


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 10 October 2014 - 16 Tishrei 5775
Festival of Succot (Tabernacles)

UNITY AND DIFFERENCE


WE SEEK UNITY, IT IS A CENTRAL QUEST IN OUR LIVES. ESPECIALLY WHEN, as today, the Jewish people confronts challenges in Israel and round the globe. We know that we must be unified together to face the future.

Yet at the same time, each person has his or her own individuality. We are different. We have different view-points, different attitudes. We do not want to abandon our singularity.

How can these two opposites be joined? On the one hand, the quest for unity, and on the other, the desire to preserve our individuality?

The cycle of the autumn festivals, and the details of their observance, give a hint to this, as explained in the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe¹.

The cycle starts with Rosh Hashanah. We crowd together in the synagogues, we hear the Shofar. Our Sages describe Rosh Hashanah as a time in which the Jewish people as a whole pledge themselves to G-d, King of the Universe, asking Him for blessing for the New Year. At this moment we are all one. Our differences are submerged.

	In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'
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This is followed by Yom Kippur, which again, and in some ways even more so, is a moment of total unity. We unite in our sense of closeness to G-d, which brings spiritual cleansing, termed Atonement. In our unity with G-d our differences are submerged. We are one people together. At the close of Yom Kippur we all cry out together: Shema Yisrael, we hear the blast of the Shofar together, with joy we call out: "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

The High Holy Days thus express a unity which transcends distinctions. But then we come to Succot.

On Succot there are two contrasting themes at the same time. The first is *difference*, the distinction of one individual from another. This is expressed by the four types of plant which the Torah commands us to take. The Sages tell us they represent types of person².

The Lulav, palm branch, has one quality; the Sages describe it as representing a person who diligently studies Torah. The Hadas, myrtle, represents another type: one who is active in observance of Mitzvot. The Etrog, citron, represents a person who has both these positive qualities. The Aravah, willow, represents a person who has neither.

These four plants express in outline the distinctions between us, which in all their possible permutations and combinations go to make our individual characters and personalities.

Then what happens? The four types of plant are joined together. We are different, each one of us is unique. We also each have the duty to develop our singular qualities. At the same time, we are joined together, we are one. With this sense of unity of disparate individuals, we enter the Succah. The Sages tell us "the whole Jewish people could dwell in one Succah"³.

Each one of us a different person, with different qualities, needs and aspirations. And each one of us strives to be what we are, uniquely. Yet we are also able to join together, as one people, and strive to bring unity to a troubled world.

1. See the Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.4, p.1159 ff. 2. Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 30:12. 3. Talmud Tractate Succah 27b.

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FESTIVAL OF SUCCOT

SPECIAL GUESTS

The stars twinkled merrily against the black night sky. A light breeze could be felt, and the feeling of happiness was in the air.

In their Sukkah, the Stein family was eating chicken soup and singing joyful songs, banging their fists on the table to the beat.

"I love Sukkot," little Esther exclaimed. "It's my favourite Festival!"

"Me too," Isaac said, giving her a high-five.

"You know children," Mr. Stein said. "Every night in our Sukka we have special guests?"

"Really? Where? Where are they?" Josh looked around, puzzled. "Yeah, Daddy, there's only us in our Sukkah," Rachel said. "Last night we had old Mr Levy from down the road, but tonight he's going somewhere else."

"There's not only us," Mr. Stein corrected her. "There are also the Ushpizin."

"Ushpizin?" his children asked in one voice. "What's that?"

"Ushpizin are the special spiritual guests we have every night. Does anyone know who are they?"

“I remember now,” said Esther. “The first night, yesterday, we had Abraham.. Tonight there is Isaac.”

“He’s the son of Abraham,” Isaac said importantly. Mr. Stein tousled his hair. “That’s right Isaac. Tomorrow is going to be Jacob, then Joseph, then Moses, Aaron and King David...”

“Wow, those are pretty cool guests Daddy,” Rachel said softly.

“How come we can’t see them?” Isaac demanded. “Yeah, if we can’t see them, how do we know that they’re here?” Josh added.

“Let me give you another example of something we know is there but we can’t see it,” Mrs Stein said, smiling. “How can I talk to our relatives around the world?”

“Through a telephone!” Esther squealed.

“That’s right. But how does my call reach them? I mean, if it’s a mobile phone?”

“An ordinary phone would be through wires,” Josh put in.

“Yes,” Rachel said, laughing. “But a mobile phone works by wireless”.

“Rachel’s right,” Mrs Stein said. “We use a wireless network to get through to people. Can we see the phone waves in the air?”

“No,” Josh said. “But we know that they’re there, right?” Mr Stein said. “So it’s the same thing with the Ushpizin. We can’t see them but we know that they’re here...”

“Wow, that’s awesome,” Josh said.

“Anyone for some more chicken soup?” Mrs Stein asked.

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