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By

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The Torah informs us that the festival of Succoth commemorates God's providence over the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness. An old question is: why was this holiday scheduled to begin specifically on the 15th day of Tishri? The dates for Pessah (15 Nissan) and for Shavuoth (6 Sivan) are clearly linked to historical events—the day of the Exodus and the day of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. But the wandering in the wilderness was ongoing for 40 years, with no particular historic connection to Tishri 15?

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, in his Torat Hayyim al ha-Moadim, suggests that the Tishri 15 date was specified by the Almighty so as to be parallel to the Nissan 15 date of Pessah. Since the Exodus from Egypt is so central to Jewish thought and observance, Pessah and Succoth were set exactly six months apart, to the day, in order to ensure that we experience the power of the Exodus on a regular basis every six months.

The great 18th century sage, Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (known popularly as the Hidah), offers a different explanation in his Midbar Kedeimot. He notes that the lives of our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob overlapped for fifteen years. When Abraham died, his grandson Jacob was 15 years old. In rabbinic tradition Abraham is identified with Pessah, Isaac with Shavuoth, and Jacob with Succoth. (See Tur O.H. 417). Because of the merit of these extraordinary 15 years, the holy days of Pessah and Succoth were both set for the 15th of the month.

The Hidah is alluding to something deeper than the clever confluence of numbers. He suggests that the 15 years of shared lifetime among Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were a period of extreme happiness for the world. These three luminaries literally changed the course of history and brought humanity to a better understanding of the One God. Succoth, which is known in our tradition as the season of our happiness (zeman simhateinu), commemorates the extraordinary happiness and enlightenment that emerged at the founding of our nation.

Since Pessah (symbolized by Abraham) and Succoth (symbolized by Jacob) both occur on the 15th day of the month, this highlights the special link between grandfather Abraham and grandson Jacob. When grandparents and grandchildren share ideas and ideals, this is a sign of continuity, love…and genuine happiness. When there is a "generation gap," there is sadness and alienation. Just as Pessah

and Succoth are linked together by sharing the date of 15, so Abraham and Jacob are bound together by their shared 15 years of life.

Pessah and Succoth celebrate the Exodus from Egypt in ancient times. The relationship between Abraham and Jacob suggests the key to the future redemption of Israel—when the traditions are shared, loved and experienced by the generations of grandparents and grandchildren. A teacher of mine once quipped: Who is a Jew? Someone with Jewish grandchildren! While this is not an objectively true statement, it underscores a vital principle in the Jewish adventure: the importance of transmitting our teachings and values through the generations.

The genuine happiness that derives from family and national continuity does not just happen by chance. It is the result of deep devotion, strong commitment, and many sacrifices. There is a vast difference between happiness and amusement. Happiness entails a genuine and deep sense of wholeness. It is not attained casually. Amusement, on the other hand, is a passing sense of enjoyment. It is shallow and ephemeral. We laugh at a joke, we enjoy watching a sports event—but these amusements do not touch our souls in a lasting way. Whereas happiness is achieved through active and thoughtful involvement, amusement is essentially a passive experience. We sit back and wait to be entertained. Succoth, the festival of our happiness, reminds us to strive for genuine happiness, to be committed to transmitting our traditions through the generations, to distinguish between real happiness and shallow amusement. Mo’adim leSimha.

Angel for Shabbat