

# The Sukkah of Redemption

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In the Grace after Meals (*Birkhat Hamazon*) recited during the holiday of Sukkot, there is a special prayer inserted—הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת—beseeching G-d for the restoration of “the fallen sukkah of Dovid.” The reference is to a verse in the prophetic book of Amos (9:11) that states, in connection with the redemption of the Jewish people, “ביום ההוא אקים את סכת דויד הנופלת”—at that time, I shall erect the fallen sukkah of David.” Many of the classical commentators, such as Rashi and the Radak, explain that this is a reference to the re-establishment of the Davidic monarchy. But what does that have to do with the holiday of Sukkot, in which we sit in huts to commemorate the clouds of glory that protected us in the desert after we departed from Egypt?

In the recent treatise *Inyano Shel Yom* by Rabbi Dovid Falk (*Moadim*, page 27), the author writes that he posed this question to the great sage Rabbi Chaim Kaniefsky of B’nei Brak. Rabbi Kaniefsky responded in characteristically succinct fashion that since the word sukkah appears in this recitation, it is therefore an appropriate prayer for the holiday of Sukkot.

While this response may indeed explain the origin of the insertion of this prayer on Sukkot, there is a well-known principle that “*minhag yisroel Torah hi*” (see Tosafot, *Menachot* 20b, s.v. “*nifsal*”)—established customs become part of the corpus of Torah. The special insertion for Sukkot in the Grace after Meals has been an established custom for hundreds of years (as demonstrated by R. Tzvi Ron, *Hamayan*, Tishrei 5773). Accordingly, a number of commentators have probed other Torah sources in order to suggest a deeper connection.

The Maharal, in the book *Netzach Yisroel* (chapter 35), offers two explanations of the connection between the sukkah and the Kingdom of David. First, he observes that a sukkah needs to be a temporary dwelling, impervious to the physical permanence of this world. In this sense, the sukkah parallels the Kingdom of David, which is linked to Divine providence and to the supernatural destiny of the World-to-Come, as opposed to having its permanent place in this world. Upon fulfilling the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah and being freed from the shackles of the mundane world of our physical houses, we can aspire for the time when the Messiah will emerge from the Davidic dynasty and elevate us to spiritual majesty. Along these lines, the Talmud actually describes the Messiah as “*bar nafli*” (the fallen one) and explicitly links the Messiah in this regard to the “fallen sukkah of David” (*Sanhedrin* 96b).

What emerges from this insight of the Maharal is a counter-intuitive message pertaining to the Sukkot holiday. Only in impermanence can there be an appreciation for genuine permanence. All too often in the hullabaloo of daily life we can lose sight of the teaching in *Pirkei Avot* (4:16) that “this world is akin to an antechamber before the World to Come.” The sukkah reminds us that what appears permanent in this world is truly fleeting, and that which has no permanence in this world, namely the spiritual structures that are primarily intended for the World to Come, are the only matters that have eternal significance. In the same way that the sukkah serves as a reminder of the antechamber nature of this world, so too the “sukkah of David,” representing the eternal Kingdom of the House of David, awaits its ultimate realization in the future world of salvation and deliverance.

In his second explanation, the Maharal explains the comparison in a different manner. The distinguishing feature about the sukkah is that even when it falls down, it is easy to reassemble precisely because it is built in a slipshod fashion. Thus it never loses its identity, but remains the same sukkah, waiting to be propped up again. In this sense, a fallen sukkah is somewhat reminiscent of the old-time commercial jingle “weebles wobble but they don’t fall down.” So too, argues the Maharal, the Kingdom of David, even when it is in the current state of being “the fallen sukkah of David,” retains its identity as the “sukkah of David” and remains poised to be resurrected at any moment. Furthermore, just as a fallen sukkah still contains usable *schach* (sukkah covering materials) that can be re-employed, so too the Kingdom of David has continued to keep its “pieces” through significant communal leaders in every generation who descend from the tribe of Judah.

According to this explanation of the Maharal, the sukkah is the symbol of Jewish resilience. By virtue of its simplicity, the sukkah represents the elasticity of our survival. Even when the sukkah falls down, it maintains its components and its character. Thus, the sukkah serves as a reminder that no matter how many times the Jewish people have been exiled and persecuted, the essential components of our legacy and our people have survived, and our sovereignty can therefore be easily and naturally restored at any moment. In this sense, the recent events of the restoral of the Jewish nation to the land of Israel validate and reinforce this optimistic national perspective. Even when there are continuing setbacks in our path to redemption, we remind ourselves through the message of the sukkah that salvation is always within our grasp.

Interestingly, the Mahari Kara offers a different explanation of the meaning of “the fallen sukkah of David” in his commentary to Amos. According to the Mahari Kara, the sukkah is a reference to the Beit Hamikdash, to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed. Accordingly, our prayer denotes a yearning toward the restoration of the Holy Temple. Is there a clear connection between the sukkah and the Holy Temple?

Perhaps the connection can be gleaned from a passage in the Talmudic tractate of *Sukkah* (11b) indicating that the clouds of glory originated at the time of the creation of the world, when a “mist arose from the earth” (Bereishit 2:6; Targum Yonatan *ad locum*) forming the clouds above that “watered the whole face of the ground.” Inherent in creation itself were these clouds, established from the purity of the earth, thus providing the Talmudic basis for the law that the sukkah covering must similarly be made from items from the earth that cannot contract

impurity. It would seem, based on this passage that the sukkah, which commemorates the clouds of glory, symbolizes the pristine state of pure reliance upon the Almighty that existed at the time of creation.

