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Why is Sukkot right after Yom Kippur?

Rabbi Alex Freedman

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I used to compare the High Holidays to the Super Bowl, as many others do. After all, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are certainly the days with the biggest shul attendance, highest spiritual significance, and largest amount of preparation. Likewise, the Super Bowl is the football game with the biggest audience, the most at stake, and is the culmination of a long process. But I stopped using this analogy when I realized it has a fatal flaw. Whereas the Super Bowl marks the *end* of the football season, we in synagogue are just getting *started*. Only five days after Yom Kippur and it's Sukkot! Not only are the spiritual stakes high again, but this holiday requires a lot of handiwork, as we must build a Sukkah only a few days after Yom Kippur. There are lots more prayers to sing and, oh yeah, this one lasts a full week.

Perhaps you feel similar and wonder: exactly why must Sukkot be *now*? We just got through Yom Kippur! Can't we take a breather first? Furthermore, the Torah says the reason we live in a Sukkah is to remember how G-d made the Israelites dwell in booths in the desert after Egypt. Why must that annual recollection be *now*? After all, in the desert, that was a *year-long* experience, and we could recreate that today *in any non-winter month!*

Now, the Torah was certainly aware of the holidays' timing, as it specifies the dates for Yom Kippur and then Sukkot five days later. But it doesn't say why. Today I want to offer four possibilities why these two big festivals - in many ways opposites - are only days apart. *We do not* get a breather yet, and perhaps that is entirely the point. We come to a deeper appreciation of Sukkot when we consider it not in isolation, but as directly connected to Yom Kippur.

First, perhaps the simplest reason: Sukkot not only commemorates G-d's protection of the Israelites in the wilderness, but the in-gathering of the annual harvest. Farmers' crops would grow through the spring and summer and be gathered after the growing season ended - right about now. The season when farmers amassed all this bounty was a logical time to thank G-d for the blessings of nature and of providing sustenance. That's the *agricultural* calendar at work. And the *spiritual* calendar tells us the fall harvest is the time of Yom Kippur. So this explanation suggests the two holidays are connected by seasons, not themes.

But my second answer ties directly to the theme of Yom Kippur. Let me quote Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein of 19th century Lithuania, the Aruch HaShulchan:

“It’s because G-d desires to demonstrate that even though we are sinners, nevertheless G-d doesn’t remove His providence from upon us. Following Yom Kippur [in the desert], G-d instructed [the Israelites] to make the Mishkan (Tabernacle), so His presence could dwell among them....and G-d did not remove the Clouds of Glory (Sukkah). So too G-d showed us, through this Mitzvah, this same model for all time. G-d forgives our sins on Yom Kippur when we do Teshuvah. Here’s a sign [of that forgiveness]: Immediately after Yom Kippur we are commanded to make a Sukkah in order to dwell in G-d’s shade...This shows us that despite all our sins, G-d loves us and protects us from all harm. G-d brings us under G-d’s holy and pure shade and protects us from above, (represented by the Schach).”

Yom Kippur is about G-d's forgiveness, and that is something we know in our heads. But we don't see it with our eyes. This rabbi suggests that Sukkot is a visual expression of Yom Kippur's forgiveness, that G-d wants to keep us safe and wants us to know it too. Just as G-d's Clouds of Glory kept the Israelites safe in the dangerous desert, so too in the Sukkah we see the Schach overhead and should be visually reminded that G-d continues to protect us now. I like this explanation because it ties together the two holidays with a *shared* theme of forgiveness. Yom Kippur is the *declaration* of G-d forgiving us, while Sukkot is the *expression* of G-d forgiving us and wanting to be close to us again.

That works well, but I also want to suggest a different relationship with Yom Kippur, this time a yin and yang relationship. Yom Kippur highlights the *soul*, whereas Sukkot emphasizes the *body*. Yom Kippur is about the *spiritual*, while Sukkot is about the *physical*. Yom Kippur is the day we do not attend to our physical needs - like not eating or drinking, for example - because it's the day we focus exclusively on the soul - Teshuvah, repentance and forgiveness.

But as important as the soul is to Judaism, our tradition teaches that our body is vital too, to be cared for and not ignored. For each of us is a body and a soul. The body is the vehicle that allows us to actually build a better world. To bring ourselves back in balance after the soul searching of Yom Kippur, we need to swing the pendulum all the way back to the physical, which Sukkot provides in droves. We have to build a Sukkah with our hands. We have to take up the Lulav and Etrog with our hands, each species of

which offers different tastes and smells. We have to physically go outside to eat in our Sukkah and bundle up in the cold weather. It's the most embodied, physical holiday that we have. There is a spiritual message to the holiday, of course, but we get there only through these very physical acts. In other words, Sukkot goes together with Yom Kippur because the *soul and the body* go together.

Finally, I want to suggest a fourth view: For me, Sukkot is like January 2nd. Together, the High Holidays mark not only the beginning of the year but a clean wiping of the slate. Sukkot offers the opportunity to start the year on the right foot and create the right habits: with Mitzvot, with joining as community in shul, with joining friends and family for quality time in the Sukkah. It's the logical follow up to the High Holidays because Sukkot emphasizes all that we think about on the High Holidays: relationships, community, and G-d. It's a time to put our plan in action.

Sukkot demonstrates our belief that the foundation of our home is not four walls and a roof. It's family, friends, community, and G-d. *That's* what really makes our home what it is, *that's* what keeps us warm. What's most important in life is not *what* we have, it's *who* we have.

Sukkot isn't just about the What and the Why. It's also about the When.

Chag Sameach.