

# Shabbat Chol Chamoed Sukkot – Oct. 15, 2022

By Morry Safer

[♪ When I sing “Moadim le’simchah”, you sing...  
“Chagim uzmanim l’sasson” x2 ♪](#)

[♪ It’s like a secret code...for twice a year  
Let’s say it one more time, loud and clear. ♪](#)

Moadim Le’simcha and Shabbat Shalom. My name is Morry Safer and I’m **very happy** to share this dvar torah this morning – and not just because I’m commanded to be!

During this *Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot*, we have reached the pinnacle of happiness! Our three pilgrimage Festivals - the *shalosh regalim* - are associated with the traditional greeting “*Chag Sameach*” – Happy holiday. Each *regel* has a dual nature - one liturgical and one agriculture. Passover, despite it’s now universally applied anti-slavery message, is specifically - *Zman Cheruteinu* - the celebration of our unique freedom story as enabled through our relationship with Hashem. Agriculturally, Passover represents the very beginning of the growing season - demarcating the *kemach yoshon* of the previous agricultural year from the *kemach chadash* of the current year. Shavuot is *Zman Matan Torateinu* - again recognizing the unique relationship of our people with G-d through the covenant at Sinai. Agriculturally, Shavuot is *Chag Habikurim* - a hopeful celebration of the first crops in early summer with great uncertainty about the upcoming critical harvest.

In contrast, Sukkot now arrives as *Chag Ha'Asif*, a harvest festival at the end of the Northern Hemisphere growing cycle. Since Shavuot, we've enjoyed the fresh salads, delicious berries, and juicy stone fruit of the farmers market all summer and we now, like so many secular celebrations, give thanks for the cornucopia of apples, squash, pumpkins and cranberries that deliciously conclude the late harvest. For our crop-dependent ancestors, it is easy to see how this holiday can be liturgically connected to *Zman Simchateinu* - a time of our happiness. Further, the Torah reading for Sukkot counts 70 total offerings brought over the course of the holiday. In the Talmud, as Irle taught on the First Day of Sukkot, Rabbi Eliezer explains that the 70 offerings are on behalf of the 70 nations of the world. Thus, unlike the inward focus of Passover and Shavuot, the happiness of Sukkot is globally universal. As the great psalmist David Cassidy teaches us:

[♪ Hello world, hear the song that we're singin'  
Come on, get happy! ♪](#)

Additionally, only during Pesach and Sukkot, do we find the middle days of Chol Hamoed and with them, as we sang earlier in Eliana Light's song of the season, the specific greeting "*moadim le'simcha*" – thus these intermediate days of the holiday are our "specified times for happiness".

And of course today is Shabbat. As we sing in the words of Rabbi Issac Luria:

[♪ Yom zeh LeYisrael, orah vesimcha Shabbat menuchah ♪](#)

This day is for Israel – light and happiness, Shabbat of rest

On a personal note, this week during chol hamoed, Rachel and I celebrated our 20th anniversary. Twenty years ago the calendar lined up a bit differently and we celebrated our aufruf in Florida during sukkot a few weeks before our wedding back here in Boston.

[♪ Kol sasson vekol simchah, kol chatan vekol kalah ♪](#)

Interestingly, traditional Jewish weddings are not scheduled during Sukkot – even during Chol Hamoed – for as the Talmud teaches: "We do not confuse joy with joy." In other words, we don't steal the thunder of Sukkot's happiness, and vice versa.

So here we are today on the happiest day of the week – Shabbat – during the happiness of the holiday which is specifically denoted as the "time of happiness", during the intermediate days which are our appointed times of happiness. In the words of the *paytan* Pharell:

[♪ \(Because I'm happy\)](#)

[Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof](#)

[\(Because I'm happy\)](#)

[Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth](#)

[\(Because I'm happy\)](#)

[Clap along if you know what happiness is to you](#)

[\(Because I'm happy\)](#)

[Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do ♪](#)

Of course, then, surrounded by so much happiness, it is no surprise that the specially selected megillah for today is the joy-filled, happiness-inspiring Kohelet!

