

# The succa: A divine embrace

• By SHIMSHON HAKOHEN NADEL

**T**he holiday of Succot commemorates the Exodus from Egypt: "You shall dwell in succot for seven days... So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in Succot when I took them out of the land of Egypt." (Lev. 23:42-43) But if the holiday of Succot is connected to the Exodus, why not celebrate it in the Jewish month of Nissan, along with the holiday of Passover? Why not have the Passover Seder in the succa, with matza, four cups of wine, four questions, etc?

Rabbi Yaakov Ben Asher (13th-14th C. Spain), explains that we celebrate Succot in the fall so that it is clear to all that our time spent outdoors is specifically for the performance of a mitzva. Were Succot held in the spring, onlookers would think we are sitting outside to enjoy the warm weather. Instead, he concludes, we celebrate Succot now, in the Jewish month of Tishrei, which is the beginning of the rain season here in the Land of Israel (Tur, Orach Chayyim, 625).

This answer, however, is difficult to

understand. If it is supposed to be "recognizable" that we are sitting outside not to enjoy the nice weather but rather to perform a mitzva, why not have Succot in the middle of December or January? Surely then it would be obvious that we are not sitting outside for our pleasure!

THERE IS a deeper reason as to why Succot is celebrated this time of year. It is no coincidence that Succot is in the month of Tishrei, immediately following Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashana we stand before God in judgment. On Yom Kippur, we are purified; cleansed of sin.

The holiday of Succot is the manifestation of the closeness with God that we have achieved during the preceding days. Immediately following Yom Kippur, the preparations for the holiday begin: We run around, build the succa, buy the four species and anything else we need for the festival. We are, all of a sudden, surrounded by mitzvot.

On Succot, we carry the lulav through the streets, raised like a banner, expressing confidence that



A MAN cradles etrogim in his hand.  
(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

we were victorious in judgment just days prior.

And while we are required to rejoice during every festival, Succot is especially joyous (See Rambam's Hilchot Lulav 5:12-15). In fact, in our liturgy, Succot is called the "time of our rejoicing." It is the paradigm of joyful celebration; the "chag." That joy is a result of our closeness with God.

The connection between the Days of Awe and Succot is deeply rooted in the historical experience. Our Sages discuss whether the succa we sit in represents real huts or God's Clouds of Glory, which protected

the Jewish People in the Wilderness (Succa 11b; Torat Kohanim 17:11).

After the Sin of the golden calf, God's Clouds of Glory were removed from the Jewish People. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish People were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf, and the Clouds of Glory returned. According to the Vilna Gaon, the holiday of Succot commemorates the return of God's Clouds of Glory and with them, the Divine presence (see the Vilna Gaon's Commentary to Shir HaShirim).

As we sit in the Succa, God's presence, so to speak, surrounds us. In hassidic thought, the Succa represents His love. The S'fat Emet, the great Gerrer Rebbe, compares the succa to a chuppa, a wedding canopy. It is the canopy under which the Jewish nation is wed to God, so to speak, expressing our intimate and deep relationship with our Creator.

The Succa is also an embrace. According to our tradition, to be kosher the Succa must have at least two walls and a tefach, a hand-breadth. The "two walls" and a "hand-breadth" could appear like an arm providing a great big hug.

After going through the Days of Judgement, isn't that all we need?

*The writer, a rabbi, lives in Jerusalem, where he teaches Torah inspired by the Land and her People. His forthcoming book is Return Again: The Argument for Aliya.*