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The Importance of Succoth

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)

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The command to celebrate succoth seems to have a basis that is difficult to understand. For example: We celebrate Pesach because we were redeemed from slavery to freedom, and we celebrate Shavuot because were given the Torah; while Succoth is celebrated because we lived in Succoth. In this study I would like to see if there is more to this festival than meets the eye. Let’s begin by looking at the Torah’s description of what we are supposed to *do* because we love HaShem. These are His mitzvot, His way to connect with us.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:39-43*** *Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of HaShem seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before HaShem your God seven days. 41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto HaShem seven days in the year;[[2]](#footnote-2) it is a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month. 42 Ye shall dwell in booths* (succoth) *seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths* (succoth)*; 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths* (succoth)*, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt:[[3]](#footnote-3) I am HaShem your God.*

Many traditional commentators understand this pasuk as referring to the cloud(s) that accompanied the Israelites throughout the wilderness journey, offering them protection. This interpretation is suggested by Rabbi Akiva[[4]](#footnote-4) and is adopted by Onkelos, Rashi, Ramban, and others. Ramban cites Isaiah 4:5-6 in support of the identification between the word succah - סוכה (usually rendered “booth”) and ענן, cloud:

***Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 4:5-6*** *And HaShem will create over the whole habitation of mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory shall be a canopy. 6 And there shall be a pavilion* (succah) *for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain.*

We will return to this ‘cloud’ a bit later. Suffice it to say that there are two ideas for these succoth: 1. Booths built by the Bne Israel and 2. The clouds of glory erected by HaShem.

There are two commands listed in Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:39-43:

1. Wave the lulav and etrog, v.40.
2. Dwell in a succah.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Both of these mitzvot seem strange on their surface. The object of this study is to look beneath the surface of these two mitzvot to discern the meaning and import of these two mitzvot. We find a key clue in v.43 which teaches us that we began to live in succoth “when we came out of Egypt”. This suggests that we started to live in succoth on the very first day that we left Egypt. This is very curious because the first place that we stopped, when we came out of Egypt, was a place named “Succoth”.

***Shemot (Exodus) 12:37*** *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses[[6]](#footnote-6) to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children. 38 And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. 39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual. 40 Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the host of HaShem went out from the land of Egypt.*

The exodus started in *Ramses*.[[7]](#footnote-7) Since they requested permission to live in Goshen[[8]](#footnote-8) and Pharaoh replied that they should live there,[[9]](#footnote-9) Joseph obviously complied with Pharaoh’s order. If so, the land of *Rameses*, which was the best of the land, was surely part of Goshen.[[10]](#footnote-10)

From Ramses we journeyed to Succoth. The distance between them was 120 miles but they came there in a moment, as it is said: “And I carried you on eagles’ wings”.[[11]](#footnote-11) Being carried on ‘eagles’ wings’ is also a way of protecting because eagles protect their young on their wings as the only threat is below them, not above. Hence, the Bne Israel were protected by HaShem. This protection will become clearer as we examine the clouds[[12]](#footnote-12) of glory.

The mitzva to live in a *succah* began when we reached a place called *Succoth*, which is simply the plural of *succah*. This suggests that there is a connection between the mitzva and the events that occurred in Succoth.

First use of ‘succoth’ is in:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 33:17*** *And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths (succoth) for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.*

This first usage indicates that here is where we see the creation of these things called ‘succoth’ at a place called Succoth! It was called Succoth, according to the pasuk, because Yaaqob built succoth for his cattle. Notice that Yaaqob built himself a house and he built succoth for his cattle, when he came out of Laban’s slavery. This teaches us that succoth are primarily the housing for cattle, not humans and that they are associated with ones who move from slavery to freedom.

The situation with Yaaqob is the same situation that we have on the first day of the Exodus, only this time the succoth were for both humans *and* cattle. The Bne Israel did not have separate housing. Also implied in the Exodus is that they named the place Succoth because they built succoth there, just as Yaaqob named the place because he built succoth there.

Note the wording of:

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:43*** *I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths* (succoth)*, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt*

This wording teaches us that our sleeping in succoth, on that first, and subsequent, nights was an act of HaShem. He made us dwell in succoth! This was a momentous turning point.

