

## Shamash: Bringing the Light of Sukkot into Our Hanukkah Rabbanit Yael Keller, Class of 2022

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In the gemara in [Bava Kama](#) the rabbis link three items—sukkah, eruv, and the ner hanukkah, the Hanukkah lamp. The common thread between them is none of these items can be over 20 amot (32 feet) tall. There seems to be something particular to these rituals that requires the rabbis to impose a height limit. It is also one of many connections we see between the holidays of Sukkot and Hanukkah.

Rashi [explains](#) that since we light the menorah to do *pirsumei nisa*, to publicize the miracle of Hanukkah, the candles must be seen. If they are placed over 20 amot then people couldn't see them as easily and the miracle wouldn't be well publicized. On Sukkot there is no mitzvah to *publicize* a miracle, but perhaps there is an obligation to *remember* miracles.

Rabba suggests in *Masechet Sukkah* that the defining feature of a sukkah is *skhach*, the top of the sukkah. When we look up and see the *skhach*, we remember we are in a sukkah, which in turn reminds us that God performed many miracles for us. According to [Rashi](#), we liken the *skhach* to the miracle of the *ananei hakavod*, God's divine protection. If the *skhach* is placed too high and far away we might lose sight of the reminder. We might not feel the miracle of God's love and protection in the same tangible way.

The rabbis observe that people don't raise their heads to see objects at a height above 20 amot. Thirty feet is pretty high up. Imagine standing in an atrium with tall buildings surrounding you. As you look up, you may notice details in the first and second floor windows, but details will become more remote and less clear as you raise your eyes to the third floor. We need to be aware, to lift our heads and our hearts up, but we also shouldn't make the burden so tall that the very items we want to see, to remember, to experience, are so far away that they don't feel truly present. One of the goals of both Sukkot and Hanukkah is to cultivate an awareness of where we are and how we got there.

There are echoes of Sukkot in Hanukkah in other ways as well. [There is a debate](#) between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai about whether we should light our candles in an ascending (eight candles on the last night) or descending (one candle on the last night) order. Although we follow Beit Hillel, we record Beit Shammai's argument where he likens candle lighting to the sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash on Sukkot, when the number of sacrifices diminished from thirteen on the first day to seven on the last. Additionally, there is a distinct focus on *mehadrin* (enhancement or

beauty) when observing mitzvot on both holidays. On Hanukkah we add one candle each night to enhance the mitzvah; on Sukkot we have an obligation to ensure the beauty or enhancement of our arba minim (lulav and etrog). Amplifying the mitzvah, the joy, the light in this way is unique to these two holidays.

In the book of Macabees II, the Jews actually celebrate Hanukkah by taking parts of the lulav and waving them as they sang Hallel. According to one source, the reason they did this was that during Sukkot the soldiers were in the field and were unable to celebrate Sukkot. When they conquered and purified the Beit HaMikdash the Maccabees observed a new holiday, as a second Sukkot.

A second Sukkot. When I read that source this year, I was moved to tears. It felt so resonant to our experience. Not just for our soldiers in Tzahal who were suddenly called into the field, but for all of us, who may have felt we were unable to celebrate the end of Sukkot to its fullest.

The Sefat Emet teaches that the light of Sukkot extends through the fall until the end of Hanukkah, when we experience the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year. If for some reason you had to miss the light and the joy of Sukkot, you could still find it when observing Hanukkah. The simcha of Sukkot ended so abruptly this year. We struggled to find the joy and the light amidst the horrifying and tragic news coming out of Israel. So this Hanukkah is especially important. A moment to look back at Sukkot, to find that last bit of holy light and connect it to Hanukkah, however dim that spark of light might have felt to us then and how dim it might still feel now.

Because that light of Sukkot serves as a bridge. As the days get darker, we cling to the light of Sukkot, which will bring us to Hanukkah when we begin to create and nurture new holy light. We can reflect back on the light that has shone through the darkness over the last two months, the ways in which our actions became the nerot, the candles. The Sefat Emet tells us that after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, when we lost some expressions of divine light in our world, our mitzvot function as the light of the candles in our menorah. They shine light in the dark and sad spaces to help us find a way to move forward. Over the last two months there have been shining expressions of chesed, of solidarity, of bravery, of action. We are still in a dark time. Unlike the triumphant return of the Maccabees, it is not yet time to fully wave our lulav, to joyfully sing Hallel. But we can use our nerot to search through the darkness, to publicize the miracles that God has done—To channel our emunah, our faith, to feel God's divine protection.

Searching for the last bit of light from Sukkot is also our chance to find that awareness at the height of 20 amot or less. We can find the light and joy of Sukkot in the light of our menorahs. If

we create a light that can be clearly visible from a short distance, we can feel the light of God's divine presence from Sukkot and publicize the miracle of Hanukkah.

May this Hanukkah's light be a second chance to experience the light and joy of Sukkot. May we light our own candles so that it will spread into the darkness of the coming days and weeks, bringing light and joy to our communities.

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