



“This Chag HaSuccos, the Time of Our Rejoicing”

The Three Mentions of “Simchah” Associated with Chag HaSuccos correspond to the Three Atonements Yisrael Is Afforded on Rosh HaShanah Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah

In honor of the auspiciously approaching festival of Succos, it is fitting that we examine the fact that HKB”H gave us the mitzvah of dwelling in the succah for seven days followed by Shemini Atzeres, which is considered to be a separate festival of its own. Regarding this, Shlomo HaMelech, described as the wisest of all men, said (Koheles 11, 2): “תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה”—**distribute portions to seven or even to eight**. They expound in the Midrash Rabbah: “**Distribute portions to seven**” refers to the seven days of Succos; “**or even to eight**” refers to the passuk (Bamidbar 29, 35): “**On the eighth day, it shall be an ‘Atzeres’ for you.**”

Now, we are familiar with the teaching in the Gemara (Megillah 31b) that Ezra HaSofer deliberately and systematically arranged our Torah readings to coincide with the annual cycle of the calendar. Thus, it behooves us to explain why he purposely arranged for us to complete the Torah readings of the year on Shemini Atzeres. Hence, we celebrate it as **Simchas Torah** and dance around the Torah with immense joy. So, what indeed is the connection between the seven days of Chag HaSuccos and Simchas Torah?

Avraham Avinu Hosted the Malachim beneath the Beams of the Succah

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing an intriguing insight from our blessed sages. They teach us that Yisrael were privileged to receive the mitzvah of succah—commemorating the Clouds of Glory that accompanied them during their sojourn in the

midbar—in the merit of their forefather Avraham Avinu. In fact, he fulfilled the mitzvah of succah even before it was officially given to Yisrael. For, when the three malachim came to visit him on the third day after his Bris Milah, Avraham sat them down to dine beneath the beams of the succah. This is evident from the following pesukim. Avraham said to the malachim (Bereishis 18, 4): “**ויקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ**”—**please, let some water be brought, wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree**. Subsequently, it says (ibid. 8): “**ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן הבקר אשר עשה ויתן לפניהם והוא עומד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו**”—**he took butter and milk and the calf he had prepared and placed these before them; he stood over them beneath the tree, and they ate**.

We find a fascinating Midrash (B.R. 48, 1) related to these pesukim: HKB”H said to Avraham Avinu, “**You instructed them, ‘Recline beneath the tree.’ By your life! I will repay your children** in the midbar and in the times of the Mashiach,” as it states (Tehillim 105, 39) “**He spread out a cloud for shelter,**” which happened in the midbar. From where do we know that they were repaid in the Land (of Yisrael)? For it is written (Vayikra 23, 42): “**You shall dwell in Succos for seven days.**” And from where do we know that they will be repaid le’asid la’vo? For it is written (Yeshayah 4, 6): “**And there will be a succah for shade in the daytime.**”

Now, the Midrash does not say explicitly that Avraham sat the malachim down beneath the beams of the succah. Nevertheless, it is stated explicitly in the poetic

words of the divine Rabbi Elazar HaKalir (recited on the second day of Succos): **"אלים כהשעין אב תחת עץ סכה"**—**when the angels were told by the Patriarch (Avraham) to recline under the beam of the succah.** "אלים" refers to the malachim; "אב" refers to Avraham Avinu.

Apparently, the poet is following the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer in the Gemara (R.H. 11a) that the world was created in Tishrei, and the Avos were born in Tishrei. Thus, the three malachim came on Chag HaSuccos to announce to Avraham and Sarah that Yitzchak would be born the following year on Succos. Therefore, the poet is explaining that when Avraham said to the malachim: **"Recline beneath the tree,"** it indicates that he himself fulfilled the mitzvah of succah and ate beneath the beams of the succah. This coincides with the teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 28b) that Avraham Avinu observed all of the mitzvos in the Torah: **"קיים אברהם אבינו כל התורה כולה, שנאמר (בראשית כו-ה) עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי"**.

We can now appreciate the meaning of the Midrash: **HKB"H said to Avraham, "You instructed them, 'Recline beneath the tree.'"** Since you observed the mitzvah of succah even before it was given to Yisrael and fed your guests in the succah: **"By your life! I will repay your children"** in the midbar, in Eretz Yisrael, and le'asid la'vo. In your merit, your descendants will be privileged to receive the Torah and observe the mitzvah of succah.