I cannot think of Kohelet without immediately thinking of the Israeli sketch-comedy show: HaYehudim Baim. For those unfamiliar, I commend to you the entire series for a very witty take on all things Tanach, Jewish, and Israeli. In this particular scene, Queen Batsheva approaches the door of would-be-king Shlomo's bedroom. Upon knocking, the door cracks open and she is greeted by a waft of smoke, loud metal music, and a gruff "what do you want" from her son dressed in all black, with straightened black hair and black eyeliner. "Are you okay,

Shlomke?”. “Ima, I told you my name is KOHELET”, where upon he further shares his angsty teenage poetry:

הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבָּל:

"Utter futility! Everything is Futile"  
and

כָּל-הַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים אֶל-הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינוֹ מֵלֵא

“All streams flow into the sea, Yet the sea is never full”

In the pre-Covid days, Rachel and I would occasionally make a date night at local performances of a show entitled “Mortified” where adults take to the stage to share the now-cringeworthy diary entries, poetry, and love songs they wrote during their tumultuous teenage years. It isn’t a very large leap to consider King Solomon doing a reading of Kohelet at just such an event.

But why do we read Kohelet, which is at the very least a gut-check, on this specific day – Shabbat Chol Hamoed – which is our pinnacle of happiness?

Broadly, Kohelet and Sukkot are both connected to temporariness. Kohelet’s repeated refrain “Havel”, which is often translated as futility or vanity, is related to the same Hebrew shresh as vapor. The temporality of any state of life - as vastly enumerated in Kohelet is reflected in the very-temporary construction of our sukkot. In a societal construction project maybe only eclipsed by Burning Man, we erect home additions in violation of our local building codes, spend a week within, and then deconstruct just as quickly. With some abstraction of specific materials, we literally enact Kohelet’s discrete “time to build” and a week later “time to tear down”. But, given the alignment of that timescale to the duration of the whole Sukkot holiday, it is still fair to re-ask why Kohelet is read on this specific day - Shabbat Chol Hamoed.

For me, on Shabbat Chol Hamoed, the mitzvah of "*leyshev basukkah*" and the reading of Megillat Kohelet combine to form a master class in dealing with privilege. The walls of the Sukkah provide differentiation without insulation. The *schach* of a kosher sukkah must provide a majority of shade and protection, while at the same time not entirely block vision of the outside. One of my favorite concepts in our liturgy is our prayer in the nightly Hashkiveinu: "*Ufros aleinu sukkat shlomecha*" – "shelter us in your Sukkah of peace". Not a tower of peace. Not a fortress of peace. But a sukkah – allowing us to be simultaneously comfortably peaceful and precariously aware.

When we look initially at the words of Kohelet, we see repeated call outs of daily cycles that return to the same state. A continuously flowing river which never fills the sea. The seemingly meaningless lifestyle choices of the individual, always terminating in the same finality. And most famously, the exclusive-OR of disjoint periods of time: time to be born vs time to die; time to plant vs. time to uproot; time for war vs. time for peace. Kohelet, focused on the individual, leaves us with an ambivalence about our self-determination and isolation from any greater good.

But the name Kohelet is derived from the Hebrew shorsh *kahal* - to congregate or assemble. To understand the full lessons of Kohelet is to view them through the aggregation of a larger community. The individual river may not fill the individual sea, but science tells us the full story of the global interactions of the complicated, unseen water cycle. Within a broader community, birth and death happen simultaneously as do, planting and reaping, and commonly, peace and war. "*Ufros aleinu sukkat shlomecha*" is certainly a plea for a time of universal peace, but in the meantime, is a personal petition for a bubble of separation – but separation **with** awareness. And if your bubble becomes homogeneous – all peaceful, all happy, all privileged – you need only peer through the *schach* and feel the penetration of the wind and the rain through the walls of the sukkah to be reminded of those outside that bubble.

We are commanded “*Vesamachta bechagecha*” – to be happy in our celebration of the holiday – but we can hold in the same moment the duality of our privileged happiness and our cognizance of those less privileged. There is no conflict – our happiness within the sukkah should not prevent us from being aware of the outside, and our awareness should not impinge our ability to celebrate happiness communally.

As we soon conclude this Tishrei holiday season, I wish us all the fullness of our *zman simchateinu*, and remind us, as sung by the great Sages, the Peanuts:

[♪ Happiness is morning and evening,  
Daytime and nighttime too.  
For happiness is anyone and anything at all  
That's loved by you.♪](#)

Moadim Le'Simchah. Shabbat Shalom.