

Happy Days Are Here Again **Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

Men in white hoods are chanting. They slowly circle a central point as they continue chanting in unison. Each one holds a fruit and a branch from a tree as he shuffles along behind his white capped compatriot. Pagan ritual? Perhaps an American Indian offering to the god of produce? Nope. It is the scene in any synagogue during the holiday of Sukkos. So the question begs to be asked, what are we doing?

If we look in our holiday prayer books we find that each of the 3 festivals has a tag line that describes it. Pesach is '*Zman Cheruseinu*' the time of our freedom. Shavous is '*Zman matan Toraseinu*', the time of our receiving of the Torah. Sukkos has a tag line as well but it is a perplexing one: '*Zman Simchateinu*', the time of our happiness. What aspect of Sukkos makes it that much more joyful than any other holiday? And is that the best way to characterize the holiday of Sukkos? Couldn't we be a little more specific?

The Sefer HaChinuch is a medieval commentary on the 613 commandments. Part of his focus is to suggest a glimpse into the divine wisdom contained in the commandments. He suggests a very novel approach to the idea of '*Zman Simchateinu*.' Unlike Pesach and Shavout which commemorate an occurrence which we can pin down to a particular time of year, Sukkos commemorates the huts that our ancestors lived in for a full 40 years of wandering. There is no particular time when it would be appropriate to celebrate Sukkos. So why now?

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that the fall season was a time of unbridled joy amongst the farmers. After toiling day in and day out in the field, they are finally seeing the literal fruit of their labor. Sukkos is also called the holiday of harvesting, since that is an apt description for this time of year. The Jewish people were in a joyous mood and so Hashem established this time period as a festival so that we could channel our joy into service of G-d. Instead of the joy being a product of the holiday, it is a product of the time of year! The joy is not caused by the festival, rather the joy is the reason that Sukkos is during this time of year.

The four species are an extension of this theme. To help us channel our harvest joy and appreciation toward G-d we take a number of agricultural pieces and use them in prayer and the service of Hashem. Hashem is trying to make it as easy as possible for us to feel joy and thankfulness towards Him. This is the theme of Sukkos and of an oft quoted Mishna. "Hashem wished to give the Jewish people merit, therefore he increased for them the Torah and commandments." Although we may not always fully understand His mysterious ways, the commandments are all a focused attempt at bettering our lives and creating a meaningful relationship with our Maker. Let's take advantage of this Divinely benevolent system, on Sukkos, and all year round.