In the Merit of the Mitzvah of Succah Performed by Avraham Yisrael Were Privileged to Receive the Torah

We will now present a fantastic, sacred insight from the great Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz, zy"a, in Zera Kodesh (Succos, 1st Night). He teaches us that Yisrael were privileged to receive the Torah in the merit of the mitzvah of succah. He deduced this fantastic chiddush from the Midrash cited above. In the merit of Avraham Avinu, who hosted the malachim and fed them, HKB"H thwarted the accusations of the heavenly angels. With their hostility, they sought to harm Moshe Rabeinu in an effort to prevent him from receiving the Torah on behalf of Yisrael. Let us refer to what they expounded in the Midrash (S.R. 2, 1) in relation to a passuk concerning Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 3):

"ומשה עלה אל האלקים, הדא הוא דכתיב עלית למרום שבית שבי... באותה שעה בקשו מלאכי השרת לפגוע במשה, עשה בו הקב"ה קלסטרין של פניו של משה דומה לאברהם, אמר להם הקב"ה, אי אתם מותביישין הימנו, לא זהו שירדתם אצלו ואכלתם בתוך ביתו. אמר הקב"ה למשה, לא ניתנה לך תורה אלא בזכות אברהם."

"Moshe ascended to G-d." Thus, it is written (Tehillim 68, 19) similarly: "You ascended on high; you have taken captives." . . . At that moment, the ministering angels sought to harm Moshe. HKB"H made Moshe's facial features similar to those of Avraham. HKB"H said to them, "Are you not embarrassed before him?! Is this not the one that you descended to be with, and you ate in his house?" Then HKB"H said to Moshe, "The Torah is being given to you solely in the merit of Avraham."

Now, in light of what we learned from the divine poet: **"אלים כהשעין אב תחת עץ סוכה"**—that Avraham fed the malachim in a succah—it is evident that Yisrael received the Torah in the merit of the fact that Avraham Avinu observed the mitzvah of succah. Furthermore, since he actually fed the malachim in the succah, as indicated by his instructing them to **"recline beneath the tree,"** HKB"H was able to shame the malachim and deflect their hostile accusations as follows: **"Are you not embarrassed before him?! Is this not the one that you descended to be with, and you ate in his house?"**

So, now, it is incumbent upon us to establish the deeper connection between the mitzvah of succah observed by Avraham Avinu and the fact that Yisrael were privileged to receive the Torah in that merit. Additionally, we must endeavor to explain HKB"H's response to the malachim: **"Are you not embarrassed before him?! Is this not the one that you descended to be with, and you ate in his house?"** Did they have to relinquish their claims to the Torah, which they so dearly longed for, simply because they ate by Avraham?

The Immense Joy on Chag HaSuccos Is Due to the Atonement of Sins on Yom Kippur

Next, we will explain the rationale of the Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah—the Members of the Great Assembly—for depicting Chag HaSuccos as **"זמן שמחתנו"**—**the time of our joy.** For instance, in the Mussaf services on Chag HaSuccos, they instituted the following formula:

“ותתן לנו ה' אלקינו באהבה, מועדים לשמחה חגים וזמנים לששון, את יום חג הסוכות”
 “and You, Hashem, our G-d, gave us with love, appointed holidays (“mo’adim”) for joy, festivals and seasons for joy, the day of this festival of Succos, the time of our joy, a holy convocation, commemorating the exodus from Mitzrayim.

This simplest way to understand this concept is by referring to the Rambam (Hilchos Lulav 8, 12): **Although it is a mitzvah to rejoice on all of the “mo’adim,” on Chag HaSuccos, there was enhanced joy there in the Mikdash, as it states: “And you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for seven days.”** But what, indeed, was the reason for this enhanced “simchah” on Chag HaSuccos that exceeded the “simchah” of all the other festivals? We find an answer to this question in the Yalkut Shimoni (Emor 654):

We find the notion of “simchah” mentioned three times in association with Succos: (1) “And you shall rejoice on your festival” (Devarim 16, 14), (2) “and you will only be joyous” (ibid. 15), and (3) “and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for seven days” (Vayikra 23, 40) . . . This association is due to the fact that the people were exonerated on Yom HaKippurim . . . Additionally, the grain and fruits of the tree have been brought inside; therefore, the notion of “simchah” is mentioned three times.

