

Once Upon a Time ... The Story Told by the Chagim

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The Torah spans several thousand years, starting with the creation of the world and continuing with the flood, the Avot, the exodus from Egypt, and the years in the desert. Over the course of these thousands of years, numerous events transpired that were so significant they could easily have justified the creation of a holiday to memorialize them every year. For example, God could have mandated an annual holiday to commemorate the end of the flood, or akeidat Yitzchak, or the first time He spoke to Avraham, to name a few possibilities. Yet, despite thousands of years' worth of history and events, a surprising fact emerges: **All three of the holidays that comprise the shalosh regalim – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot – commemorate events that took place in the self-same year.** Pesach celebrates the exodus from Egypt which took place on the 15th of Nissan in the Jewish year 2448. Seven weeks later, the Israelites accepted the Torah, which is the event the holiday of Shavuot recreates. Regarding the holiday of Sukkot, the Torah tells us explicitly:

In booths you shall dwell for seven days so that your generations will know that I (God) housed Bnei Yisrael in booths when I took them out of Egypt.

VaYikra 23:42-43

בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים למען ידעו דורותיכם
כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא
אותם מארץ מצרים
ויקרא כג:מב-מג

Since it is most probable that God began sheltering the Jewish nation in booths²⁹ immediately upon saving them from Egypt rather than leaving them homeless for an initial period of time, it emerges that the third holiday of the shalosh regalim recreates an occurrence that began the very same year as its two counterparts.

²⁸ I would like to thank the following people for their insightful suggestions upon reading the first draft of this article: My husband, Nir; my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Ushi and Zina Freundlich; my brother, Rabbi Yechezkel Freundlich; my sister, Mrs. Shira Wiesen; and my friend and colleague, Mrs. Rivka Kahan.

²⁹ Regardless of whether they were literally booths (sukkot mamash) or the ananei hakavod, as debated by Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer on Sukkah 11b.

The significance of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot recollecting events that took place in the same year is that it indicates that each is not an isolated holiday meant to celebrate an independent event, but rather all three are integrally connected parts of one continuous story.

We all recognize the fundamental connection between Pesach and Shavuot; after all, we count Sefirah to directly link the exodus from Egypt to Matan Torah. However, what role does Sukkot play in this story? Upon closer inspection, it is not even clear what significance the booths possess at all, that they merited an entire week-long holiday when the binding of Isaac and the manna in the desert did not. But once one recognizes that the booths are in some way linked to yetziat Mitzrayim, the question becomes all the more pressing: What eternal significance do these booths possess at all, and what critical insight do they add to the exodus narrative in particular?

Recognizing that our sukkot are meant to recreate the booths in the desert raises a second anomaly: Sukkot's baffling placement in the calendar. Since the Torah explicitly tells us that we are to build sukkot to remind ourselves of the booths in which God housed us in the desert, it would seem that this holiday should be celebrated immediately after Pesach, since that is when we entered the desert and presumably began being housed in the booths. Yet instead of being placed in Nissan where it would chronologically belong, the holiday of Sukkot is not celebrated until six months later in Tishrei,³⁰ only two weeks after Rosh Hashanah and a mere five days after Yom Kippur! The question is thus compounded: Why isn't Sukkot immediately after Pesach where it belongs, and why is it instead immediately after Yom Kippur?

To more deeply understand both the significance and the timing of Sukkot, one must first reexamine the holiday that precedes it, Shavuot.

We usually view the annual cycle of Jewish holidays as beginning in Tishrei with the New Year holiday of Rosh Hashanah, followed closely by Yom Kippur and Sukkot. However, once we recognize that through our celebration of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, we are reliving the experience of one single momentous year, it follows that the chagim should be experienced in the chronological order of how the events unfolded that year. Thus, the beginning should not be Rosh Hashanah, but rather, Pesach, which celebrates the Exodus. And in fact, the Torah calls Nissan, the month during which Pesach falls, the Rosh Chodashim, the first of the months,³¹ and

