



GROWTH

At The

YOM TOV TABLE

SUKKOT

Double-Sided!

The Miracle of Home

There was an elderly man who would always adhere strictly to sleeping in the sukkah every night of the holiday. Being that he lived in Toronto and the nights were frigidly cold, his children and grandchildren tried protesting, urging him to go back inside for the sake of his health. He would not hear of it. Night after night, he continued with his practice. After much back and forth, he finally admitted: "Since the Holocaust, I have not had one night's sleep where I don't wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, terrified by nightmares. The only nights of sleep I get in the whole year are the seven nights I sleep in the sukkah. Now leave me alone."

Why do we celebrate this holiday by dwelling in a sukkah?

The Torah explains: "למען ידעו דורותיכם כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל — For generations to know that I made the Children of Israel dwell in sukkot." The Gemara quotes two opinions: R' Eliezer maintains that these "sukkot" actually refer to the miraculous Clouds of Glory. R' Akiva, however, argues that the verse is referring to actual tents.

It seems that between the two, R' Eliezer's opinion holds more intuitive appeal. It makes sense to commemorate the miraculous Clouds of Glory; such a Divine intervention certainly sounds worthy of an extended holiday commemoration. R' Akiva, however, requires further interpretation. If the verse is referring simply to huts that the Jewish people constructed for themselves, why would that constitute something worthy of memorializing for generations? It seems so dull, insignificant, and circumstantial. What is so remarkable about building yourself some shade to escape the desert heat?

To understand and truly appreciate the depth and beauty of R' Akiva's opinion, we need to dissect the verse at hand. "כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל." Notice the choice of wording. G-d did not say, "I brought the Jews into sukkahs." He did not even say, "I built the Jews sukkahs." He said: "I settled them." G-d did not merely provide them with shelter; He made them sit, get comfortable, and dwell there.

Recall the setting. The Jews had just escaped generations of national slavery. The clothing they wore was not their own. The wealth they carried had come from the Egyptians. They had no country and no permanent home. They were wandering through the desert, with no idea where their next destination

would be. And then G-d gave them a little hut.

But perhaps G-d gave the Jewish people an even more brilliant gift than the hut itself. He gave them the הושבתי. In that hut, they had a feeling of home. Of belonging. Of being settled. Of being safe. They had left behind everything that had once been familiar, yet somehow, in the middle of the wilderness, they could still feel at home.

According to R' Eliezer, who says that we commemorate the Clouds of Glory, the miracle was around the Jews. G-d miraculously surrounded them with His protection. R' Akiva, however, understands the verse differently, and perhaps with an even more profound twist: the miracle was not only what surrounded the Jews, but what happened within them. The miracle was that a people with no home, no country, and no certainty about their future could nevertheless feel at home in the desert.

With this, we can understand an enigmatic halacha unique to the sukkah: a person who is a mitzta'er, experiencing significant discomfort from sitting in the sukkah, is exempt from the mitzvah. Why? The Gemara derives the laws of sukkah from the principle of "תשבו כעין תדורו" — you shall dwell in a manner resembling how you normally dwell. A person does not ordinarily choose to remain in a home in which he is suffering when he has somewhere else to go.

Perhaps there is something deeper embedded within this halacha. According to R' Akiva, the entire story of Sukkot is that despite having no permanent home, no country, and no certainty about what lay ahead, the Jewish people were able to feel settled. The sukkah was not merely a place to physically sit; it became a place where they could feel at home. If so, perhaps it is precisely for this reason that the Torah does not demand that a person remain in the sukkah when he is distressed. Feeling unsettled, uncomfortable, and unable to relax in the sukkah is almost antithetical to the entire message of Sukkot. The miracle was that in the middle of the wilderness, the Jewish people could experience a sense of security and belonging. The sukkah is meant to recreate that feeling — to give us a place where we can let our guard down, feel protected, and recognize that we are under the shelter of Hashem.

