

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

EMOR

You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days. Every Israelite citizen shall dwell in sukkot. In order that your generations shall know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I took them out of Egypt... (23:42-43)

The HaAmek Davar explains that these p'sukim communicate two messages. There is one message for those living comfortably, and one message for the person living in poverty.

"Every Israelite citizen shall dwell in sukkot." The citizen, interprets the HaAmek Davar, is the insider, the recognized member within the community, and somebody who owns land. Remember that until recently, people were far more directly in touch with the land and its produce that we typically are today. And they were also more directly dependent on their lands, and the grains, fruits, and vegetables that their lands produced. Sukkot, the harvest festival (23:39), was the climax of the year (Sh'mot 23:16) That landowners had worked hard through the farmer's year, and had come a long way until its climax when he would gather in the highly profitable products of his hard work. It is at that time, at Sukkot, that he

would need a reminder. For no residence and landownership is permanent, as the Jews were to learn throughout their history. G-d owns, we are His tenants. Material achievements do not last forever (perhaps this explains why we read Kohelet on Sukkot). This message is conveyed by the act of moving out of our permanent dwellings into the flimsy structure made out of the products that created the wealth, the agricultural products making up the s'chach. And more generally, and that extends to today: let not the comfort of our affluence go to our heads.

"In order that your generations shall know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I took them out of Egypt". This, the HaAmek Davar explains, addresses the position of those who are not at the center, but at the margins of society. Those without possessions, those who struggle to keep going. Those who do not have permanent homes, but flimsy structures, akin to sukkot. Those whose poverty forces them to frequently migrate from place to place. They need to be reminded and reassured that, once upon a time, the whole of Am Yisrael was like that. They were not landowners and settled, established people when they emerged from slavery and left Egypt in a hurry. Yet they accepted their lot and despite they lack of permanence, they continued to enjoy G-d's

providence from day to day in ways that they could never have predicted. And as in days of old where G-d helped them as they connected with Him, so, Sukkot conveys, He will help those who connect with Him no matter how impermanent and worrying their situation.

In addition, we may add, that Sukkot is the counterpart to Pesach. On Pesach, we all are required to see ourselves as though we came out of Egypt, saved from those who wish us harm. For, the Hagada tell us, in every generation people want to destroy us, but it is G-d who saves us. As it was then, then it is now. We prove that as we are still here.

On Sukkot, farming society reaches harvest time with its annual bounty. That, together with land ownership convey wealth. These things must not go to our heads! We have to see ourselves as merely migrants and visitors in the Almighty's territory. For it is His wealth that He is allowing us to use. "For you are with Me as migrants and as visitors" (25:23). Whether the Sukkot of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim that Am Yisrael lived in were the flimsy structures we all know, or whether they were the clouds of glory of the past, they both convey the same message. They are temporary; so is life, so are our possessions great and small. Make the most of where you are in line with what is right before being moved on

to the next stage! By doing so, you link into what is permanent: G-d's plan as revealed in our sacred traditions. Wealth is entrusted to us in order to help us do our part in interacting within our environment as partners as His ongoing Creation.

And finally, let it be said that it is in the sukkah that all can meet. It is where no-one can feel over-secure in their possession, nor overawed by the other's wealth and their own hardships. 🌿🍷