³⁰ The Tur addresses this question in Orach Chayim 625. He posits that Sukkot was not placed in Nissan when the weather is beautiful because everyone sits outside in the shade then of their own volition. In Tishrei, the rainy season begins so it is recognizable that we are sitting outside because of a Divine command. Interestingly, the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim III:43 suggests the opposite – that the timing of Sukkot is because “it is possible to live in the tabernacle during that season, there being no great heat nor an uncomfortable rain.” The Ibn Ezra on Shemot 23:43 proposes, contrary to what I assume above, that Bnei Yisrael did not actually construct booths immediately upon their exodus from Egypt since they had God's cloud protecting them from the sun. The booths were not necessary until Tishrei when the weather turned colder. The Vilna Gaon (in his commentary to the opening pesukim of Shir HaShirim) suggests that our sukkot do not commemorate the moment Bnei Yisrael initially began being protected by the ananei hakavod upon leaving Egypt, but rather the moment the ananei hakavod returned to Bnei Yisrael after they were forgiven for Chet HaEgel, which occurred in Tishrei. This article will suggest yet another possible explanation.

³¹ Shemot 12:2 – "החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה"

Rosh Hashanah's Tishrei is called the *seventh* month!³² Similarly, Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1 says, "באחד בניסן ראש השנה למלכים ולרגלים" - *the first of Nissan is Rosh Hashanah for kings and for the Festivals*.

Shavuot, then, which is celebrated only seven weeks after Pesach, does not fall toward the conclusion of the year, but is instead closer to the beginning. At first glance, this seems perplexing, even anticlimactic. Shavuot would seem to have been the perfect culmination of the year, the perfect “happily ever after,” for this is when Am Yisrael received the Torah and our nationhood gained its purpose. However, upon closer inspection, it is evident that it absolutely cannot be “The End” because Matan Torah does not, in fact, have a happy ending. A mere forty days after the most awesome Divine revelation in all of history, Moshe descends from Mount Sinai to find the nation worshipping a Golden Calf. And Moshe reacts by smashing the luchot, effectively obliterating the Divine covenant that had been enacted on Shavuot. Thus, Shavuot cannot be the final holiday of the year or the year would end in tragedy, with our relationship with God in ruins, our covenant with Him null and void.

The day that Moshe shattered the luchot was none other than Shiva Asar B'Tamuz, a day designated for fasting and mourning throughout the generations. We don't usually associate Shiva Asar B'Tamuz with Shavuot since we generally connect it to the Beit HaMikdash; after all, it laments the breaching of the city walls and initiates the three weeks of mourning that lead up to Tisha B'Av. However, the Mishnah in Ta'anit 4:6 explicitly states that the 17th of Tammuz mourns five different tragedies, the first of which was the breaking of the Luchot.³³ Thus, interestingly, not only are Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot all part of the story that unfolded that first year following the Exodus, but Shiva Asar B'Tammuz is as well.

Thankfully, however, Shavuot and Shiva Asar B'Tammuz are not the end of the story. After shattering the luchot, Moshe proceeds to punish the people. He burns the egel, grinds it up, scatters the dust into water, and gives it to Bnei Yisrael to drink. He confronts Aharon, declares, “מי לה' אלי,” and when Bnei Levi respond to the call, he instructs them to kill their brethren who have sinned. The next day, Moshe announces that now that the most serious perpetrators have been punished, he is ready to approach God and beg for amnesty and mercy. And so he ascends for an additional forty days and nights, this time to plead for forgiveness.³⁴ He then descends only to be called up once again, on Rosh Chodesh Elul, which we now designate as the beginning of the intense Teshuvah period. Forty days later, Moshe triumphantly descends again, this time carrying with him the second luchot, signifying God's forgiveness of His people.

³² VaYikra 23:24, 27, 34

³³ See Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom's article, “Sinai and Tziyyon,” on Yeshivat Har Etzion's Virtual Beit Midrash (www.vbm-torah.org/3weeks/3wyitz.htm) where he suggests that all five of the tragedies mourned on 17 Tammuz, even those that seem primarily Beit Hamikdash-related, fundamentally represent a rejection of Sinai. He posits that “Rejection of Sinai” is the central theme of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz. Thank you to Rachel Weber for bringing this article to my attention.

³⁴ Shemot 32:19-31. Interestingly, the 9th of Av happens to fall out during these days when Moshe is imploring God to forgive Bnei Yisrael but their fate is uncertain. However, Klal Yisrael's “bechiya le'chinam” during Chet HaMeraglim that establishes Tisha B'Av as a day of mourning le'dorot does not occur until the following year, Bnei Yisrael's second year in the desert.

