

Medina & Halacha

Exploring the Jewish State
through the lens of Jewish Law

By Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel

From Yom Kippur to Sukkot: From a Place of Purity to a Place of Peace

Anyone who has ever been to Jerusalem in the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, will testify that there is a unique energy in the air. A frenzy. The city is abuzz. The excitement is palpable, as people fill the streets and flood the markets, buying the Four Species, supplies for their Sukkot, and food (and clothes) for the holiday.

Many have the custom to begin building their Sukka immediately following the conclusion of Yom Kippur. After fasting and praying all day, they eat something and get right to work - going from one mitzva to the next - not delaying or missing the opportunity. It is a labor of love, which expresses the desire to carry over the inspiration of the past twenty-five hours. There is something magical that takes place on these Jerusalem rooftops and balconies, lit by the moon and stars. In my neighborhood of Har Nof, you can hear hammering (and singing!), well into the night. It's an intense ending to an intense day.

The custom to begin building one's Sukka immediately following Yom Kippur is cited by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, the Rama, in his glosses to Orach Chayim 624:5 and 625:1. Curiously, the Rama cites this minhag twice: Once in the last section of the Laws of Yom Kippur, and then again in the first section of the Laws of Sukkot.

Why does the Reama, always meticulous in his comments, cite this custom twice? And what is the reason for this practice? Can't the Sukka wait until the next day?

The Mishna Berura (ad loc.) suggests that the first time the Rama records the minhag, he mentions "those scrupulous in observance (ha-m'dakdikim) begin building immediately..." Everyone else, explains the Mishna Berura, begins the next day. That is why the custom appears twice in the Rama: Once for those who begin at night, and once for those who begin the next day. But that answer is difficult to accept as the Maharil (Minhagim, Hilchot Sukkot), an early source for the practice, writes that immediately following Yom Kippur "every individual" should be involved in building the Sukka - not just those scrupulous in their observance!

Perhaps there is a deeper answer. By building the Sukka immediately after Yom Kippur, we recognize the intimate connection between Sukkot and the days that immediately precede it. By mentioning the

custom in both the Laws of Yom Kippur and again in the Laws of Sukkot, the Rama stresses this intimate connection.

According to Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (Chochmat Shlomo, Orach Chayim 625:1), we begin building the Sukka right after Yom Kippur, for Hashem, so to speak, covers over our sins on Yom Kippur and on Sukkot covers us with His Sukka.

This intimate connection between the Days of Awe and Sukkot is deeply rooted in our historical experience. According to one opinion, the Sukka we sit in represents Hashem's Clouds of Glory, which protected the Jewish People in the Wilderness (Sukka 11b; Torat Kohanim 17:11). But after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the 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. The Vilna Gaon writes that the holiday of Sukkot commemorates the return of the Clouds of Glory and with them, the Divine Presence. This is why, explains the Gaon, Sukkot is celebrated at this time of year - immediately following Yom Kippur (See the Vilna Gaon's Commentary to Shir HaShirim 1:4).

Once Sukkot begins, we are surrounded by mitzvot - another expression of our closeness with Hashem. We carry the Lulav through the streets raised like a banner,

expressing confidence that we were victorious in judgment just days prior.

And while we are required to rejoice during every festival, Sukkot is especially joyous (See Rambam's Hilchot Lulav 8:12-15). In fact, in our liturgy, Sukkot 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 Hashem, achieved during Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.

During these incredible days between the Days of Awe and Sukkot, we go from a place of purity (lifnei Hashem tit-ha'ru) to a place of peace (haporeis sukkat shalom aleinu).

As we sit in the Sukka, the Divine Presence surrounds us. In Chassidic thought, it is a symbol of God's love. The S'fat Emet compares the Sukka to a Chupa, wedding canopy. The Sukka is also an embrace. According to Jewish Law, the Sukka must have at least two walls and a handbreadth of a third wall. The "two walls" and a "handbreadth" could appear like an arm providing a great big divine hug. And after having gone through the Days of Awe - isn't that all we need?