

Pnimityut

The Inner Dimension of Torah

Sukkot Edition

Sukkot

ט"ו תשרי תשפ"ז

THE SUKKA

Four days after Yom Kippur, we don't return entirely to ordinary life. Instead, we build. We take boards and branches, cover them with s'chach — leaves, reeds, cut vegetation — and we move in. The halacha asks us to sleep there, eat there, to make it our home for seven days. Something from Yom Kippur has not ended. We are continuing something.

A permanent home makes a claim. Its walls say: I have secured my space. Its roof says: I am shielded from above. These are not merely practical arrangements — they express something deeper about where we believe safety comes from. The sukkah quietly overturns all of it. Its walls are thin. Its roof lets in the stars — and, by halacha, the rain. You are sitting, by design, under the open sky. Moving into the sukkah is a declaration in the other direction: my walls were never my real security. I was always in ה'’s hands. The sukkah makes that truth visible.

The Torah gives the reason: 'For I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt.' In the desert there was nothing to hold onto — no stored provisions, no permanent shelter. Everything arrived fresh each day, directly from ה'. The clouds of glory surrounded and guided them. The sukkah reenacts that reality — not as a memory, but as a renewal. For seven days we step back into that desert. Not as deprivation. As homecoming. The open s'chach overhead is not a lesser version of a roof. It is a more honest one.

On Yom Kippur we sealed ourselves in with ה' at Neilah — locked the door from the inside and said: this is where I want to be. The sukkah is that sealed connection made into a home. Four days later we build it with our hands and live inside it. The s'chach above — the leaves, the branches, the sky between them — is not a ceiling. It is the roof of the divine presence. The person who sleeps there, who stays when the air turns cold, has said something that cannot be unsaid: I trust. I am held. I am not alone. That trust, carried forward into the whole year, is the real harvest of the Yamim Noraim.

HOSHANA RABA

The seventh day of Sukkot is Hoshana Raba — the day the Zohar calls the final sealing of the judgment that was written on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur. The congregation circles the bimah seven times holding the four species, then beats five willow branches on the ground. The willows have no taste and no fragrance. They represent a Jew who arrives with nothing — no Torah to his credit, no mitzvot to display — and offers only himself. And that is enough.

The Baal Shem Tov would remain awake through the entire night of Hoshana Raba in deep concentration. One year, as the first light of dawn began to appear, a student noticed that the Besht had not moved for hours. When he finally stirred, the student gathered his courage and asked: what were you doing all this time?

The Besht said: 'On this night, the Heavenly Court dispatches the verdict — the pitka, the sealed note — for every soul. I spent the night asking for one thing: that whatever is written arrive as a message from a Father, not a decree from a judge. Because the judgment is never the end of the story. The love is.'

— Baal Shem Tov

Reb Zusha of Anipoli would beat the willows on Hoshana Raba with tears streaming down his face — and a broad smile. Those who watched him were confused by the combination. A student finally asked: how can you weep and smile at the same moment?

Reb Zusha looked at the willow in his hand. 'Do you see this? No taste. No fragrance. It represents the Jew who arrives with nothing to his name — no Torah, no good deeds. And we take it and beat it on the ground and say: here I am. Take even this. Everything I have — which may not be much — I give to You. I weep,' he said, 'because I know what I am. I smile because I know that ה' accepts it. He always does.'

— Reb Zusha of Anipoli