(cont. on next side)

This may also help us understand why Chazal describe dwelling in the sukkah as a mitzvah that encompasses the entirety of a person's physical existence. Unlike mitzvot that involve a particular limb or action, the sukkah surrounds the person. One does not merely perform the mitzvah with a hand, a mouth, or a particular act; one lives inside it. The message is that emunah is not meant to occupy only one compartment of our lives. It is meant to surround us — to accompany us into our homes, our relationships, our finances, our uncertainties, and the areas of life in which we feel least secure.

And perhaps this is the deeper symbolism of the sukkah's defining feature: its shade. Halachically, a sukkah must have more shade than sunlight in order to be valid. We naturally associate sunlight with happiness and positivity. Even biologically, sunlight plays an important role in our well-being and happiness, including through the body's production of vitamin D. Yet the Torah specifically commands us to create a dwelling in which the shade is greater than the sunlight. Perhaps there is a message here: our source of happiness cannot always come externally — from the "sunlight" around us, from everything going right, favorable circumstances, or complete certainty about the future. External happiness can certainly bring us joy, but it cannot provide the lasting and powerful sense of happiness that comes from within. That is the deeper meaning of הוֹשֵׁבָתִי: the ability to feel settled and at home regardless of what is happening around us. And perhaps this is

why the sukkah is defined by its shade — reminding us that when our happiness comes from within, it does not depend on how much sunlight there is outside.

This takes on even greater significance when we extend the idea to when we leave the sukkah, as well. Each of us has an arena of life that causes anxiety: a relationship, a financial concern, a health concern, an uncertain future, or a situation over which we have little control. We naturally wait for the circumstances to change before allowing ourselves to feel at peace. We tell ourselves, "Once this gets resolved, then I will be okay. Once this uncertainty disappears, then I will be able to relax."

But on Sukkot, we are meant to deepen our perspective. The goal is not necessarily to eliminate every source of uncertainty. It is to build a sukkah over the uncertainty — to create a place of emunah within it. We may not be able to control what happens outside of us, but we can work toward changing what happens within us. We can remind ourselves that Hashem is present even in the places that feel temporary, fragile, and unfamiliar. We enter the sukkah and sit beneath its fragile roof to remind ourselves that our ultimate sense of safety does not come from how strong the walls around us are, but from knowing Who is above them.

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' Shlomo Farhi)

Stepping Inside

The Torah presents the commandment of Sukkah in two places. In Vayikra (23:42) it says, "*In sukkot you shall dwell for seven days...*", while in Devarim (16:13) it commands, "*The festival of Sukkot shall you make for yourself...*"

According to the *She'iltot d'Rav Achai Gaon*, these two verses describe not one but two distinct mitzvot related to Sukkot: the mitzvah of building the Sukkah and that of dwelling in it.

This, however, begs the question: if building the Sukkah is a mitzvah in itself, then why don't we recite a blessing at the time of its construction — "*asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al asiyat sukkah*"?

The Rambam (Hilchot Berachot 11:8) offers an illuminating principle: we only recite a blessing over a mitzvah whose fulfillment is complete at the moment it is performed. When one slaughters an animal according to halacha, covers its blood, separates tithes, or builds a guardrail on a roof, the mitzvah is finished the instant the action is done — the deed and its completion are one and the same.

But Sukkah is different. Building it is only the *preparation*, not the culmination. The mitzvah reaches its completion when a person *dwells* in it — when he eats, drinks, studies, prays, and lives under its shade. Only then does the structure become infused with meaning; only then does the act of construction transform into a vessel for holiness.

This distinction carries a powerful message. In life, it's easy to take pride in what we've built — our accomplishments, routines, or even our spiritual "structures." Yet Judaism reminds us that the true fulfillment doesn't lie in the building itself, but in the dwelling — in how we live within the spaces we've created.

We are not blessed for the walls we raise, but for the presence we bring inside them. The holiness of Sukkot — and of life — begins not when the work is done, but when we choose to step inside and make it *home*.

(Based on a concept from Iyun HaMoadim)

Among my personal favorite weekly Parsha publications is that of my brother, Yehoshua, who consistently works hard to put out an amazing read. Access and enjoy his content here:



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"Inviting the Ushpizin into the sukkah is a reminder that a Jew, even when he leaves his home, always shares his dwellings with others."

(R' Zecharia Wallerstein)