is the unity of the Jewish people. This ideal has always been one of our main goals, one which has generally seemed to elude us. Yet the message of the Succot festival is that despite our apparent diversity, deep down we are unified, and the challenge is to let that unity be expressed openly in our lives.

The theme of unity is seen in the Four Kinds of plant which are held together and waved every day of the festival (except Shabbat): the Etrog (citron), Lulav (Palm branch), Myrtle and Willow twigs. These represent four kinds of person who create together a composite whole: the Jewish people¹.

The Etrog (citron) is a beautiful plant which is both fragrant and, particularly when cooked and made into jam, has a fine taste. Fragrance represents good actions. Further, a fine taste which one heartily enjoys, represents the pleasure of Torah study. The Etrog therefore signifies the kind of person who is dedicatedly active in helping others and strengthening Judaism, and who also has great knowledge of Torah.

The Lulav (palm branch) by contrast does not have a fragrance, but it does produce tasty dates. This signifies the kind of person who has knowledge of Torah but does not specialise in practical activity.

He keeps the Mitzvot, but not in an intense way.

The Myrtle has fragrance, but produces no fruit. It expresses the kind of person who is very active in a positive way, but has little knowledge. Finally the Willow twigs have neither taste nor scent. They represent people who have little or no knowledge of Judaism and are virtually inactive.

These four kinds of person seem very different from each other. Yet the Mitzvah on Succot is to take these very different kinds of plant, and put them all together. This signifies the unity of all the diverse kinds of Jew. When they are together they have a spiritual power which cannot be surpassed.

The Succah too expresses the unity of the Jewish people, as seen in the Talmudic phrase “it would be fitting for the entire Jewish people to dwell in one Succah...”²

As real people, with our many differences, what bonds us together? The Jewish soul. The souls of the Jewish people are all unified. As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi wrote: “from the point of view of the soul... the entire Jewish people is one. Only the bodies are separate”³. And the souls are rooted in G-d, their infinite Creator...

So how do we get in touch with our soul, in order to connect to that level where the Jewish people are one? One way is through Joy. Joy breaks down barriers within oneself, and also those between people. It is also a central theme of Succot, of which the Torah tells us “You should rejoice on your festival... you should be only joyful” (Deut. 16:14-15).

The Talmud describes the way the great rabbis of the time of the Temple would express their joy during Succot. At the centre of a huge crowd (men downstairs, and women upstairs) they would dance all night in the Temple courtyard lit by brightly blazing oil lamps⁴. Leading Sages would juggle with lighted torches and do handstands⁵. There was rapturous singing... Nowadays too, many families and communities make special Succot festivities. Visible, tangible joy is a basic ingredient in the Festival. It helps us experience the unity which is the inner reality of the Jewish people...

1. See Midrash Vayikra Rabba 30:12, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.4 p.1159. 2. Talmud Tractate Succah 27b. 3. See his *Tanya*, ch.32. 4. Talmud Succah 52b. 5. Ibid., 53a.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SUCCOT FESTIVAL

IN THE SUCCAH, ALL IS HOLY...

It was a beautifully clear night, the stars were shining through the cracks in the leafy roof as the Cohen family sat huddled up together in their Succah.

There were Mr and Mrs Cohen sitting at the head of the table. On their right were some friends they had invited. On their left were the Cohen children: David, Rachel, Benny, Sara and Sam.

The Cohen Succah always had a special atmosphere and the food always seemed to taste much better out of doors for some reason. "I wonder what it is that makes the Mitzvah of sitting in the Succah so special that the whole festival is called by that name," thought Mr Cohen as the chicken soup was being served. "It might have been called the Festival of the Lulav, or..., or...."

These are thoughts which might occur to a person while the chicken soup is being served, while sitting in a Succah hut with a roof of evergreen branches with leaves. Mr Cohen decided to ask the children.

"This evening I have a question. Why is this festival called Succot? There are several other Mitzvot that we do during this festival, what makes the Mitzvah of sitting in the Succah so special that it gives the whole festival its name?"

"I know" said Sam. "Because the Mitzvah of sitting in the Succah starts the very first second of the festival, unlike the Lulav and the Etrog for which we must wait till the morning in order to do the Mitzvah".

"Very good" said Mr. Cohen. "Anything else?"

"Oh, my teacher said something about that in school last week" said Sara. "She said that the mitzvah of Succot is something that we can do the whole time but the Mitzvah of Lulav and Etrog can only be done one time during each day. And we do not wave the Lulav on Shabbat, but we do sit in the Succah."

"That is very interesting Sara" Mr Cohen answered. "Let's hear what you think Benny." "Well" said Ben, "I can't really remember anything from school about it."

"Maybe you can say some thing from yourself" said Mr. Cohen. "You know, not everything you say has to be from school. What do *you* think?"

"Okay," Ben said, slowly, trying to think of something. "Umm... when you shake the Lulav and Etrog you are doing something specific, but when you sit in the Succah, there is no specific action, you are just sitting inside a Mitzvah surrounded by it from all sides."

One of the guests, a lady, noticed a beetle crawling along the tablecloth. It must have dropped down from the leaves. The guest shuddered. Mr Cohen leaned over and blew it off the table with a single puff.

"Wow, Benny, that is very impressive" Mr. Cohen said. "We are surrounded by the Mitzvah of the Succah. This shows us how we can bring holiness to our everyday life. Everything we do in the Succah becomes holy."

"Even avoiding having a beetle in our plate of soup!" added Mrs Cohen, who had noticed the beetle saga. The lady guest smiled, and for a moment stopped worrying whether another beetle was about to drop from the dark green leaves. In the Succah, it was all holy.

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***