The claim that atonement causes “simchah” is supported by the following passuk (Tehillim 51, 9):
 “תחטאני באזוב ואטהר, תכבסני ומשלג אלבין, תשמיעני ששון ושמחה תגלגלני”
 “עצמות דכית—purge me of sin with hyssop, and I shall be pure; cleanse me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness once more; then the bones you crushed may exult. Rashi explains that “hearing joy and gladness once more” signifies the forgiveness of sin. Similarly, we find in the Midrash Rabbah (Koheles 9, 7) that at the conclusion of Yom HaKippurim, after Yisrael has been forgiven completely: **A heavenly voice (a “baht-kol”) goes out and says to them (ibid.): “Go eat your bread with simchah.”**

Accordingly, the simple way to explain the three mentions of “simchah” on Chag HaSuccos is on account

of the atonement of sins and iniquities. For, on Yom HaKippurim, we are afforded three types of atonement—**כפרה, סליחה, מחילה—atonement, forgiveness, pardon.** This is apparent from the formula we recite in the “vidui” on Yom HaKippurim: **“ויבן יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שתכפר לנו על כל חטאותינו, ותסלח לנו על כל עוונותינו, ותמחל לנו על כל פשעינו”—and so may it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that You forgive us for all our sinful errors (חטאים), and You pardon us for all our iniquities (עוונות), and You atone for us for all our transgressions (פשעים).**

HKB”H Informed Avraham Avinu of Three Occasions of Atonement --Rosh HaShanah Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah

Now, since the Torah may be interpreted in seventy different ways and perspectives, I had a wonderful idea of my own concerning why HKB”H, the Giver of the Torah, chose to mention the language of “simchah” three times in relation to Chag HaSuccos. I would like to refer to what the Mateh Moshe (Hoshana Rabbah 957) brings down in the name of a fascinating Midrash concerning Hoshana Rabbah, the 21st day from Rosh HaShanah:

The seventh day (of Chag HaSuccos) is Hoshana Rabbah. Why is it called Hoshana Rabbah? HKB”H said to Avraham: “I am One and you are one; I will provide your children with a special day to atone for their sins—that day is Hoshana Rabbah. My name is אהי”ה whose gematria (numerical value) is twenty-one; you are also twenty-one.” There were ten generations from Adam to Noach and ten generations from Noach to Avraham (Avos 5, 2). Hoshana Rabbah is the 21st day of the month of Tishrei. HKB”H said to Avraham, **“If your children are not afforded atonement on Rosh HaShanah, it will be afforded on Yom HaKippurim; and if not, it will be on Hoshana Rabbah.”**

Now, based on the calculation of the generations based on the Mishnah in Avos, Avraham was only the 20th generation from the creation of the world. So, why does the Midrash say that he was the 21st? One answer, based on a Midrash Tanchuma (Shoftim 11), is that Avram was in fact the 20th generation, but when HKB”H modified his name to Avraham, he was considered a

new being; hence, he became the 21st generation. A second way to reconcile this discrepancy is provided by the Kaf HaChaim (O.C. 664, 1). He counts Noach as the 10th and 11th generations—Noach before the flood and Noach after the flood. Thus, Avraham can be counted as the 21st generation.

Now, the Midrash associates the 21 days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah with the divine name אהי"ה—whose gematria is 21. We learn from the Ma'or V'Shemesh (Bereishis), who cites the great Rabbi of Lublin, zy"a, that the name אהי"ה alludes to the mitzvah of teshuvah. Since the word אהי"ה means **"I will be,"** he writes that it signifies a person's commitment **"that from now on, I will serve Hashem."** This is precisely the essence and significance of the **21** days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah. They represent a period of teshuvah, of spiritual awakening, emblematic of the name אהי"ה.

The Three Mentions of "Simchah" on Succos Correspond to the Three Atonements of Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah

With great joy and satisfaction, we can now elaborate on the significance of the three mentions of "simchah" related to Chag HaSuccos. We have already learned from the Midrash that this simchah stems primarily from the forgiveness of iniquities on Yom HaKippurim. According to the Midrash brought down by the Mateh Moshe, HKB"H informed Avraham Avinu that He would provide his descendants with three separate occasions of teshuvah: **"If your children are not afforded atonement on Rosh HaShanah, it will be afforded on Yom HaKippurim; and if not, it will be on Hoshana Rabbah."**

Hence, we can suggest that the three mentions of "simchah" correspond to the atonement afforded by these three occasions. The first mention of "simchah" (Vayikra 23, 40): **"ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם שבעת ימים"**—corresponds to the atonement of Rosh HaShanah. The second mention of "simchah" (Devarim 16, 14): **"ושמחת: בחגך"**—corresponds to the atonement of Yom HaKippurim. The third mention of "simchah" and which appears last (ibid. 15): **"והיית אך שמח"**—corresponds to the atonement of Hoshana Rabbah.