If one performs the calculations, as Rashi does in his commentary to Shemot 33:11, one comes to the startling realization that the day when God revealed His willingness to once again enter into a covenant with Am Yisrael was none other than the tenth of Tishrei, more famously known as Yom Kippur.

Thus, the “original” Yom Kippur took place the same extraordinary year during which the events that generated Pesach, Shavuot, Shivah Asar B’Tammuz, and Sukkot all occurred. And we see that Shavuot is not only linked to Pesach, which is evident since we count the Omer between the two, but it is also integrally connected to Yom Kippur, for that is when the luchot and covenant that were originally forged on Shavuot but subsequently shattered, are reinstated. Yom Kippur is thus not only the climax of Rosh Hashanah, but also the ultimate culmination of Shavuot.

Recognizing this aspect of Yom Kippur has far-reaching implications for the significance and meaning of the day. We generally think of Yom Kippur as a day to introspect, pray, fast, and focus on our personal and national relationship with our Creator. It is of course about all of these critical notions. However, appreciating its historical significance as the day on which the second luchot were given, essentially as Matan Torah Part II, enhances it with a powerful new dimension as well.

The giving of the second luchot is often viewed simply as an addendum or postscript to the first, original Matan Torah. But an examination of the pesukim reveals that the second luchot were given amongst a Divine revelation of their own, one which rivaled that of the initial Matan Torah and may even have surpassed it as being the most intense Divine revelation in history.

God agrees to grant the second luchot as a result of Moshe’s compelling pleas on behalf of the people in the wake of Chet HaEgel. The back and forth negotiations that take place between Moshe and Hashem during this encounter are very enigmatic. Moshe is supposed to be asking for forgiveness for the people, but instead, he asks for some type of private showing of the Divine. Surprisingly, God acquiesces to these brazen demands.

And [Moshe] said, please show me Your glory. And [God] said I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of God before you... you will not be able to see My face since no human can see My face and live. And it shall be that when My glory passes by that I will put you in a cleft of the rock and will cover you with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away My hand and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.

Shemot 33:18-23

ויאמר הראני נא את כבודך: ויאמר אני
אעביר כל טובי על פניך וקראתי בשם ה'
לפניך ... ויאמר לא תוכל לראת את פני
כי לא יראני האדם וחי: ויאמר ה' הנה
מקום אתי ונצבת על הצור: והיה בעבר
כבדי ושמתיד בנקרת הצור ושכתי כפי
עליך עד עברי: והסרת את כפי וראית
את אחרי ופני לא יראו:
שמות לג: יח-כג

It is in the *pesukim* immediately following this awe-inspiring promise of Divine revelation that God commands Moshe to carve out the second set of tablets.³⁵ The *pesukim* then describe the following remarkable experience:

³⁵ Shemot 34:1-4.

God descended in a cloud and stood with him there and he proclaimed the name of God. And God passed by before him and proclaimed, "Hashem, Hashem, Almighty, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and truth. He preserves kindness for thousands (of generations), forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and acquits.

וירד ה' בענן וייתצב עמו שם
ויקרא בשם ה' ויעבר ה' על פניו
ויקרא ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך
אפים ורב חסד ואמת נצר חסד
לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
ונקה

It is in the afterglow (literally – see *Shemot* 34:29) of this experience of the Divine that Moshe actually inscribes the tablets with the Ten Commandments and brings them down to the people. Thus, the giving of the second luchot was not simply an afterthought to the initial Matan Torah, but was accompanied by its own independent experience of intense Divine Revelation and the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

Furthermore, not only were the second luchot accompanied by an experience of the Divine, but this revelation may have been even more powerful than the initial Matan Torah itself. At the first luchot, the people experienced God amidst thunder, lightning, smoke, and clouds, while at the second luchot, God showed *Himself* to the greatest degree that a human being could possibly withstand; He passed before Moshe and even had to cover Moshe with His hand so as to protect him from the intensity of what he was witnessing. In addition, at the initial Matan Torah, God revealed His laws – the Ten Commandments, but at the second luchot, He revealed His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, i.e. His qualities, His personality, so to speak. In fact, it was not after the initial Matan Torah that Moshe's face glowed, but only after this Thirteen Middot revelation.³⁶ Thus, though the revelation that accompanied the first luchot was unique in that it was to the entire nation, the revelation associated with the second luchot is unrivaled in terms of its quality and intensity - the degree to which God allowed Himself to be experienced by man.

