

The Sukkah in *Olam Hazeh* and *Olam Habah*

Of all the mitzvot in the Torah, very few involve fulfilling the mitzvah with our entire body.

For example, we hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah with our ears, we eat matzah on Pesach with our mouths, and we learn Torah on Shavout with our minds and hopefully hearts. But on Sukkot, we fulfill the mitzvah with our entire body as we surround ourselves with the sukkah. What is it about Sukkot that requires us to be surrounded by the mitzvah?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), *Orach Chaim* 639:1, gives us the following directive:

כיצד מצות ישיבה בסוכה שיהיה אוכל ושותה (וישן ומטייל) ודר בסוכה כל שבעת הימים בין ביום ובין בלילה כדרך שהוא דר בביתו בשאר ימות השנה וכל שבעת ימים עושה אדם את ביתו עראי ואת סוכתו קבע.

The proper fulfillment of the commandment of the sukkah is to eat and drink, sleep and rest, and live in it all seven days, both day and night just like one lives in his home during the rest of the year. For these seven days a person makes his home the temporary dwelling and the sukkah his principal dwelling.

The Torah tells us in Vayikra 23:42-3:

בַּסֻּכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכּוֹת. לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

For seven days you should live in booths. Every native in Israel should live in such thatched huts. This is so that future generations will know that I caused the



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Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

The Gemarah, *Sukkah* 11b, explains what these booths are meant to represent:

תניא כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל ענני כבוד היו דברי ר' אליעזר ר"ע אומר סוכות ממש עשו להם

It was taught, "That I settled the Jews in booths." Rabbi Eliezer said that this refers to the clouds of glory. Rabbi Akiva said the Jews made actual booths for themselves.

What is the real difference between these two opinions? Why is it so important to know whether the sukkah represented the clouds of glory that protected the Jewish people as we travelled through the desert, or the actual booths the Jewish people constructed and lived in for those formative years that the Jewish people lived in the desert?

The difference comes down to what aspect of those forty years we are meant to focus on when we sit in the sukkah: the miraculous or the mundane. Let's examine this a little closer.

They Lived in Booths – So Should You!

Rabbeinu Bachya (Vayikra 23:43) explains that living in actual booths commemorates the miraculous nature of our ancestors' survival in the desert:

דעת האומר סכות ממש עשו להם, מפני זה נצטוינו לעשות סכות דוגמתן, כדי שיתגלה ויתפרסם מתוך מצות הסכות גודל מעלתן של ישראל במדבר שהיו הולכים עם כובד האנשים והנשים והטף במקום ההוא אשר אין בטבע האדם לחיות בו ... כי שם באותו מקום הכנתי להם כל צרכם ולא חסרו דבר.

According to the opinion that says that the Jews made actual booths for themselves, we are commanded to make booths like those, to publicize the greatly elevated state of existence that the Jews enjoyed in the desert. They traveled in the desert with masses of men, women, and children in a place where it is not the nature of man to live ... Even in that place, God prepared for them all of their needs and they lacked nothing.

This understanding sits well with how the Torah (Bereishit 33:17) uses the word sukkah in a different context. Yaakov was traveling with the many animals he had acquired and he needed to protect them from the elements:

וַיַּעֲקֹב נֶסֶע סֻכָּתָהּ וַיִּבְנוּ לֹו בַיִּת וַלְמִקְנָהּ עֹשֶׂה סֻכָּת עַל כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת.
Yaakov went to Sukkot. There, he built himself a house, and made shelters (sukkot) for his livestock. He therefore named the place Sukkot.

The Rashbam (Vayikra 23:43) explains that dwelling in booths heightens our sense of appreciation for God's blessing of abundance. At this time of year, the summer has come to an end and the produce of the field has now ripened and been threshed. Our storehouses and actual houses are now filled with our year's work. The Torah clearly warns us of the potential problem that may come with feeling so excited about our newfound wealth and success:

בְּאוֹסֵפְךָ אֶת תְּבוּאת הָאָרֶץ וּבְתִיכֶם מְלֵאִים כֹּל טוֹב דָּגָן וּתְרוּשׁ וַיִּצְהַר, לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ כִּי בִסְכוּת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַר אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה בְּלֹא יִישׁוּב וּבְלֹא נַחֲלָה, וּמִתּוֹךְ כֵּךְ תִּתְּנוּ הוֹדָאָה לְמִי שֵׁנְתָן לָכֶם נַחֲלָה וּבְתִיכֶם מְלֵאִים כֹּל טוֹב, וְאֵל תֹּאמְרוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם כְּחֵי וְעוֹצֵם יָדִי עֹשֶׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה.