The Talmud states that the Heavens rejoiced on the day of the building of the Tabernacle as if the world was created on that day (*Megillah* 10b). The Holy Temple, which represents a fulfillment of the mitzvah to build a tabernacle in the Land of Israel (see Rambam, *Mitzot Aseh* 20, *Hilkhot Beit HaBechira* 1:1, and *Kesef Mishneh ad locum*), serves as a manifestation of the return to a state of spiritual perfection that existed at the time of creation. The sukkah, through its evocation of the original clouds of glory that hovered over the world during that time, provides the same opportunity to connect to that state of spiritual perfection as the Holy Temple itself. Hence the association of the sukkah with the “sukkah of David” representing the Holy Temple becomes perfectly understandable.

This association of the sukkah with the Holy Temple also helps to explain why the sukkah structure is endowed with Divine sanctity (*Sukkah* 9a), and why the mitzvah of “living” in the sukkah precludes any kind of activity that is not respectful or dignified (*Orach Chaim* 639:1), similar to the requirement of maintaining dignity in the area of the Holy Temple (see, e.g., *Yevamot* 6b). Through the observance of the mitzvah of sukkah which enables us to relive the pure, unadulterated state of devotion to G-d at the time of the creation of the world, we are able to focus our aspirations upon the rebuilding of the “sukkah of David”—the Holy Temple—which represents the spiritual pinnacle of creation.

In similar fashion, Rabbi Meir Zvi Bergman writes (*Sha'arei Orah* 1:318-319) that the comparison of the sukkah to the Holy Temple is a reference to the spiritual essence of the Holy Temple. The proof is that the Temple is described as the “sukkah of David” when in fact the Temple was built by his son King Solomon. The reason the Temple is attributed to King David rather than to his son is because, as indicated in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 30a), the gates of the holiest chambers of the Temple only opened up for Solomon in the merit of his father, who conceived the idea of building the Temple during his lifetime. King David thus represents the spiritual essence of the Temple, as opposed to King Solomon who represents its physical manifestation. When we pray for the restoration of the sukkah of David, we demonstrate our yearning for the spiritual closeness with the Almighty that is achieved through the essence of the Holy Temple.

The connection with the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple also helps to explain the timing of the celebration of Sukkot. The Vilna Gaon (commentary to Shir Hashirim 1:4)- in response to the question posed by the *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 625) regarding why Sukkot is celebrated in Tishrei as opposed to Nissan when the exodus from Egypt took place and the clouds of glory began to protect the Jewish people- explains that the holiday of Sukkot was timed to coincide with the date of the beginning of the construction of the Tabernacle. Moses delivered the second set of Tablets to the Jewish people on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei and taught them the laws of the Tabernacle on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei (Rashi, *Shmot* 35:1). Afterwards, the Jewish people gathered materials for construction on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei (based on *Shmot* 36:3 that the donation period consisted of two days), and Moses then dispensed the materials on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei to the

artisans who would engage in the construction. Thus, the actual construction of the Tabernacle commenced on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, which is the first day of Sukkot. Similarly, the Bible recounts that the dedication of the Holy Temple by King Solomon took place immediately prior to the time of the Sukkot holiday (Melachim 1, 8:2, 65-66).

There is also another possible connection between the sukkah and the Holy Temple. The Talmud (*Sukkah* 27b) states:

[The verse states] “All the residents of the Israelites will sit in the sukkah” (*Vayikra* 23:42); this teaches us that all of the Jewish people are eligible to sit in the same sukkah.

כל האזרה בישראל ישבו בסוכת – מלמד  
שכל ישראל ראויים לישב בסוכה אחת.

The *Sefat Emet* (*Sukkot*) explains that this is meant to refer to the unity of the Jewish people that exists after Yom Kippur when the entire nation becomes an “*agudah achat*,” a united assembly. The Second Holy Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b). In order to restore the Holy Temple, it is necessary for the Jewish nation to rectify this sin and join together in unconditional love for each other. The concept of sukkah is intertwined with the notion of everybody being able to join together in one sukkah, much in the same way that the Holy Temple is the central place of worship for the entire nation. In order to merit the rebuilding of the Temple, it is necessary to create an atmosphere where the entire Jewish people will feel comfortable sharing one sukkah in a spirit of mutual respect and affection.

With this understanding we can appreciate why Sukkot is the holiday of the “*ushpizin*”—of the inviting of the honored guests (*Zohar, Emor* 103-104). The purpose of the sukkah is to create a spiritual haven that is open and welcoming to all members of the Jewish nation in a demonstration of unified spirit. This may also explain why the classical sukkah of the Torah only has three walls (*Sukkah* 2a, 6b)—in order to ensure that one side always be open to an endless stream of guests.

Perhaps in this sense, all of the various explanations regarding the sukkah of David coalesce. Through the *ushpizin*, in which we usher in the forefathers from the time of creation through the building of the Holy Temple, beginning chronologically with Abraham and ending with King David (and according to some traditions, ending with King Solomon), we connect the sukkah not only to the entirety of the Jewish people in our time, but to the entirety of the Jewish people throughout history. The rebuilding each year of the sukkah, which evokes the clouds of glory of creation, and the Holy Temple as the spiritual pinnacle of creation, propels the Jewish nation to become united and worthy of the future redemption that will usher in the Kingdom of David for eternity. Furthermore, as the Maharal indicates, we are blessed with the ability to bring about this ultimate sukkah of redemption in a heartbeat. All we need to do is come together, click our heels, and acknowledge that there is “no place like the sukkah” to cast aside the artificial walls of this temporal and tempestuous world and to unite as a people of eternal destiny.