Yom Kippur is transformed by its identification as the day on which the second luchot were given. The mitzvot which most characterize the day are the five inuyim - refraining from eating and drinking, wearing shoes, washing, using lotions, and marital intimacy. The message of these restrictions seems to be to remove ourselves from our physicality on this awesome day, and instead to focus exclusively on our spiritual essence. While this undoubtedly is a central theme of Yom Kippur, recollecting that the first Yom Kippur in history is also Matan Torah Part II gives the inuyim an additional level of meaning: They may also be our way of reenacting Moshe receiving the second luchot.

One of the miraculous aspects of Moshe's time in *shamayim* was "לחם לא אכל ומים לא שתה" - *He did not eat bread or drink water.*³⁷ Fasting is thus not just about removing ourselves from the physical, but is our way of recreating Moshe's encounter with the Divine. Similarly, we refrain from wearing leather shoes, just as Moshe was instructed by the burning bush, "של" - *Remove your shoes from your feet.*³⁸ In fact, the Gemara *Berachot* 62b derives

³⁶ *Shemot* 34:29.

³⁷ *Shemot* 34:28.

³⁸ *Shemot* 3:5.

from this *pasuk* a general prohibition against ever wearing shoes on the Temple Mount – shoes are inappropriate when in the presence of the shechinah. Likewise, marital relations are forbidden on Yom Kippur, which is reminiscent of the fact that Moshe separated from his wife in order to be prepared to receive prophecy at any moment, and that before Matan Torah all Jews were instructed to refrain from relations with their spouses in preparation for their encounter with God.³⁹ Clearly, our observance of the five inuyim is not just about removing ourselves from physicality; it is also our way of reliving the giving of the second luchot, which took place on this day.

Similarly, the climax of Yom Kippur during the times of the Beit HaMikdash was the Kohen Gadol entering the Kodesh Kadashim - the one and only day of the year that a human being could do so. Clearly this was a reenactment of Moshe ascending for the most intense encounter with God that is humanly possible.⁴⁰

The teshuvah we do on Yom Kippur, then, is not an end unto itself; it is the means through which we become worthy of drawing closer to God than we ever have before. Experiencing new heights in the intensity of our relationship with the Almighty is the ultimate goal and essence of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur, then, would seem to be the perfect conclusion to the remarkable story we relive annually as we observe the holidays. The story of this extraordinary year begins with the Exodus, seems to climax with Matan Torah forty days later, but comes crashing down on the 17th of Tammuz with the shattering of the luchot. However, on the tenth of Tishrei, the relationship has been repaired, the luchot have been given again, and the covenant has been reinstated, all amidst an intense Divine Revelation and issuing of Divine Forgiveness. It would seem that Yom Kippur should have been the grand finale, the conclusion of this remarkable year. Yet, a mere five days later, on the 15th of Tishrei, another holiday commences – Sukkot, which seems superfluous and anticlimactic. This brings us back to the questions which we posed at the outset - what is Sukkot doing here where it does not even chronologically belong? What is the significance of these booths and what do they add to the story?

To discover the answers to these questions, we must look back to Tanakh and explore what actually happened that formative year right after Hashem forgave the Jewish people and granted them the second luchot on Yom Kippur. Klal Yisrael's immediate next undertaking was to throw themselves into the construction of the Mishkan.⁴¹ The fact that immediately after Yom Kippur we begin to construct sukkot⁴² indicates a link between the mishkan and our booths.⁴³

³⁹ Shemot 19:15.

⁴⁰ Both Rav Avrohom Gordimer (www.ou.org/torah/gordimer/5764/yomkippur64.htm) and Rav Yair Kahn (www.vbm-torah.org/roshandyk/yk57-yak.htm) make this point.

⁴¹ Shemot perakim 35-40.

⁴² The Rama codifies the practice of beginning to construct one's sukkah literally on Motzai Yom Kippur both in the last siman of Hilchot Yom HaKippurim (624:5) and in the first siman of Hilchot Sukkah (625:1).