In Shemot (Exodus) 12:40-41 we learned that the Bne Israel came out of Egypt 430 years to the very day that they went in:

***Shemot (Exodus) 12:40*** *And the settling-downs that the Children of Israel settled-down while they were in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the host of HaShem went out from the land of Egypt.*

The Torah is telling us, in the above pasuk, that the Bne Israel had ‘settled down’ in Egypt. In Egypt they had real homes with real roofs. This means that the very first night of freedom was spent in succoth – temporary huts. For the first time in their lives the Bne Israel no longer had real homes. For the first time in generations they were truly free. They had no masters dictating their every move. No one watching their comings and goings. This was freedom!

Now, they were in a wilderness, a desert with all of its unknowns. They no longer had homes or established routines. They were free, but they were in an insecure place, sleeping with sheep, goats, and cows. Surely, they must have been questioning their decision to follow HaShem into this wilderness.

(We can readily picture, and understand, the change in their circumstances when we leave our homes and spend a week in our succoth, our temporary huts.)

To top it all off, they had only matza for dinner. Matza, that dry, tasteless cracker like bread was all they had for dinner.

***Shemot (Exodus) 12:39*** *And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they**brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.*

This, of course, begs the question: Why is Matza associated with Succoth? Matza is a Passover lesson six months before Succoth. For all intents and purposes, Pesach and Succoth are, seemingly, commemorating the same events. We had plenty of food and real homes in Egypt, yet we were missing *freedom*. Now we are missing those basic necessities, but we have freedom. This turnabout happened, literally, overnight. True, we had a year of plagues warning us that slavery would soon end, but that fateful night of the death of the firstborn of Egypt was a momentous time when we left our secure homes and food in order to gain freedom.

Pesach commemorates the food we ate, while Succoth commemorates the succoth that we lived in. Thus, the primary needs of man: Food and shelter, are commemorated by two different festivals.

What were they thinking? What person would leave their secure homes with normal food in order to follow HaShem into the wilderness with all its deprivations? Consider that they were leaving from Rameses, a storehouse city where a great deal of grain was stored. They left this storehouse city to go to an uninhabited place that had no grain and no way to grow grain.

We made a choice. We choose to follow HaShem into the wilderness with its deprivations and unknowns. We choose freedom![[13]](#footnote-13) We believed that HaShem would take care of us in the wilderness and lead us to The Promised land, a land we had never seen.

As an aside, HaShem demonstrated His love for the Bne Israel by counting them when the Bne Israel traveled from Ramses to Succoth. Why do we count things? Only to show that that which is counted is precious and beloved!

***Midrash Tanchuma Yelammedenu, Shemot (Exodus) 30:9*** *A census of Israel was taken on ten different occasions. The first occurred when they descended to Egypt, as it is said: Your fathers went down into Egypt with three score and ten persons.[[14]](#footnote-14) Again, when they came out of Egypt, as is said: And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men.[[15]](#footnote-15) Once in the Book of Numbers (it was taken) with reference to the standards;[[16]](#footnote-16) once with regard to the spies;[[17]](#footnote-17) in the days of Joshua when the land was divided;[[18]](#footnote-18) twice in the time of Saul, as it is said: And he numbered them with lambs in Telaim[[19]](#footnote-19) and He numbered them with pebbles in Bezek.[[20]](#footnote-20) What is indicated by the word Telaim? When they were prosperous, he counted them by means of their lambs(telayim), but when they were poor in deeds, he counted them with stones. What is bezek? It is a stone. He took a stone for each one of them and then totalled the stones. A census was taken in the days of David, as is said: Joab gave up the sum, the number of the people to the king;[[21]](#footnote-21) and again at the time of Ezra: The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand, three hundred and three score.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the time-to-come (a census will be taken), as is said: The flock shall again pass into the hands of Him that counts them,[[23]](#footnote-23) and in this instance: When you take the sum.*

Without provisions for food or water, without knowing exactly where we were going, or how we were going to survive – we followed HaShem, after He counted us, anyway. *All two point three million of us* followed HaShem into the wilderness. This was a supreme act of faith, based on HaShem’s faithfulness which we had experienced over the last year with all of its plagues. We followed HaShem into the wilderness to sleep in succoth and to eat matza with no other provisions for this forty-year journey. That first night we embraced HaShem with total trust. This is the essence of both the festival of Pesach and of Succoth. We followed HaShem into the wilderness, away from the storehouse city of Rameses, and trusted Him despite all of the unknowns, despite the flimsy structures and the tasteless bread. We gave up much to be with HaShem. Thus, does Jeremiah write:

***Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 2:1*** *And the word of HaShem came to me, saying:* ***2*** *Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith HaShem: I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.*

We gave up physical security to follow HaShem and to rely on Him. We gave HaShem our love and our trust.

