

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I have been observant for about 3 years now, and am still in the learning process. After just recently finishing the Sukkot holiday, I can't help but be bothered by the amount of effort we need to put into preparing for the holidays. For Sukkot my husband put many hours into building the Sukkah, and I put even more hours into cooking the holiday meals. Pesach takes such an effort to put away the all-year dishes and take out the Pesach utensils, besides all the cooking! I enjoy the beauty of the Yom-Tov, but why must it be such a huge effort? I know I'm not the only one with this question, and I would appreciate some insight.

Elisheva B.

Dear Elisheva,

I agree, you're not the only one with the question. Every aspect of Jewish life contains underlying meaning. If we need to put so much effort into a holiday, there's got to be a reason.

The Kabbalists have taught us a profound insight into the Jewish holidays. A holiday is not just something we "do" or "observe". A holiday is rather an gateway for us to leave the world we normally live in , and enter a different, spiritual world. In that other world we enter, we have the opportunity to join our ancestors and relive the miraculous occurrences that they witnessed.

One example of this is Pesach. The Hagadah states: "In every generation, it is incumbent upon every Jew to see themselves as if they themselves left Egypt". This teaches us that there's a deep memory in the Jewish soul of the leaving of Egypt. The mitzvos we do are subliminal suggestions to awaken those memories. It's sort of a time machine to take us into the world of the Jews leaving Egypt.

When we turn over the house, removing the usual dishes and bringing out the special ones, gotten rid of many of the normal foods, we have left our homes and surroundings and entered another world. This helps us to enter another spiritual world, the "world of Pesach".

The same thing applies to Sukkot. We literally leave our homes and enter the Sukkah. By us building this dwelling and living there for the entire week, we leave our normal surroundings and enter the world of G-d's presence the Jews experienced in the desert so long ago.

The festive meals are a key factor in this celebration. All the hard work invested into preparing those meals becomes part of the spiritual experience of the holiday. All the food eaten in that "other world" becomes part of the participants' spiritual estate for ever. Although it might not feel so spiritual standing in the kitchen and peeling potatoes, in fact that is no less part of the holiday than shaking the lulav or blowing the shofar. Every stroke of the peeler counts as another mitzvah in the World of Truth.

The Talmud says that it was in the merit of the righteous women in the Egyptian exile that Jews were redeemed. Without question, our final redemption will come in the merit of the righteous Jewish women, as yourself, who have dedicated themselves to do whatever it takes to ensure the continued observance of our holidays the way they have been observed for thousands of years.

May you continue to grow and learn and find the treasures and beauty hidden within our rich tradition.