⁴³ In fact, according to the Vilna Gaon (in his commentary to Shir HaShirim 1:4), the construction of the Mishkan actually began on exactly the fifteenth of Tishrei, what we celebrate as the first day of Sukkot!

There are also compelling parallels between the mishkan and our sukkot. For example, since the Mishkan needed to be repeatedly taken apart and reconstructed so as to accompany Bnei Yisrael on their travels through the desert, it was a temporary structure. This is highlighted by its appellation, “Ohel moed,” – tent of meeting, in contrast to the Temple, which is designated the Beit HaMikdash – House of Holiness. Similarly, one of the critical characteristics of a sukkah is that it must be a temporary structure; if it is too permanent, it is invalid for the mitzvah.⁴⁴ In addition, the seven day Sukkot holiday followed by Shemini Atzeret is reminiscent of the inauguration ceremony for the Mishkan,⁴⁵ which lasted for seven days, followed by the final Yom HaShmini.⁴⁶ Thus, in addition to symbolizing the booths in which God housed Bnei Yisrael in the desert as the peskuim explicitly tell us, it seems clear that our sukkot also represent the Mishkan.

To fully appreciate the implications of us symbolically constructing the Mishkan every year immediately after Yom Kippur, we must analyze the significance of the building of the Mishkan that eventful year in the desert. There could not have been a more powerful expression of God’s genuine forgiveness of Klal Yisrael than the Mishkan. This is because the Mishkan is precisely what hung in the balance during those fearful days when Moshe pleaded with Hashem to forgive Bnei Yisrael for Chet HaEgel; if God had not fully forgiven them, there would have been no Mishkan. This is for two reasons. First, as the Ramban convincingly elucidates on Shemot 25:1, the grand purpose of the Mishkan was to serve as a permanent Matan Torah so that experiencing closeness with the Divine would not be a one-time event frozen in history but that the Shechina should dwell as a constant presence at the center of Am Yisrael’s camp. Thus, once the brit of Matan Torah was severed by the shattering of the Luchot, there obviously could not and would not be a structure meant to perpetuate this now obsolete event. Second, the reason the Mishkan would have been able to serve as a true “mini-Har Sinai” is that its entire purpose was “ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם” – *Make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.*⁴⁷ However, even though Moshe convinced Hashem not to utterly destroy Bnei Yisrael in the wake of Chet HaEgel, the relationship between God and the Jewish people was severely damaged. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag⁴⁸ points out that prior to Chet HaEgel, when God describes the malach who would lead Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, He says, “כי לא ישא לפשעכם כי שמי בקרבו” – *He will not forgive your sins for My name is in him.*⁴⁹ In stark contrast, when he describes the malach after the Sin, He says, “כי לא אעלה בקרבך כי עם קשה ערף אתה פן אכלך בדרך” – *For I will not go up amongst you because you are a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the way.*⁵⁰ This new distance that God is now imposing between Himself and the people is not meant simply to punish them; rather it is the logical and necessary consequence of Bnei Yisrael’s behavior. If God dwells in their midst, their sins necessitate immediate and harsh retribution. Therefore if

⁴⁴ See Gemara Sukkah 2a.

⁴⁵ Described in VaYikra 8-9.

⁴⁶ This parallel even has practical halachic ramifications. The Gemara Sukkah 43a derives that the mitzvah of eating in a sukkah applies at night as well as during the day based on a gezeirah shavah with the Shevah Yemei Miluim, rejecting a competing comparison with the mitzvah of lulav, which applies only during the day.

⁴⁷ Shemot 25:8.

⁴⁸ www.tanach.org/shmot/kitisa.doc

⁴⁹ Shemot 23:21.

⁵⁰ Shemot 33:3.

God is to avoid destroying them, He has no choice but to move out. And in fact, this is precisely what He does; He instructs Moshe to move the Ohel Moed "מחוץ למחנה הרחק מן המחנה" - *outside the camp far from the camp*.⁵¹ If God cannot dwell among us, if He cannot and will not fulfill "ושכנתי בתוכם," then by definition there can be no Mishkan.