There was a dispute among the sages as to what we are commemorating. Do we commemorate the succoth (huts) or do we commemorate the clouds of glory, which act as succoth?[[24]](#footnote-24) Are these two different things, or are they merely two sides of the same coin?

When does the cloud (הֶעָנָן) first show up?

***Shemot (Exodus) 13:20*** *And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. 21 And HaShem went before them by day in a pillar of* ***cloud****, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night: 22 the pillar of* ***cloud*** *by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people.*

So, the clouds of glory appeared at Succoth, the very place where we first erected our succoth! Clearly HaShem reciprocated and gave us absolute protection because we made a minimal effort at providing our own protection. Yet, the above pasuk suggests that that the cloud was just a way for HaShem to direct us in the proper direction, not to provide protection.

Later on, at the Reed Sea, we do see the cloud moving and providing protection.

***Shemot (Exodus) 14:19-21*** *And the angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them; 20 and it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud and the darkness here, yet gave it light by night there; and the one came not near the other all the night. 21 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and HaShem caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.[[25]](#footnote-25)*

To gain understanding, let’s look at what the Targum tells us about what happened at Succoth. It was here that the Israelites were first protected by the clouds of Glory.

***Targum Pseudo Jonathan for Bamidbar (Numbers) 33:5.*** *And the sons of Israel went forth from Pelusin, and encamped in Succoth, a place where they were protected by seven glorious clouds.*

***Targum Pseudo Jonathan Exodus 13:20*** *And they journeyed from Succoth, the place where they had been covered with the clouds of glory, and sojourned in Ethan, which is on the side of the desert.*

When we lived in our succoth, trusting HaShem to protect us, HaShem reciprocated and protected us with His clouds of glory. We needed protection from the elements of the wilderness. The succoth were just a token effort at protection. In turn, HaShem provided real protection, His clouds of glory.

Yet, this not the whole story. The Torah’s view, of living in succoth, describes what *we* *did* to show our love and trust of HaShem. The Talmudic view, of the clouds of glory, describes what *HaShem did* to show His love for us.

Now, that we understand the dispute of the succoth vs. clouds of glory, perhaps it is time to deal with a peripheral issue that we raised earlier: We followed HaShem into the wilderness to sleep in succoth and to eat matza with no other provisions for this forty-year journey. That first night we embraced HaShem with total trust. *This is the essence of both the festival of Pesach and of Succoth*. If this is the essence of these two festivals, why are they separated by six months on the calendar? Why don’t they coincide? Why are they situated, calendrically, at the furthest distance from each other?

On that first night in Succoth, the day of Pesach, we learned to trust HaShem when we had nothing. However, when we celebrate Succoth at the end of our harvest, at that time we have the least reason to trust HaShem because we have our own provisions, we have our own houses, we are self-sufficient. Our own houses have become Rameses, they have become storehouses. To remind us of the trust and love we showed HaShem on that first Pesach, and to counter our own feelings of self-sufficiency, HaShem commanded that we return to our succoth, leaving our Rameses storehouse, and re-experience the trust we had back on that first Pesach, despite the fact that we have homes and plenty of food.

By moving into our succah we are re-creating the ambiance and the trust of that first pesach. At the same time, we are reminding ourselves that having our own homes and our own provisions is just an illusion. Our security is illusory at best. A single fire can wipe all of that out and remind us that these things do thot provide security. Only HaShem provides security. When we move into our succah we remind ourselves of *our* real security. We remind ourselves of our trust, our love, and our faith in HaShem as the only real security.

Question: Why is there no back-story for Succoth like we find for Pesach and Shavuot. Why is there no ‘background’ for this festival?

# Bifurcation of the year

We should explore the bifurcation of the year such that Pesach and Succoth are really mirror images of each other. We have already seen a few things that juxtapose these two festivals. Perhaps the most important note from earlier in this study, is that Pesach commemorates the food we ate, while Succoth commemorates the succoth that we lived in.

