

From Rav Menachem Penner of Yeshivat Har Etzion

Many writers and *darshanim* noted the irony in the fact that it is specifically on the “occasion of joy” when we are commanded to leave our homes and take residence in crude, unstable and insecure structures. Intuitively, perhaps, we might have expected the Torah to require celebrating the holiday of joy in the comfort and security of our homes, where the atmosphere is far more conducive to the experience of serenity, contentment and happiness which characterizes the observance of Sukkot.

One explanation is that precisely to the contrary, the *mitzva* of *sukka* is intended (at least in part) to convey the message that genuine happiness does not require the material comforts upon which we have come to rely in our pursuit of personal contentment. The Torah commands us to celebrate and experience joy without those things which we normally associate with joy – our homes and their furnishings. It is precisely in the primitive and crude structure of the *sukka* where we are to look for the sense of purpose and satisfaction that leads to true *simcha*. We are mistaken if we hinge our feelings of contentment on our material possessions. *Simcha* is found in the *sukka*, celebrating our close relationship with God together with our families, not in material luxury.

The ironic link between *simcha* and the *sukka* conveys an additional message, as well. The *sukka* signifies not only simplicity and primitiveness, but also vulnerability. In the *sukka*, we are exposed and insecure; we do not enjoy the protection of sturdy walls or insulation – or an alarm system. Moving from our homes to the *sukka*, we forfeit the feeling of security and protection that our permanent, stable homes afford us. In this sense, the *sukka* symbolizes the anxieties and insecurities that we all experience.

The theme of vulnerability as it applies to the *sukka* lends an especially powerful dimension to the prominence of *simcha* in the Sukkot celebration. The Torah teaches us that we can, and must, experience *simcha* despite our natural fears and anxieties. We are commanded to rejoice in our relationship with our Creator even as we are understandably beset by a range of concerns and fears. The *mitzva* of *sukka* tells us that we cannot wait for every problem to be solved, for every hole in our lives to be filled, before feeling happy and content. We will always live in a “*sukka*”; there will always be legitimate concerns that weigh heavily upon our minds and cause us to feel unsettled. Nevertheless, we can and must experience

the *simcha* of serving the Almighty, even amid the struggles and difficulties that we encounter on a daily basis.