

Chanukat ha-Mikdash: A Sukkot Celebration

Rabbi Menachem Penner

Acting Dean, RIETS • Rabbi, Young Israel of Holliswood

The *haftarot* for *chag Sukkot* seem to have little to do with Sukkot. Several deal with wars *be-acharit hayamim*, the end of days, and one—the *haftarah* chosen for the second day in the Diaspora—takes us back to the inauguration of the Temple in the days of King Shlomo. I invite you to spend a few moments studying the latter and to grapple with me as to why this *haftarah* (Melachim Alef 8:2-21) was chosen for Sukkot.

With the work on the magnificent Temple completed, Shlomo invited the people to what was the largest celebration in Jewish History—the completion and inauguration of the Mikdash. The celebration took place (verse 2) “*be-yerach ha-eitanim*”—understood by the commentators to be the month of Tishrei—“*be-chag*”—on the holiday of Sukkot.

Well, there you have it. Someone looking for but a surface connection between *haftarah* and holiday is welcome to stop here. Doesn't it make sense that each year, on the anniversary of the inauguration, we should mark the day? Perhaps. But this approach sidesteps a larger question: why, after all, was the Temple inauguration held on Sukkot? Was that simply the day that the final bricks were laid? The final permits from the Department of Buildings came through? The Talmud (*Bavli, Moed Katan* 9a) rejects that possibility. Chazal suggest that the Temple was completed some 11 months earlier—in Cheshvan; however, the celebration was not held until Sukkot. Why wait until the following fall? And why Sukkot?

A similar delay seems to have occurred with the Mishkan. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:2) points out that the Mishkan was ready to open on the 25th day of Kislev, but that its inauguration was delayed until the first of Nisan. One inauguration was pushed to nearly coincide with Pesach—the next, to overlap with Sukkot. Why? And why was the Mishkan celebrated in Nisan and the Mikdash in Tishrei?

Ramban (*Shemot* 40:2) explains that Nisan ushers in the spring (at least in Eretz Yisrael and the Northern Hemisphere!) and represents beginnings. G-d took us out of Egypt in the spring because there is no more appropriate time to inaugurate the Jewish nation. It is not that Pesach is in the spring because that's when G-d freed us from slavery; instead, G-d chose the spring for Pesach because their themes overlap.

What then does Tishrei—the fall—represent? And why is Sukkot commemorated in the fall? The author of *Arba'ah Turim* and others have already pointed out that Sukkot, which marks the

miraculous journey of the Jewish people through the desert, truly belongs right after Pesach! The *Tur* (*Orach Chayyim* 625) explains that if Sukkot were celebrated in warm weather, one might mistake the retreat to the sukkah as something done for shade alone. Ramban (*ibid*) suggests a deeper answer. If the spring represents beginnings, the fall is about making preparations for a long process of continuity, after which a fading world can be rejuvenated and come back to life. Fall is not about glorious beginnings—it's about the struggle for survival and rebirth.

The Jewish people were taken out of Egypt in the spring. But their survival in the brutal wilderness was far from secure. The sukkot represent the ongoing Divine protection, both in the desert and through the wilderness of history that allows us to survive, and one day reach the Promised Land. The theme of Sukkot parallels the theme of the fall. There will be a time of uncertainty, of travelling through a sort of wilderness. But G-d assures us that another spring will come.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch develops this idea further in *Horeb* (2 *Eidot*, chap. 23). He explains that Pesach marks the birth of our physical existence as a nation. Its “*atzeret*,” Shavuot, marks the creation of our spiritual relationship with Hashem. In the same way, on Sukkot, we celebrate the continued preservation of *Klal Yisrael*, while on Shemini Atzeret we thank Hashem for our continued spiritual existence.

Rabbi Yissaschar Yaakovson, most famous for his five-volume work on *tefillah* (*Netiv Binah*), points out the parallel between Mishkan and Mikdash (*Sefer Chazon le-Mikra*, pp. 399-401). The Mishkan was our first shared home with G-d. It was new and exciting—but insecure and temporary. As Ramban points out earlier in Shemot (introduction to *Parshat Terumah*), the Mishkan allowed us to continue the “spark” and connection with G-d that was present at Sinai. And yet—the Mishkan—our traveling temple—was always destined to find a permanent home in Israel. That permanent home for G-d's presence is celebrated not in Nisan, but in Tishrei, the time of the year that the natural world comes to a state of rest.

The careful reader is left with one final concern. I seemed to have pulled a “fast one” over on you. On the one hand, I have explained that the sukkot, which travelled through the desert, represented the lasting protection of G-d for His people. At the same time, the Mishkan, which also traveled through the desert, becomes the model of a *temporary* relationship! How can Rav Yaakovson have it both ways?

The answer lies in the difference between the *galut* and *geulah* experiences. The sukkah represents the kind of permanence that we can achieve in the exile. The journey through the desert was long and arduous. A full redemption it was not. And yet, there was no doubt that even in the wilderness, G-d was watching over us. The *galut* experience—wandering through the wilderness of the Diaspora—will never allow us the protection of a sturdy home. And yet, hiding above the *schach* of our temporary dwellings, Hashem makes sure that our perilous journey continues through history.

The redemptive experience of *Eretz Yisrael* is as different from *galut* as the freedom of the desert was from the Egyptian slavery. Our permanent spiritual home is so much more than just a

portable sanctuary. The Mishkan allowed us to continue the Sinai experience for hundreds of years—but did so as a bridge to bring us to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Mikdash is the final step of a long process.

May we merit moving from our temporary sukkot to the *Sukkat David* in Jerusalem.