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|  | **Pesach** |  | **Succoth** |
|  | Commemorates the food we ate. | vs. | Commemorates the succoth that we lived in. |
|  | Atzeret commemorates the giving of the Torah. | vs. | Atzeret commemorates the rejoicing in the Torah. We complete the Torah and begin anew. |
|  | 7th day HaShem saves us from the hand of Egypt. | vs. | 7th day we cry out seven times: Hoshana – Save Please! |
|  | On the first day of Pesach we stop reciting the prayer for rain, in the Amida, and pray for dew. | vs. | On the eighth day, the conclusion, of Succoth, we begin praying for rain. |
|  | We make succoth for ourselves at a place called Succoth. | vs. | At a place called Succoth we eat matza. |
|  | We go into our houses to celebrate the seder. Ex. 12:7 | vs. | We leave our houses to use a succah instead. Lev. 2:43 |
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We have already seen that the first night we stayed in succoth happened on Pesach, where we ate matza. Clearly there is a connection between these two festivals. Both Pesach and Succoth are seven-day holidays. The seventh day of Pesach is a yom tov and the seventh day of Succoth is the ‘last and greatest day” of the feast.

Remember we said that the cloud was designed to guide the Bne Israel, but at the Reed Sea it took on the additional aspect of protecting the Bne Israel. It took on the aspect of saving the Bne Israel on the seventh day of Pesach. In fact,

***Shemot (Exodus) 14:30*** *Thus HaShem saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore.*

Curiously, on the seventh day of Succoth we encircle the altar / Bimah seven times saying hoshana – Please Save! Thus, the seventh days of both Pesach and Succoth concern themselves with our salvation.

The seventh day of Pesach concerns itself with the splitting of the waters of the Reed Sea while the seventh day of Succoth concerns itself with the water pouring ceremony. Succoth is the festival of water. Shemini Atzeret marks the beginning of the rainy season where we pray for rain. The water references are many:

* On Succoth, says the Mishna, “We are judged regarding water”,[[26]](#footnote-26) i.e. regarding the rainfall for the coming season.
* Temple services featured the ceremony of the water libation, which replaced the year-round pouring of wine upon the altar.[[27]](#footnote-27)
* During Succoth, public celebrations are held known as the *simchat beit hasho’eva*-- the festival of the drawing of well water.[[28]](#footnote-28)
* For the mitzva of the Four Species, we take only moist branches and fruits. The Mishna notes that if any individual species is dry, it is unacceptable.[[29]](#footnote-29)
* Among the four species are “willows of the brook”,[[30]](#footnote-30) which grow by flowing water, and the etrog, which according to the Talmud grows “upon all waters”. The Talmud also suggests that the etrog is called “hadar” as a pun on “hydor”, the Greek word for water.[[31]](#footnote-31)
* According to Rabbi Eliezer,[[32]](#footnote-32) we dwell in succoth because the Children of Israel were sheltered in the desert by the divine Clouds of Glory; the cloud imagery is no accident.
* Tradition requires that the succah’s roof of foliage must allow rainwater to penetrate it.

On Succoth, which marks the start of the rains, all of the festival’s symbols somehow recall, whether explicitly or obliquely, the bounty of water for which we pray. Water, one could say, is the symbol of life.

On the opposite side of the Jewish calendar is Pesach. Just as Succoth marks the start of the rains, Pesach marks their end and the transition to the arid summer. Yet if all the mitzvot and customs are waterlogged, why don’t the symbols of Pesach similarly reflect its own dry season?

Indeed, they do! On Pesach, water actually creates the prohibitions:

Chametz is created when flour contacts with water, causing fermentation. The entire difference between matzah and chametz is the amount of time spent with water.

The Korban Pesach, the Passover sacrifice, in ancient times the main observance of the festival, must not be cooked in water: “Do not eat it raw or cooked in water, rather roasted in fire”.[[33]](#footnote-33) The Talmud even discusses on which type of skewer the meat may be roasted, the concern is that the fire may draw out moisture from the wood of the skewer, so that the meat would in part be cooked in water, which is forbidden.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The very date of Pesach is determined in part by dryness. One of the criteria considered by the Sanhedrin in deciding whether to postpone Pesach by adding a second month of Adar was whether the roads were still muddy from the winter rains.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Further, in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, water is a negative symbol. Egypt, the house of slavery, is a land full of water year round, due to the powerful Nile River. The Nile symbolizes the suffering of Israel: “Every son who is born you shall throw into the Nile”,[[36]](#footnote-36) and Moses is saved from a watery death in the Nile. Likewise, the first plague was upon the Nile, whose water was turned to blood.