We can support the assertion that the last passuk cited—**"והיית אך שמח"**—corresponds to Hoshana Rabbah by referring to an elucidation in the Gemara (Pesachim 71a): **"והיית אך שמח" —לרבות לילי יום טוב האחרון לשמחה"** **comes to include the final night** (Shemini Atzeres) **for rejoicing.** The Sefas Emes (Succos 5639) explains that the term א"ך, whose gematria is **21**, alludes to the **21** days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah. Let us explain in keeping with our current discussion: We asserted that during the 21 days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah, HKB"H gave us three occasions of atonement for sins—Rosh HaShanah, Yom HaKippurim, and Hoshana Rabbah. Thus, on Shemini Atzeres, the 22nd day, the day on which HKB"H remains alone in seclusion with the people of Yisrael, the simchah is apparent.

We can now reconcile very nicely a difficulty posed by the commentaries. Whenever the term **"אך"** appears, it indicates a type of restriction. So, how can the sages in the Gemara expound on the words **"אך שמח"** that they come to include rather than to restrict? They include simchah on the eve of Shemini Atzeres. Based on what we have learned, we can suggest that the **"אך"** of **"והיית אך שמח"** is in fact a restriction. It teaches us that even if a person did not merit atonement for his sins from Rosh HaShanah up until Hoshana Rabbah, nevertheless he still has hope for atonement on the 21st day, Hoshana Rabbah. If that happens then he will rejoice on Shemini Atzeres as per the elucidation: **"והיית אך שמח" comes to include the final night** (Shemini Atzeres) **for rejoicing.**

The Malachim's Mission to Avraham Was a Preparation for Receiving the Torah

Following this line of reasoning, we will now focus on HKB"H's remark to the malachim: **"Are you not embarrassed before him?! Is this not the one that you descended to be with, and you ate in his house?"** We will begin by introducing a wonderful insight from the incredible teachings of the holy Admor Rabbi Yischar Dov of Belz, zy"a. Although HKB"H sent three malachim to Avraham and Sarah, they were not truly necessary. Their supposed missions were to inform Sarah of the upcoming birth of Yitzchak, to heal Avraham, and to destroy Sedom, but, in reality,

HKB"H alone could have visited, comforted, and healed Avraham, and informed him of the birth of Yitzchak.

Therefore, we can posit that HKB"H sent the malachim to Avraham Avinu for another purpose. They were a preliminary step for giving the Torah to Yisrael. On account of the meal the malachim enjoyed as Avraham's guests, they were prevented from maligning Yisrael and contesting their right to the Torah. As we learned in the Midrash: The heavenly malachim wanted to harm Moshe when he ascended to receive the Torah. HKB"H thwarted their efforts by making Moshe resemble Avraham. He then confronted the malachim saying: **"Are you not embarrassed before him?!"**

The Maharid, zy"a, continues in this vein to interpret what Avraham says to the malachim (Bereishis 18, 5): **"ואקחה בת לחם וסעדו לבכם"—I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may nourish your heart.** He refers to the Gemara (Shabbas 88b). We are taught that the malachim beseeched HKB"H (Tehillim 8, 2): **תנה—rather You should bestow Your glory upon the heavens.** In other words, they believed that the Torah should be given to them. To which Moshe Rabeinu began his rebuttal (ibid. 89a): **"Are you hampered by a yetzer hara?"** As we are taught elsewhere in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b), the Torah is the antidote to the yetzer hara. Hence, the malachim who are not influenced by a yetzer hara do not need the Torah as Yisrael do.

