

# *Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*

From Rav Binny

## **(Sukkot)**

*In 2005, Steve Jobs delivered the Commencement Address at Stanford University. In it, he described how he had started Apple in a garage at age 20; and after ten years of hard work, built it into a 2 BILLION dollar company with 4,000 employees.*

*And then he got fired; and lost it all.*

*He had hired a guy the second year whom he thought would help him build the company, but after a year they started to see things differently and eventually they had a falling out, and the board sided with him and fired Jobs. At the time he was devastated and did not know what to do.*

*But he still loved what he did, so he decided to start over again; he did not realize it then, but as it turned out, it would be the best thing that ever happened to him. The heaviness of being successful had been replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, of starting over; and thus began the most creative period in his life. He started two companies: NEXT and PIXAR and fell in love with the woman who would become his wife.*

*Pixar created the first animated feature film (Toy Story) and became the most successful animation studio in the world.*

*Jobs was pretty sure none of this would have happened if he had not been fired from Apple ....*

*Sometimes life will hit you in the head with a brick; don't lose faith.*

*You have to find what you love and it's as true at work as it is with your love life. You will spend most of your time at work; make sure you love it.*

This week, with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur behind us, we enter the festival of Sukkoth, symbolized by the sukkot or booths we sit in for seven days. Interestingly, unlike Passover and Shavuot with clear historical origins, the events which the festival of Sukkoth is meant to commemorate are not at all clear.

In fact, two of the most famous Rabbis in Jewish history debate the nature of these booths we call Sukkot.

According to the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer says the Sukkot represent the clouds of glory (the *ananei kavod*) which miraculously protected the Jews in the desert.

Rabbi Akiva however believes we are commemorating actual sukkot (booths) the Jews dwelled in for forty years in the desert, which protected them from the elements until they finally entered the land of Israel, their permanent home.

A rather strange point of view to say the least; it is easy to understand why we would celebrate and commemorate the miraculous clouds of glory.

But what was so special about booths in the desert? Obviously if a nomadic people are wandering the desert for forty years they will build huts and booths much like the Bedouin still do today. So what is it we are celebrating?

Additionally puzzling is the fact that Rabbi Akiva was actually a student of Rabbi Eliezer, so why does he have a different opinion from his Rebbe?

It is known that Rabbi Akiva was a principal proponent of the Bar Kochba rebellion (131-135 C.E.) and was in fact captured and tortured to death by the Romans for his role in supporting the revolt. Perhaps what Rabbi Akiva was saying was that we cannot wait for clouds of glory if we wish to bring redemption; we need to be willing to build the booths ourselves.

A good friend and neighbor of mine, Dr. Meier Becker once suggested a novel idea: If the Jews had not sinned at the Golden Calf, they would have received the Torah and been on their way to Israel. And, protected by clouds of Glory, they would have arrived in Israel without ever needing to build the Sukkot (booths). Indeed, the Sin of the Golden Calf occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz (forty days after the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, the festival of Shavuot....) and the Jewish people would have been in Israel by the new moon of Av (end of July?) and would never have experienced winter in the desert, so perhaps they would not have needed the booths. But in the aftermath of the Golden Calf and then the sin of the spies (which occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, in August) the Jews were doomed to wander the desert for forty years which necessitated the building of the Sukkot.

So the clouds of glory represented the world as it was meant to be; the ideal; and the Sukkot represented the world as it was; the reality we needed to face.

Rabbi Akiva understood the reality of his day and realized the Jewish people could not sit around waiting for clouds of glory; they needed to be willing to build their own booths.

Think about it: in a moment the Jewish people lost everything. One day, they were riding high, freed from two hundred years of Egyptian servitude, having experienced the splitting of the sea, and then basked in G-d's presence at Sinai. And the next day they were destined to wander for forty years in the desert until their deaths with a promise that their generation would never see the Promised Land.

It would have been so easy to give up; to just lay down and die. But they did not give up; they followed G-d and Moses in the desert for forty years and they built their booths, the Sukkot. Because even though they knew they would never see their promised land, they believed their children would, and it was for this dream, the belief that one day their children would come home, that they never gave up.

We celebrate the booths in the desert because they symbolize the willingness of a people, with nothing but faith, to start over again, to believe the long journey will one day bring their children home.

Rabbi Akiva must have known how impossible the revolt against the Roman Empire was and he must have understood how long were the odds. But he still believed the battle to be worthwhile, (much like Mordechai Anilewicz in the Warsaw Ghetto) because it meant the Jews had not, and would never, give up.

And two thousand years later, the long lost children of those Bar Kochba rebels, having never given up, emerged from the temporary booths of their wandering and exile and came home at last.

Sukkot is the festival of faith, on so many levels, the festival of joy, and the belief that the long difficult journey will one day prove worthwhile.

It is true on a national level, as a people. But it is equally true for us as individuals.

As Steve Jobs suggested:

*The only way to do great work is to love what you do.*

*If you have not found it yet; keep looking and don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you will know when you find it.*

For thousands of years, we refused to settle, and now we are home. And despite what some leaders in Iran may say, we will still be here in 25 years and in twenty five hundred years, with Hashem (G-d)'s help.

Wishing you all a sweet happy and healthy year, a Shanah Tovah and a Chag Sameach (Happy Sukkot!)

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