At the splitting of the Red Sea, water is again the instrument of death, first when the Israelites reach the sea and have nowhere to flee, and then when they are saved from the sea and the Egyptians are drowned. The Jews are saved by dryness, by “crossing through the sea on dry land”.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Having finally crossed the sea, the Israelites immediately arrive at Marah (“bitter”), where the water is too bitter to drink, and again they are miraculously rescued.[[38]](#footnote-38)

In general, the transition from slavery to freedom is also a transition from a land of plentiful water to a dry, bitter desert. Apparently, Pesach celebrates dryness, the opposite of Succoth’s celebration of water.

As a side note, each festival has its own characteristic colors. The color of Succoth is green, indicated by the colors of the Four Species (including the etrog, which ripens from green to yellow), and of the green branches covering the succah. And green is the color of Israel’s lush, rain-drenched winter landscape.

The color of Pesach, meanwhile, is brown, indicated by the roasted meat, the matza, and the barley and wheat whose harvests are beginning. Brown is the color of the desert, and of Israel’s parched summer landscape.

Having identified the symbols, the message remains elusive. What does it mean “to celebrate dryness”? It’s natural to celebrate the arrival of the rains, to pray for rain, to recognize our dependence on HaShem’s mercy for sustenance. But what is the point of emphasizing the dry summer on the way?

The point of interest is not the lack of water per se, but rather the presence of hidden water. After all, roasted meat isn’t dry; it has internal juices which provide it with flavor. Similarly, one cannot bake matzah without using water, though the water is absorbed into the dough and is not apparent in the final product.

The same holds for the other symbols of the holiday: There is water even in the desert, in wells and springs and cisterns. Open a grain of ripening barley and wheat and you’ll find moisture retained from the winter rains.

What is absent is rainwater, water falling from the sky like a visible blessing from HaShem. In place of the visible water of the winter, the summer bears only hidden water, water which appears by surprise in the middle of the dry landscape, just like a miracle, such as the miracle of the waters of Marah.

Just as on Succoth we pray for water, on Pesach we say the “Prayer for Dew” -- a type of hidden water, drawn out of the air itself in the late hours of the night.

On Pesach we celebrate not dryness, but the hidden water, the fact that even in the dry, parched desert, there is hope of finding revitalizing fresh water to save our lives. Just as during the darkest days of slavery in Egypt, we were suddenly rescued by unexpected miracles. The water of Pesach is the water of miracles, the water of redemption. The challenge before us is to believe in redemption when all around is bleak, and to work to bring it about -- to find water in the dry desert.

The two symbols that HaShem gave to us, to guide and protect us, seems to also represent the water cloud of Succoth and the fire roasted pesach lamb.

***Shemot (Exodus) 13:21*** *And HaShem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night:*

Passover and Succoth parallel each other in several ways. For example, they are exactly six months apart, they always occur on the 15th of their respective months, and both commemorate the exodus from Egypt and its aftermath. In fact, they are the *only two* festivals to which the Torah refers to as “chag”,[[39]](#footnote-39) or festival.

While the Shulchan Aruch notes that 30 days before Pesach we inquire and expound about the festival, the building of the Succah is actually the last law recorded of the laws of Yom Kippur. Only after Yom Kippur is over do we begin building our Succah, four days before Succoth. Thus, we understand that we begin building the succah immediately after Yom Kippur – on the tenth of Tishri, before we break the fast. Similarly, we select the Pesach lamb on the tenth day of Nisan, four days before Pesach.

In the Talmud, Shemini Atzeret is called *Atzeret shel Hag*, the Atzeret of Succoth, as opposed to Shavuot which is called Atzeret without a qualifier.[[40]](#footnote-40) In fact, the Midrash[[41]](#footnote-41) takes the effort to explain why Shemini Atzeret isn’t 50 days after Succoth, why it differs from Shavuot:

***Midrash Rabbah - Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) VII:4*** *Another explanation: HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THY FOOTSTEPS IN SANDALS (NE ‘ALIM): in two closings (ne’alim).[[42]](#footnote-42) R. Hana b. Hanina said: It is as if two traders went into a town together, and one of them said to the other: ‘ If we both offer our wares together in the town, we will bring down the price. So do you offer yours one week, and I will offer mine the next.’ R. Hananiah the son of R. Ibi said: It is written here, HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THY FOOTSTEPS not in the sandal, but IN SANDALS. There are two closings: the closing of Passover and the closing of Tabernacles. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Israel: ‘You close before Me at Tabernacles, and I close before you at Passover. You close your work before Me at Tabernacles,[[43]](#footnote-43) and I open the heavens and cause winds to blow and bring up clouds and make rain fall and cause the sun to shine and make plants grow and ripen produce, and provide each one of you with a table set out with his needs, and each body according to its requirements. And I close [the heavens] before you at Passover,[[44]](#footnote-44) and you go out and reap and thresh and winnow and do all that is required in the field and find it rich in blessing.’ R. Yahoshua (Joshua) b. Levi said: By rights, the Eighth Day of Assembly should have followed Tabernacles after an interval of fifty days, as Pentecost follows Passover. But since at the Eighth Day of Assembly summer passes into autumn, the time is not suitable for traveling. [God was like] a king who had several married daughters, some living near by, while others were a long way away. One day they all came to visit their father the king. Said the king: ‘Those who are living near by are able to travel at any time. But those who live at a distance are not able to travel at any time. So, while they are all here with me, let us make one feast for all of them and rejoice with them.’ So with regard to Pentecost, which comes when winter is passing into summer, God says, ‘The season is fit for traveling.’ But the Eighth day of Assembly comes when summer is passing into autumn, and the roads are dusty and hard for walking; hence it is not separated by an interval of fifty days. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘These are not days for traveling; so while they are here, let us make of all of them one festival and rejoice.’ Therefore Moses admonishes Israel, saying to them, On the eighth day ye shall have a solemn assembly.[[45]](#footnote-45) Thus we may say, HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THY FOOTSTEPS IN NE’ ALIM.*

**Passover and Succoth both have a *second chance* to be celebrated.**

Iyar 15 is known as Pesach Sheni, the second Passover. This celebration is for those who were unclean, or on a trip, during Passover.

Succoth’s “second chance” is called Chanukah. The Israelites were too busy fighting the Syrians to stop for Succoth. They missed the celebration so much, that they celebrated it when they were through fighting: Kislev 25 – Tevet 2.

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1. This study is based on a shiur given by Rabbi David Fohrman. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that for Pesach, Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:6 just says ‘seven days’ rather than ‘seven days a year’. The difference in expression comes to teach us that these seven days of rejoicing before HaShem through the performance of His commandments and dwelling in the sukkah are regarded as if Israel had rejoiced before HaShem all year. All of their work during the entire year is considered to have been only for the sake of HaShem’s glory. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We are commanded to dwell in a succah because of what happened on the first night of Pesach. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sifra, Emor 17:11; Mechilta, Bo, 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Succoth is the plural of succah. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shemot (Exodus) 1:11 (Rameses or Raamses - רַעַמְסֵס) was a storehouse city built by the Bne Israel. Grain was stored here in giant silos. When we left Rameses, we were leaving a place of security with lots of grain for food. This makes the contrast with Succoth all the more graphic. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bereshit (Genesis) 47:11 And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bereshit (Genesis) 47:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bereshit (Genesis) 47:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tosafot HaShalem [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Mechilta commenting on Shemot (Exodus) 19:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In Bereshit (Genesis) 9:13 we have the first usage of ‘cloud’. This cloud has a rainbow in it and also offers protection against flooding the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Rambam indicated that with regard to relating the events of the Exodus too, the main aspect is the positive step of becoming free. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Debarim (Deuteronomy) 10:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Shemot (Exodus) 12:37 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bamidbar (Numbers) 2:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bamidbar (Numbers) 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Yehoshua (Joshua) 18:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 14:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ibid., 11:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 24:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ezra 2:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 33:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Succah 11b That is satisfactory according to the authority who says that [the booths of the wilderness were] clouds of glory, but according to the authority who says [the Israelites] made for themselves real succoth, what can one say? For it has been taught: For I made the children of Israel to dwell in succoth, these were clouds of glory, so R. Eliezer. R. Akiba says, they made for themselves real succoth. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Rashi takes these three pesukim of 72 letters each [in Shemot (Exodus) 14:19, 20, 21] and juxtaposes them to get the *ani vaho* prayer. Which we say on Hoshana Rabbah, beseeching HaShem for salvation! ArtScroll Succos machzor page 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rosh HaShana 1:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Succah 4:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Succah 5:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Succah 3:1-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:40 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Succah 35a [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Succah 11b [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Shemot (Exodus) 12:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Pesachim 74a [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh 4:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Shemot (Exodus) 1:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Shemot (Exodus) 14:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Shemot (Exodus) 15:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Pesach: Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:6 – Succoth Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Menachoth 65a [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Midrash Rabbah Shir HaShirim 7:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. As explained infra. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Or, you complete your pi1grimages then, Tabernacles being the third and last pilgrimage festival of the year (M.K.). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Rain ceases then (Radal). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:35 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)