This then is what Avraham was hinting to the malachim when he said: **"I will fetch a morsel of bread"**—on account of this meal, my descendants and I will be privileged to take the Torah, which is compared to bread—as they expounded in the Gemara (Chagigah 14a) on the passuk (Mishlei 9, 5): **"לכו לחמו בלחמי"—come, partake of My bread.** **"וסעדו"**—here is support for the fact that you are not worthy to receive that which your heart desires—**"לבכם"**. In his commentary, Rashi notes that the passuk employs the term **"לבכם"** rather than **"לבבכם"**, indicating that the malachim are not under the influence of the yetzer hara. [Translator's note: They have a single-minded heart, so to speak, without outside influences.] Avraham was telling them that they

do not require or deserve the Torah, since they are not encumbered by a yetzer hara. And this is why HKB"H arranged for you to visit me and dine here (Bereishis 18, 5): **"כי על כן עברתם על עבדכם"**—so that you would not be able to object to the giving of the Torah to Yisrael. These are his sacred words.

Avraham Avinu Took the Malachim into the Succah to Show Them the Simchah Associated with the Forgiveness of Sins

Now, we learn in the Gemara (Shabbas 88b) that the malachim presented the following argument to HKB"H: **"חמורה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הודך על השמים."** **The coveted treasure that was stored by You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, You intend to give it to flesh and blood?!"** (Tehillim 8, 5) **"What is a mortal that You should remember him or the son of man that You should recall him?"** (ibid. 2) **"Hashem, our Lord, how grand is Your name in all the earth that You bestow Your glory upon the heavens."**

In other words, the malachim argued that since man is a corporeal being and has a yetzer hara, he is likely to sin. Therefore, it would be preferable to give the Torah to the malachim instead who are not influenced by a yetzer hara. Moshe refuted this argument. On the contrary, specifically because Yisrael are harassed by a yetzer hara, they are constantly under attack and need to combat it. For this reason, HKB"H gave them the Torah, which is the antidote to the yetzer hara. Engaging in Torah-study enables Jews to withstand the yetzer hara and please HKB"H immensely. In the words of the Gemara (Berachos 34b): **"מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין, שנאמר שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב, לרחוק ברישא, צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין, שנאמר שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב, והדר לקרוב."** **In the place where "ba'alei teshuvah" stand, consummate tzaddikim cannot stand. As it says (Yeshayah 57, 19): "Shalom, shalom to the far and to the near." First to the far and then to the near** (Translator's note: First Hashem greets the one who was far but then did teshuvah, and only afterwards greets the one who was near all along).

We can now begin to appreciate to some degree the profound wisdom of Avraham Avinu and his reason for instructing the malachim to **“relax beneath the tree”** and eat in his succah. He recognized that HKB”H had sent the malachim to him specifically on Chag HaSuccos to announce the upcoming birth of Yitzchak—from whom He would build the continuing genealogy of the people of Yisrael until the end of time. Hence, Avraham realized that it was the intention of HKB”H that he preempt the malachim, so that his descendants, the people of Yisrael, would receive the Torah in the future and not the malachim.

Therefore, he cleverly seated the malachim beneath the shade of his succah—**“beneath the tree.”** It was because future generations of Jews would sit in the “shade of emunah,” beneath the shade of HKB”H, in the merit of the teshuvah they would perform on Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah. This demonstrates the lofty status of ba’alei-teshuvah and the fact that HKB”H cherishes them and esteems them. The malachim do not experience this simchah, because they lack a yetzer hara and have no connection with the concept of teshuvah.

Now, this explains beautifully what HKB”H said to the malachim who argued that Yisrael do not deserve the

Torah, because they are corporeal creatures who are inclined to sin: **“Are you not embarrassed before him?! Is this not the one that you descended to be with, and you ate in his house?”** In other words, when you ate beneath the beams of his succah, you witnessed the immense pleasure HKB”H derives from affording Yisrael the simchah of the forgiveness and atonement of their iniquities. This simchah does not exist with you. Hence, the Midrash concludes: **Then HKB”H said to Moshe, “The Torah is being given to you solely in the merit of Avraham”**—who had the foresight to seat and feed the malachim beneath the tree of the succah.

This explains magnificently Ezra HaSofer’s rationale for arranging that we conclude the yearly Torah-readings on Shemini Atzeres accompanied by the joyous celebration and dancing of Simchas Torah. For, as explained, we were privileged to receive the Torah in the merit of Chag HaSuccos—when Avraham Avinu hosted the malachim in his succah. Therefore, after the seven days of Succos have passed, immediately after the last day, Hoshana Rabbah—the third and final opportunity for the atonement of sins—it is the most fitting time to celebrate the receiving of the Torah with immense simchah.



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