

The Matzot of Sukkot: History & Agriculture

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History and Agriculture

The shalosh regalim each have historical and agricultural themes. Pesach is the anniversary of our redemption from Egypt, and also corresponds to the barley harvest. Shavuot is the anniversary of matan Torah, and also takes place at the start of the wheat harvest. Sukkot commemorates our sojourn in the desert, and also corresponds to the time of gathering produce from fields and orchards.

Each regel has mitzvot particular to both its themes. On Pesach, we eat *matzah* and abstain from chametz because our dough did not rise as we left Egypt. We also offer the *korban omer*, a barley-flour offering, on account of the barley harvest. On Shavuot, we customarily study Torah all night to atone for our late awakening on the day of revelation. We also offer the *shte haLechem*, a wheat-bread offering, because of the newly begun wheat harvest. On Sukkot, we dwell in *sukkot* to symbolize the clouds of glory that Hashem shielded us with in the desert. We also take the four *minim*, products of the land, on account of the gathering of produce.

A Matter of Timing

The significance of Sukkot's dual themes is reflected in a dispute about Sukkot's timing. Why do we celebrate Sukkot in Tishrei, rather than another time of year? The Tur, who connects Sukkot primarily to our redemption from Egypt, believes that Sukkot really should be celebrated in Nissan, on the anniversary of our redemption.

Although we left Egypt in Nissan, He did not command us to make Sukkot at that time, since that time is summertime when everyone makes sukkot for shade, and people would not realize that we are making sukkot because of Hashem's mitzvah. Therefore, He commanded us to make sukkot in the seventh month, the time of rain, when everyone leaves their sukkot to dwell at home, and we leave our houses to dwell in sukkot; this shows everyone that it is our King's command to make it.

Tur Orach Chaim 625

ואע"פ שיצאנו ממצרים בחדש ניסן לא צונו לעשות סוכה באותו הזמן לפי שהוא ימות הקיץ ודרך כל אדם לעשות סוכה לצל ולא היתה נכרת עשייתנו בהם שהם במצות הבורא יתברך ולכן צוה אותנו שנעשה בחדש השביעי שהוא זמן הגשמים ודרך כל אדם לצאת מסוכתו ולישב בביתו ואנחנו יוצאין מן הבית לישב בסוכה בזה יראה לכל שמצות המלך היא עלינו לעשותה.
טור אורח חיים סימן תרכה

In contrast, Rashbam connects Sukkot primarily to the gathering of produce, and therefore believes that Sukkot belongs in Tishrei, at the conclusion of the produce gathering season.

Sukkot was established at the time gathering produce for this reason: to prevent our hearts from pride for our "houses full of good," lest we say 'our hands [and not Hashem's] gained us this wealth.'

Rashbam Vayikra ch. 23

ומפני הטעם הזה קבע הק' את חג הסוכות בזמן אסיפת גורן ויקב, לבלתי רום לבבם על בתיהם מלאים כל טוב פן יאמרו ידינו עשו לנו את החיל הזה.
רשב"ם ויקרא פרק כג

Hence, the Tur emphasizes Sukkot's historical dimension while Rashbam emphasizes Sukkot's agricultural element.

Sharing Mitzvot

According to the Midrash, logic would have demanded that we dwell in Sukkot on Pesach in addition to eating matzah, and that we eat matzah on Sukkot in addition to dwelling in sukkot.

Shouldn't one learn this by a kal vaChomer (a fortiori argument); this [Pesach] does not need a sukkah but needs matzah, so certainly Sukkot that needs sukkah should need matzah ... therefore, the verse says "this" [i.e. only this, Pesach, needs matzah] ... Shouldn't one learn this by a kal vaChomer; this [Sukkot] does not need matzah but needs a sukkah, so certainly Pesach that needs matzah should need a sukkah ... therefore, the verse says "this" [i.e. only this, Sukkot, needs a sukkah].

Torat Kohanim 9:11(2), 12:14(2)

והלא דין הוא, ומה אם זה שאין טעון סוכה טעון מצה, חג הסוכות שטעון סוכה אינו דין שיטעון מצה ... תלמוד לומר, הזה... והלא דין הוא, ומה אם זה שאין טעון מצה טעון סוכה, חג המצות שטעון מצה אינו דין שיטעון סוכה ... תלמוד לומר, הזה.
תורת כהנים ט:יא(ב), יב:יד(ב)

At first glance, this Midrash seems astounding. Matzah is the unique mitzvah of Pesach, and sukkah is the unique mitzvah of Sukkot; how can we imagine mandating both mitzvot on both holidays?

The historical themes of Pesach and Sukkot are similar; both holidays commemorate our redemption from Egypt. Only the agricultural themes of the holidays are distinct. Hence, it is sensible that the historic-themed mitzvot should be common to both holidays, and only the agricultural-themed mitzvot should be distinct. The Midrash therefore suggests that matzah and sukkah, the mitzvot that commemorate our redemption, should be shared by Pesach and Sukkot. The Midrash does not suggest that korban omer or the four minim should be common to both; these mitzvot represent the distinct themes of barley harvest and produce-gathering. This idea is alluded to by the Korban Aharon, a medieval commentary on Torah Kohanim:

The idea is that these holidays are for remembrance of leaving Egypt, and therefore I would have said that each one should need both of these things, to commemorate what was done [as we left Egypt].

Korban Aharon, ad loc.

וענין זה כי שני החגים הללו זכר ליציאת מצרים ולזה הייתי אומר שיטעון כל אחד מהם שני דברים האלו שהם זכרון למה שנעשה בו
קרבן אהרן שם

The ultimate halakhah, i.e. that we do not eat matzah on Sukkot or dwell in sukkot on Pesach, seems to contradict the Korban Aharon's assumptions. This may indicate one of four things. Perhaps it indicates that the agricultural themes of Pesach and Sukkot are primary; since these themes are primary and distinct, the holidays too must be distinct. Alternately, it may indicate that these holiday's historical themes are as distinct as their agricultural themes; our redemption from Egypt is not as connected to the desert sojourn as we initially thought. A third possible inference to draw from the final halakhah is that the mitzvot of matzah and sukkah are not solely historical, but have agricultural components as well; hence, they are uniquely suited to the holidays they are connected to. Alternately, the halakhah may reflect some other value that militates for distinguishing between Pesach and Sukkot. Regardless, the initial logic of the Midrash must have been informed by the assumption that matzah and sukkah reflect an historical theme common to both Pesach and Sukkot.