Jewish Tribune – Succos

**The Succos Smuggler**

The guard on duty watched the man drive his shiny new Mercedes towards the border. He had been on duty for only a short time and was fresh and alert. No smuggler was going to get past him or pull the wool over his eyes.

The border guard signalled to the driver to stop and told the custom officials to search the car thoroughly, all the time eying the driver suspiciously. They searched his luggage and then opened the boot of the car - all they could find were several bags of soil carefully placed in the boot of the car. The custom officials sifted through the soil and found nothing.

The border guard stepped towards the driver and asked him why he had bags of soil in his boot. The driver replied that he was building a new house in a village across the border and he wanted to do so with better quality soil.

The border guard could not see any contravention and allowed him through.

The next day, the same driver, in his shiny Mercedes, approached the border. The exact story repeated itself. Nothing of interest other than bags of soil in the boot. The same story and the border guard allowed him across the border.

This continued almost daily for several weeks. The border guard felt something was wrong but could pin anything on the driver.

Finally, a few months later, the driver of the Mercedes approached the border again and told the guard that he now had enough soil, and this would be his final trip. The guard could not contain his curiosity and said to the driver: “Look, I know something fishy is going on here, but I promise you that I will allow you across the border this last time if you just tell me what you are smuggling.”

“Do you absolutely promise?”

“Yes” begged the guard. “I swear over my very life.”

“Ok” said the driver, “I’ve been smuggling Mercedes cars.”

Sometimes we confuse what is *ikar* and what is *tofel*. What is important and what is trivial. It is easy to get caught up in the peripheral areas of life.

Succos is a time to remind us of what is important. It’s a week of “back to basics”.

And the basics are that life is “*diras arai*”. We sometimes journey through this world in the unspoken contemplation that it goes on forever. But, of course, it doesn’t. It is merely a corridor that we pass through.

And this is not a depressing thought. On the contrary, Succos is **זמן שמחתינו** – a time of simcha. The very realisation that life is transient and full of opportunity to earn eternal reward is a source of happiness.

But what is simcha and how do we attain it?

Rabbi Tatz puts it quite simply: “Real happiness is what you experience when you are doing what you should be doing. When you are moving clearly along your own road, your unique path to your destination, you experience real happiness.”

The trouble is many people confuse happiness with pleasure. Pleasure is ok, but if it becomes our life’s goal, or if we become dependent on it, we’re in trouble.

The succah must be a *diras arai* – a temporary dwelling. Its walls may not be higher than twenty amos as this is deemed too permanent, but the Gemora (Succah 2a) permits *mechitzos shel barzel* – walls of iron. What is the difference between an overly high succah and a metal succah?

The Gemora explains that a height of less than twenty amos is suitable for a temporary dwelling and therefore, even if he made his succah with a permanent metal structure, it is permitted. But higher than twenty amos is suitable *only* for a permanent building and is therefore invalid.

Rav Yisroel Miller explains the message of this Gemorah. There is nothing wrong enjoying life’s pleasures so long as they do not become our passion and control us. The succah can indeed be made of walls of iron, or gold and silver, but it must be low enough that the structure *could* be temporary, made of more basic materials. We can enjoy our material possessions so long as we don’t need them or rely on them to bring us happiness.

Real happiness is when external circumstances cease to control us and we see the world as a temporary dwelling. It is what we experience when we do what we should be doing.

That is why, in parshas Ha’azinu, Moshe Rabbeinu compares the Torah to rain that waters the ground and brings forth its produce. We all have different abilities, talents and life circumstances but we can all find happiness. It is not based on external factors. We simply have to develop these talents and do what we should be doing.

The Sifrei (Ha’azinu 306) explains Moshe Rabbeinu’s message as follows: just as the rain is one thing, yet it falls on produce enabling each to deliver its own unique fruit, the vine in its way, the olive tree in its way and so too the date palm.

There is only one Torah, yet it nurtures us all. Torah is compared to rain precisely to emphasise that its most important effect is to make each of us grow into what we could become.

And that is key to a happy life and real simcha. Remaining focused on the *ikar* and not the *tofel*, a mistake that even the most vigilant of border guards can make.

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