



# MACCABI WORLD UNION

## Department of Education

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תשרי תשע"ח

### חג הסוכות

## *The Festival of Succot: Joy and Fragility*

**Dear friends,**

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, in which we remember the salvation of the Jewish People at the mercy of the elements in Sinai and our 40-year journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel, is also referred to as HeHag<sup>1</sup>, **The Festival**, to emphasize its especially joyful and festive character. We are specifically commanded by the Divine to delight in this Festival. God unequivocally tells us, "*Ve'Samach'ta be'Chage'cha*" - "*And you shall rejoice in your festival*"<sup>2</sup>, as important a mitzvah as constructing the Succah<sup>3</sup> - a flimsy and temporary mini-cabin with natural light passing between the flimsy branches that form its roof.

These two orders, **to rejoice** in this "Feast of Joy par excellence", and **to build a Succah**, seem contradictory. On one hand, we have the imperative of celebration, the feast, the way towards joy and happiness. On the other, we are ordered to raise a Succah, a symbol of fragility in itself and in ourselves - exposed within it to the vagaries of the climate (in Israel, this often means rain). This symbol demands our own sensitivity to those who are weak, who need our help - in all ranges of human fragility: poor and impoverished, sick, abandoned, hurt, and more. How should we reconcile these two imperatives of Succot, the demand **for joy** and the demand **for sensitivity**?

The joy of Succot **is a collective, popular, national joy**. Even though the Torah imperative is given in the **singular** voice "*Ve'Samach'ta be'Chage'cha*" - "*And you (a singular person) shall rejoice in your festival*", **the practice of Succot is collective**. This therefore demands that one should not take care only of **his or her personal** joy and happiness, but also of **the general** joy and happiness – of our family, our people, our community. Succot seems to say to us: "The pursuit of **personal** happiness independent of the happiness of those around us **is a selfish pursuit** that does not lead to the desired results. **True happiness is a group patrimony**. You must give access to happiness of those around you. If they suffer, living in 'the fragile Succah', in pain and sorrow, your personal happiness may be simple frivolity."

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<sup>1</sup> Vayk. XXIII, 39, 41; Bamid. XXIX, 12; Dev. XVI, 14; I Mel. VIII, 2; Yechez. XXXXv, 25; Nech. VIII, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Devarim (Deuteronomy) XVI, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Vaikrah (Leviticus) XXIII, 42.



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Unlike hedonism, Judaism intimately links **happiness** with **goodness**. Someone is happy when s/he brings goodness to others; they enjoy that goodness together. Happiness transcends the field of **aesthetics** to enter the field of **ethics**. That is perhaps the dialogue between **demanding joy** and **demanding empathy** in Succot. In the action of goodness, both are one. This is the General Goodness: goodness in societies, communities and families where we live, which we serve; goodness that brings happiness to those who are important to us.

**May God grant us the opportunity to celebrate the profound bliss of another joyful Succot, full of song and dance, with our families and communities.**

**May God grant us wisdom to know the difference between our reasons for authentic, and vain, futile, and transient things devoid of genuine value.**

**May God guide us to understand that happiness is possible only when it is shared by others, in a chain of mutual responsibility directed towards Goodness.**

**May we have a Chag with true joy.**

**With best wishes,  
Chag Succot Sameach!  
Chazak ve'ematz!**

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