

Bookends of the Year

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The rule is “מצטער פטור מן המצוה” - one who is uncomfortable or bothered by eating in the sukkah is exempt from the mitzvah. The Gemoroh elucidates the verse of “בסוכות תשבו” - “you shall dwell in sukkos” that the dwelling be similar to that of the normal routine in your home, “תשבו כעין תדורו” - and any discomfort that you would not normally have in your home, should not be present in the sukkah either; if it is, you are exempt from the mitzvah of sukkah. Despite this, on the first night of Sukkos we must eat in the sukkah anyway according to some Rishonim. The *mitzva d'oraysa* of eating in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkos is compared halachically to the mitzvah of matzoh on the first night of Pesach. Just as there is no dispensation not to eat matzoh due to discomfort, so too discomfort will not exempt us from eating in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkos.

Sukkos and Pesach are seen as analagous by some Rishonim because Sukkos, like Pesach, is celebrated on the fifteenth of the month - Sukkos on the fifteenth of Tishrei and Pesach on the fifteenth of Nisan. We compare these two *yomim tovim* hermeneutically via “*hekesh*”, and draw halachik similarities. According to some Rishonim, one should not eat in the sukkah on the first night of Sukkos before it is definitely night time because it says in the Torah “בערב תאכלו מצות”; on the first night of Pesach, matzoh must be eaten at night. Here again, we compare the mitzvah of sukkah to the mitzvah of matzoh.

Homolectically, we also see an obvious similarity between these two holidays: the magic number at the seder is four -- four cups of wine -- and on Sukkos we also take four species -- לולב אתרוג הדס ערבה. I would like to suggest that these two holidays, which are bookends to the Jewish year as they occur on the 15th of Nissan and the 15th of Tishrei, are in fact, opposite sides of the same coin. These two holidays reflect two different dimensions that are essential to Jewish life. Pesach is a family holiday - the father must interact with his children and engage them in what is going on at the seder. Here the number four connotes family, as in the four sons “כי ישאלך בנך” - “When your son asks.” There is an obligation to respond and converse with your children. The narrative, when describing the events of the Exodus, uses the term בית repeatedly: “לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו וכו’” and “לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו וכו’” and “ואת בתנינו הציל”; “אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל וכו’” and “בבית אחד יאכל לא תוציא מן הבית” and “בבית אחד יאכל לא תוציא מן הבית”. On Pesach

there is an emphasis on the house and on family. We analyze, discuss, relate and relive the exodus with the members of our family, transmitting our Torah, history and tradition.

Sukkos, however, we are taught to leave our homes: “בסוכות תשבּוּ”. The Talmud expounds upon this phrase in the following maner “עושה אדם סוכתו קבע וביתו עראי”. One must leave his home and go into the sukkah, making that one’s fixed dwelling; the home becomes temporary and the sukkah permanent as one exchanges the indoors for the outdoors. The Gemorah in the tractate Sukkah 27B states that “כל האזרח בישראל ישבו בסכותו” -- upon which the Gemorah expounds according to the *chachomim*: “מלמד שכל ישראל ראויים לישב בסוכה אחתו” - “All of Israel can fulfill their obligation to dwell in the Sukkah by sitting in one communal sukkah. Rabbi Eliezer poses a dissenting view, that one may not share a sukkah, because it says in the possuk (*Devarim* 16:13) “חג הסוכות תעשה לך” -- “You shall make *for yourself* the festival of Sukkos”. According to this opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, Tosfos asks, every individual must have his own private sukkah, which would even exclude family members from sharing a sukkah! Whether one considers the sukkah made for individual use, as does Rabbi Eliezer, or for communal use, as do the *chachomim*, in both cases the use of the sukkah is not focused on the family. This is the antithesis of Pesach where the family must be present.

By leaving our homes on Sukkos, we shift the focus from the family to all of Israel; from the individual to the communal. The four species or *minim*, represent plant life, growth in the fields, the outdoors, unlike the four sons that represent the home and the family. We see in these two themes two dimensions of Jewish life: Pesach - the importance of the family unit, the Jewish home and transmitting our *mesorah* to the next generation, and Sukkos - taking our Torah values beyond our homes and keeping them with us at all times, wherever we are. The *hekesheh*, comparison, of 15 Nissan to 15 Tishrei mandates that every Jew synthesize these two ideals. On Pesach we must nurture and fortify our families inside our homes, and on Sukkos we must fortify ourselves for the responsibilities and commitments beyond our doorstep. These are two valuable lessons from the bookends of the Jewish year.