However, Moshe refuses to accept this state of affairs, and he boldly challenges God to change His mind. As we discussed earlier, he essentially demands some type of personal one-on-one experience of Divine revelation, and God surprisingly accedes to this request by passing before Moshe and proclaiming to him the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. This was more than God simply revealing to Moshe His character traits; this was God *changing* His character traits. As Rabbi Leibtag has convincingly developed,⁵² the yud gimmel midot are God's vehicle for radically altering the rules of how He will interact with Bnei Yisrael. Rabbi Leibtag points out that Hashem embedded a number of His traits within the Ten Commandments that He revealed on Har Sinai. They include "קל קנא" - *a zealous God*,⁵³ "פוקד עון אבות על בנים" - *remembering the sin of parents upon their children*,⁵⁴ and "כי לא ינקה ה'" - *for God will not forgive (he who says His Name in vain)*.⁵⁵ These harsh characteristics stand in stark contrast to the way that God describes Himself in the yud gimmel middot harachamim: "קל רחום וחנון" - *a merciful and gracious God*, "נושא עון ופושע" - *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*, and "ונקה" - *and acquits*.⁵⁶

Since the yud gimmel middot change the rules of God's interaction with Am Yisrael and introduce mercy into the equation, they make it possible for God to move back in with Klal Yisrael without having to destroy them every time they sin. Thus, the yud gimmel middot, the content of the revelation that accompanied the giving of the second luchot on Yom Kippur, are precisely what enables "v'shachanti betocham" to be fulfilled, Matan Torah to be perpetuated, and the Mishkan to be built! And in fact, immediately after this revelation to Moshe, the next thing described in the pesukim is the command to carry out the construction of the Mishkan.⁵⁷

This might explain why even after delineating in exhaustive detail all the instructions for building the Mishkan in Parshiot Terumah and Tetzaveh,⁵⁸ the Torah repeats every detail of the actual construction in Parshiot VaYakhel and Pekudei.⁵⁹ God could have simply summed it up in one short line - "And they built it exactly as God had commanded them." However, because Chet HaEgel took place in the interim between the command and the execution, the execution almost didn't take place at all. The details are spelled out again because each and every piece of the

⁵¹ Shemot 33:7.

⁵² www.tanach.org/shmot/kitisa.doc

⁵³ Shemot 20:4 within the second commandment (not to have other gods)

⁵⁴ Also in Shemot 20:4 within the second commandment. R. Leibtag notes that almost the identical phrase is repeated in the context of the Yud Gimmel Middot HaRachamim, but he points out that the phrases' contexts indicate that they are to be interpreted differently, as Rashi does.

⁵⁵ Shemot 20:7 within the third commandment.

⁵⁶ Shemot 34:6-7. R. Leibtag brings 3 additional examples of middot that change from pre to post Yud Gimmel Middot.

⁵⁷ Shemot 35.

⁵⁸ Shemot 25-31.

⁵⁹ Shemot 35-40.

Mishkan is a testament to God's intimate relationship with us, and drives home the message that He has wholeheartedly forgiven us and is going to move in with us after all.

Thus, nothing could be more fitting than going straight from Yom Kippur into the holiday of Sukkot. The teshuvah we have done is concretized and channeled into our constructing a physical structure for the Almighty. And the forgiveness that we have hopefully earned from God is given tangible expression by the Divine command to construct a dwelling in which God will reside together with us. And it seems that God does in fact come to dwell in our sukkot and give it a unique kedushah.

Just as the Heavenly name (i.e. sanctification) attaches itself upon a chagigah offering, so too the Heavenly name attaches itself upon a sukkah.

Gemara Sukkah 9a

כשם שחל שם שמים על החגיגה
כך חל שם שמים על הסכה
סוכה ט.

In fact, the Gemara there derives a practical halachah from the kedushah that inheres in the sukkah – it is prohibited to use the sukkah⁶⁰ for personal benefit throughout the chag.⁶¹ Similarly, the Mishnah Berurah writes, “Since the holiness of a sukkah is very great, one should minimize mundane talk in it, and instead speak in it only holiness and Torah.”⁶² Also, and perhaps most notably, the minimum height of a sukkah, ten tefachim, is based on the height of the aron, the focal point of the Mishkan.⁶³ Significantly, the Gemara explains that the reason the aron had to be ten tefachim high was to enable God to reveal Himself upon it⁶⁴ since God does not descend within ten tefachim of the ground.⁶⁵ The fact that the minimum height of our sukkot is also ten tefachim indicates that our sukkot, like the aron, are designed to be places for the shechinah to descend and interact with us.⁶⁶

