

# The Message of the Clouds

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The Talmud in Massechet Sukkah cites a dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer in regards to the *sukkot* in the desert. Rabbi Akiva was of the opinion that the *sukkot* were actual huts that *B'nai Yisrael* used as their residence for the duration of their journeys in the desert. Rabbi Eliezer, on the other hand, was of the belief that the *sukkot* that we sit in for seven days are a representation of the *ananei hakavod*/the clouds of glory. The Shulchan Aruch at the beginning of *hilchos sukkah* agrees with the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer and states that *l'chatchilah* one must be thinking about the clouds of glory in order to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of sukkah.

There are two questions that arise from the Shulchan Aruch's statement. The first problem is why did the Shulchan Aruch follow the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer when we never follow his *p'sak*? Secondly, it is very unusual for the *mechaber* to choose a philosophical reasoning for a law in his great work on *halacha*.

It seems that one can answer these two questions based upon the opinion of the Mabit. The Mabit noticed that the only constant miracle in the desert that was granted a holiday is that of the clouds of glory. However, the miracles of the *be'er* (the well of water that followed the Jews) and the manna that sustained *B'nai Yisrael* in the desert for forty years are left without celebration. The Mabit explains that if we had not eaten the manna and had not had to drink from the *be'er* we would not have been able to survive. On the other hand, the clouds glory was an unnecessary miracle. If we were not privileged to experience the *ananei hakavod*, we would have been denied a luxury (lack of exposure to the sun and the elements), nothing more. Why then did Hashem provide us with these clouds? He wanted to show the people of *K'lal Yisrael* that He loves so much that He is willing to go to great lengths just to provide us with a little extra comfort.

At this point, we can answer our original two questions. The Shulchan Aruch felt that this underlying idea behind the *ananei hakavod* is of such great import to the Jewish psyche that he felt compelled to put it into print. Most of us never view our relationship with Hashem as one of an abundance of love but, rather, as a relationship of fear and decrees. We have to have the realization that Hashem loves us more than we can possibly imagine. This is also why it made no difference to the *mechaber* whether he follows the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer or that of any other great rabbinical figure.

This explanation of the Mabit can also help us to understand other laws and concepts behind the holiday of Sukkot. Why does Sukkot have to immediately follow the *Yamim Noraim*? The explanation is that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the “days of awe” where we view Hashem as a king who is feared and exalted. We need to begin viewing Hashem in the light of a loving and close G-d. We need to have a relationship of *ahava* and not just of *yirah*.

This also helps shed light on the fact that a *mitztaer* (someone who is very uncomfortable) is not obligated in the *mitzvah* of sukkah. If one is feeling discomfort, how can they experience Hashem’s love? Also, if it rains on the first night of Sukkot, it is compared to a king pouring water over the head of his servant. This is to represent the fact that we are unable to feel G-d’s love which is the entire purpose of the *mitzvah* of sukkah.

May we all approach the holiday of Sukkot this year with a true understanding of how much Hashem really loves all of *K’lal Yisrael*.