

# Why do we sit in Sukkot?



Rabbi Moshe Aberman  
Former Rosh Kollel (Chicago, 1997-1998)  
Currently a Torah adviser to the Shlichim

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The Torah commands us "בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֲזָרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת"  
"You shall live in booths (Sukkot) seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths"  
(Vayikra 23/42).

Go from your homes and dwell in the Sukkot as the Rabbis describe:

**MISHNA: All seven days a person renders his *sukka* his permanent residence and his house his temporary residence.**

**Gemara: As the Sages taught: "In *sukkot* shall you reside" (Leviticus 23:42) as you dwell in your permanent home. From here they said: All seven days, a person renders his *sukka* permanent and his house temporary. How so? If he has beautiful vessels, he takes them up to the *sukka*; beautiful bedding, he takes it up to the *sukka*; he eats and drinks and relaxes in the *sukka* and studies Torah in the *sukka*.**

Why is it that the Torah wants us to reside in a *sukka*?

לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ דַרְתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God. (Vayikra 23/43)

The Torah commands us to reside in the *sukkah*, so as to establish our awareness and that of future generations that God placed the Jewish people in *sukkot*, when coming out of Mitzrayim and journeying in the dessert. Two phrases in the pasuk should be noted. The Torah speaks of "when I brought them out of the land of Egypt", rather than when they dwelled or traveled, in the dessert. The focal point is leaving Egypt, as the Midrash Sifra notes, "when I brought them out of the land of Egypt – teaches that the *sukkah* too commemorates the exodus from Egypt". (Sifra Emor parsha 12 beginning of chapter 17) Additionally, the Torah concludes with the words "I the Lord your God" directing our attention to the fact that the commemoration is to reinforce the awareness of God deeds.

What is the Torah teaching by focusing on the exodus from Egypt rather than the time in the dessert?

When the Jews leave Egypt two things occur. They detach themselves from the Egyptian nation and begin to develop an independent, national - religious identity that reaches a pinnacle at Mount Sinai where they receive the Torah. On the other hand, by leaving Egypt they lose a certain life of financial comfort and economic security. Time after time when facing hardships the people return to claims of "we would rather return to Egypt" or just "It was good for us in Egypt". In spite of the enslavement, Egypt offered safety and financial security.

God's guiding hand, when leaving Egypt, directs the spiritual development, while at the same time offering a replacement for the Egyptian financial security, by supplying the nation with all these needs.

Sukkot links together two sets of Holidays. On the one hand, it represents the completion of the Three Regalim, accompanying the agricultural cycle, "the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field". On the other, it is the last of the Holidays of Tishrei, "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishrei)", "In the seventh month you will celebrate it". Sukkot is celebrated at "Tekufat

Hashana" that can be understood, as Rashi elucidates, at the turn of the year, at its beginning. However, this phrase can be read as strength and power, when you gather the crops and feel a sense of economic strength and security.

When we reside in sukkot, we remember, it was God who placed the Jewish people in sukkot, and He who supplied their needs when departing from Egypt. On Sukkot, we aspire to maintain the spiritual level achieved during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kipur. Residing in a sukkah remind us that only under the leadership of god can significant and meaningful spiritually be achieved. While on the other hand, specifically when we feel strong and secure, we are called by leaving our homes and residing in the sukkah, to remember, it is God's good grace that endows us all this prosperity.

It can be suggested that this is the background of the dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva, were the sukkot, referred to in the pasuk, the Ananei Hakavod (clouds of Glory) or literal sukkot<sup>[1]</sup>. Both would agree that there were Ananei Hakavod as well as literal portable housing units as Bilam notes "מה טובו אהליך יעקב", "How fair are your tents, O Jacob".

The question they struggle with is whether the central lesson of the sukkah is the Ananei Hakavod and the spiritual guidance reflected in that concept? Alternatively, does the pasuk refer to literal sukkot, which remind us of our dependence on God for sustenance? Possibly, both are true and both should be what we reinforce in our hearts when sitting in a sukkah.

May we all have a joyful and meaningful Sukkot.

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<sup>[1]</sup>As for who said what we find differing versions in the Gemara (Sukkah 11b) and the Sifra.

Comments: moshaber@gmail.com