Armed with this new appreciation of the significance of our sukkot, we can answer the questions we posed about Sukkot at the outset. If the booths in the desert had been the totality of what we commemorate with our sukkot, then the holiday probably would have been five days (or even fewer) after Pesach, rather than five days after Yom Kippur. However, the booths were probably not, in fact, the most significant element of Bnei Yisrael's sojourn in the desert, and did not

⁶⁰ There is a machloket whether the issur hana'ah applies only to the s'chach or also to the walls.

⁶¹ This halachah is codified in the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 638:1.

⁶² Orach Chayim 439, se'if katan 2 – “ולפי שקדושת הסכה גדולה מאד ראוי למעט בה בדברי הול ולדבר בה כי אם קדושה ותורה”

⁶³ Sukkah 4b-5a.

⁶⁴ As it says in Shemot 25:22, “ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים אשר על ארון העדות” – There I will meet with you and I will speak with you from above the covering, from between the two keruvim which are upon the Ark of Testimony.

⁶⁵ The Gemara (Sukkah 5a) explains that this is because God gave the land to Man, as it says in Tehillim 115:16, “השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם” – *As for the heavens, the heavens are God's, but the Earth He has given to Mankind.*

⁶⁶ For an elaboration of some of these examples, as well as a few more, see Rav Moshe Taragin's article, “House of Shekhina and Apocalyptic Shelter: Two Approaches to the Symbolism of Sukkah” at vbm-torah.org/sukkot/sk60-mt.htm. Interestingly, however, he posits that the central source of the sukkah's kedushah is its identification with the ananei hakavod, though he notes its role as a “pseudo-mishkan” as well.

generate a holiday on their own merit alone. Rather, our sukkot serve a dual function and simultaneously represent not only the booths but also the Mishkan.⁶⁷ Thus, it makes perfect sense that they are worthy of being at the center of a holiday of their own, and that the ideal time to build them is right after receiving God's forgiveness on Yom Kippur. This atonement is concretized by God granting permission to carry out the construction of the Mishkan so that He can dwell in the midst of His people, as He does with us in our sukkot.

What we have seen is that every one of the Biblical holidays, with the sole exception of Rosh Hashanah,⁶⁸ has its historic roots in the same one year. Thus, through the cycle of our holidays each year, we relive the remarkable series of events that unfolded during one single seminal year in Klal Yisrael's history. The story of that year begins on the 15th of Nissan when God takes us out of Egypt (Pesach). Then seven weeks later, on the sixth⁶⁹ of Sivan, a monumental climax is reached when Hashem gives us the Torah on Mount Sinai (Shavuot). However, our honeymoon is short-lived; on the 17th of Tammuz (Shivah Asar B'Tammuz), we are discovered worshipping a Golden Calf, leading to the shattering of the luchot and the fracturing of our covenant and relationship with God. But then on the tenth of Tishrei (Yom Kippur), God grants us forgiveness and gives us the second luchot amidst an awe-inspiring divine revelation. This revelation consists of His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which enable Him to reestablish an intimate relationship with us and move back in with us in the Mishkan (Sukkot) so that the revelation of Matan Torah can be an ongoing experience in our lives.

As we annually recreate the ups and downs of that extraordinary year, there will inevitably be low points in our own personal and national relationship with God, but the cycle of the chagim provides inspiration that forgiveness, a fresh start, and renewed intensity are always possible, and that the end will hopefully be an intimate relationship with God in which He is a permanent part of our lives.

⁶⁷ The booths and the Mishkan actually express the same fundamental message – bringing God into daily life.

⁶⁸ Though Rosh HaShanah's historical origin lies in the Creation of the World more than two thousand years before the Exodus, it too has been considerably affected by that crucial year. Its significance as Yom HaDin has taken on additional magnitude as a result of its proximity to Yom Kippur, transforming it in many ways into a preparation for the ultimate teshuvah, reconciliation, and revelation that are soon to occur.

⁶⁹ Or seventh – it is a machloket between the Chachamim and R' Yosi in Masechet Shabbat 86b-87a.