

Question 1

Why is the holiday of Sukkot known as “*zman simchateinu*,” the time of our rejoicing?

Answer

While the Torah mentions “joy” only once in its description of the festival of Shavuot, and not at all with respect to Passover, rejoicing is mentioned *three* times in connection to the holiday of Sukkot:

The source of this great joy is predicated on the recognition of all the goodness that G-d provides for all humankind. This is brought to mind, first and foremost, by the sukkah itself. By dwelling in a temporary hut, outside of the physical comforts of one's home, we are dramatically reminded of just how much we have been blessed. Simple things that people often take for granted, like four walls to keep out the wind, windows to keep out the noise, a roof to keep out the rain, and all the other comforts of home, take on additional importance when dwelling in a sukkah.

Additionally, the holiday of Sukkot is celebrated at the time of the harvest, when farmers bring in the fruit of their labors, and everyone prepares for the onset of winter. This too serves as a spur for people to be thankful that the ground brings forth such delights and that trees bear such bountiful fruit. There is no question that, having witnessed the miracle of growth in the field, people are moved to be thankful to the Creator of all things.

Source 1-1

Leviticus 23:40

... וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
And you shall rejoice before the L-rd your G-d.

Deuteronomy 16:14

וְשִׂמְחִיתָ בְּחַגְדָּךְ אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ
וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֲלֻמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

And you shall rejoice in your Festival, you and your son and your daughter and your servant and your maidservant, and the levi and the convert and the orphan and the widow who dwell in your gates.

Deuteronomy 16:15

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תְּחַגְּלוּ לִי-אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.. וְהִייתֶם אֲדָרְשִׁמָּה:

Seven days you shall rejoice [before] the L-rd your G-d...and you shall be exceedingly joyful.

Source 1-2

Bereishith 1:11-13

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תְּדַשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוּבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ
וְהָיִיתְכֶן: וַתּוּצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוּבוּ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא
אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:

And G-d said “Let the land bring forth vegetation, plant bearing seeds that come from seeds and fruit trees that the fruit is to its kind that have seeds within it on the land, and it was so. And the land brought forth vegetation, plant bearing seeds according to their kind and trees that had fruit according to their kind. And G-d saw that it was good. And it was evening and it was morning, the third day.



When G-d brought the Children of Israel out of the Egyptian slavery, He provided the people with all their needs. He gave them manna from heaven for food and water from Miriam's well. He also gave them sukkot in which to dwell. These provisions, however, were merely examples of the provisions that G-d provides for humankind every single day.

In addition to meeting their physical needs, however, G-d also provided a protective, spiritual “sukkah” for the Jewish people. These were the *Ananei Hakavod*, the Clouds of Glory, which surrounded the Children of Israel throughout their forty years in the wilderness. These clouds did more than simply protect the Jewish people from their physical enemies; they created a protective cocoon around them so that the people could focus on the spiritual growth that was necessary for them to work up to their spiritual potential and merit entering the land of Israel.

Thus, the sages note that the act of dwelling in the sukkah is meant to remind us as well of the Cloud of Glory that surrounded our ancestors in the wilderness.

There is no more appropriate time to feel surrounded by this Divine spirit than during the month of Tishrei, just after the High Holidays. After all, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are days of judgement and awe. During this period, every man and woman approaches the Divine throne and beseeches G-d to be forgiven for the sins they may have committed and to be cleansed of their misdeeds. At the end of Yom Kippur, it is assumed that the prayers for atonement have been accepted, and we enter the new year with a clean slate. This, too, is a reason for the joy of Sukkot.

When people surround themselves with this sense of gratitude and love for G-d and for all He provides, it is impossible not to rejoice.

S A M P L E



Source 1-3

Exodus 13:21-22

וַיֵּי הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד
עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּהָדֵד וּלְיָלֵה בְּעַמּוּד
אֵשׁ לְהַאֲדִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה:
לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד
הָאֵשׁ לְיָלֵה לִפְנֵי הָעָם:

And G-d went ahead of them by day with a pillar of cloud, to make the pillar a guide for them on the way, and at night a pillar of fire to give them light to go day and night. Neither the pillar of cloud in the daytime nor the pillar of fire at night moved away from the people.

