

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Sukkot / סוכות 5779

## The Joy of Yerushalayim on Sukkot

Sefer Yetzirah, one of the earliest extant kabbalistic books, divides reality into the realms of space, time and soul (*olam, shanah, nefesh*). While each of these operates on a different plane, they are all interconnected and influence each other. Accordingly, if these realms are in sync, it can create a particularly powerful and potent experience.

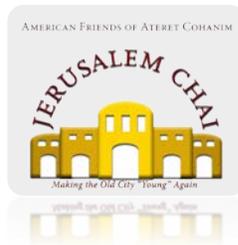
The Sefat Emmet<sup>1</sup> explains that one such confluence occurs when Sukkot is celebrated in Yerushalayim. Sukkot is described in our liturgy as “the time of our joy” as it is the center of joy in the realm of time. Of all people, the Jewish nation embodies joy as per the verse “the seekers of God should be of joyous heart.”<sup>2</sup> In terms of place, the city of Yerushalayim is referred to as “the joy of the earth” and is the location where the joy of connecting to God is optimally experienced.

It is for this reason that the Mishna describes the joy of the Jewish people in the Beit HaMikdash on Sukkot as the pinnacle of joy: “whoever has not seen the Simchat Beit HaSho’evah has not seen joy in his lifetime.” The confluence of the center of joy in each of the three realms creates the ultimate joyous experience.

Interestingly, the Sefat Emmet continues that this Mishna also has another layer of meaning. Even though this joy cannot be replicated with a different time, place or people, the sui-generis joy of the Jewish people in the Beit HaMikdash on Sukkot impacts the rest of the year and other spaces. In a creative read of the Mishna the Sefat Emmet writes that any joy that a person experiences in their lifetime allows them to tap into an aspect of the joy of Sukkot in Yerushalayim. As the center-point of joy, the Sukkot-experience of Yerushalayim spreads to other joyous occasions and locations.

<sup>1</sup> Sefat Emmet, Sukkot, s.v. *be-inyan*.

<sup>2</sup> Tehillim 105:3.



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Whenever, for example, Sukkot is experienced in New York, or another holiday is observed in Yerushalayim, the joy that we experience is drawn from the joy's center of Sukkot in Yerushalayim.

This teaching conveys two important lessons for us. First, those of us who merit to experience Sukkot in Yerushalyim must realize that we are tapping into the pinnacle of joy. Second, whenever and wherever we experience joy throughout the year we must realize that it is not independent or natural to the present location. Rather, we must remember that all our joy flows from our holy city and every joyous occasion should cause us to think about Yerushalayim.