When you have gathered in the produce of the land and your houses become filled with all manner of goodness such as grain, wine, and oil, remember that "I settled the people of Israel in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43). For forty years you dwelt in the wilderness, unsettled and without land. Therefore, it is most fitting that you should be grateful to God for having given you an inheritance and houses full of all manner of good. Do not imagine in your hearts that "my own strength and power have wrought all of this wealth for me" (Devarim 8:17).

By leaving our homes and moving into a flimsy roofed hut at the height of our financial success, the Torah is enabling us to realize where our success truly comes from. The same G-d that redeemed us from Egypt is the One

who keeps us successful in our land by bringing us financial blessings. This realization is most needed when our bank accounts are full, at the tail end of the agricultural season. When do you truly appreciate what you have? When it gets taken away. Even if that lasts for only seven days.

What about the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer? What is his understanding of the purpose of sitting in a sukkah to commemorate the Clouds of Glory?

To understand this, let's see what the role the Clouds of Glory played for the Jewish people at that time.

It's all about the Clouds

The Torah (Shemot 13:21) tells us:

וְהָיָה הַלֵּךְ לַלַּיְנִיָּהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַלַּיְלָה וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה.

God went before them by day with a pillar of cloud, to guide them along the way. By night it appeared as a pillar of fire, providing them with light. They could thus travel day and night.

The Sifri (Beha'alotecha 83) explains:

שִׁבְעָה עֲנָנִים הָיוּ, אַרְבַּעָה מֵאַרְבַּע רֹחוֹתָם וְאַחַד מִלְּמַעְלָה וְאַחַד מִלְּמַטָּה וְאַחַד מִלְּפָנֵיהֶם הַגְּבוּהָ מִנְּמִיכּוֹ וְהַנְּמוּךְ מִגְּבִיָּהּ וּמִכָּה אֶת הַנַּחֲשִׁים וְאֶת הָעֲקָרְבִים וּמִכְבֵּד וּמְרַבֵּץ לַפְּנִיָּהִם *Seven clouds are recorded in the account of their travels: four from the four sides, one above, one below, and one in front of them which would flatten the high land, raise the holes in the ground and destroy snakes and scorpions.*

The clouds therefore had a number of different functions: they guided the Jewish people during their journey through the desert, giving them protection by night and by day, and they made their travels easier (by making the land flat) and less

dangerous (by removing snakes and scorpions in their way).

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 325) tells us that by dwelling in a sukkah, we were reminded of the miracles God performed for us and inspires us to be careful in performing mitzvot:

מִשְׂרָשֵׁי הַמִּצְוָה, מֵה שֶׁמְּפֹרֵשׁ בְּכַתּוּב לְמַעַן נִזְכּוֹר הַנִּסִּים הַגְּדוּלִים שֶׁעָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִדְבַר בְּצֵאתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׂסִיכְכֶם בְּעֲנֵנֵי כְבוֹד שֶׁלֹא יִזְיַק לָהֶם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם וְקָרַח בַּלַּיְלָה. וַיֵּשׁ שְׂפִירְשׁוּ שְׂסוּכּוֹת מִמֶּשׁ עֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַר. וּמִתּוֹךְ זִכְרָת נִפְלְאוֹתָיו שֶׁעָשָׂה עִמָּנוּ וְעַם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ נִזְהָר בְּמִצְוֹתָיו בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְנִהְיָ רְאוּיִים לְקַבֵּלֵת הַטּוֹבָה מֵאַתָּה, וְזֶהוּ חִפְצּוֹ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁחָפֵץ לְהִיטִיב.

The root of this mitzvah is to remind us of the great miracles that God did for our forefathers in the desert after they departed from Egypt. God surrounded them with Clouds of Glory in order that the sun should not bother the Jews by day nor the cold by night. Some commentators write that they actually built sukkot in the desert. Remembering the wonders that God performed for us and for our ancestors will inspire us to be careful with His commandments and will lead us to merit receiving good from Him, which is what He desires.

The Vilna Gaon (*Shir HaShirim* 1:4) explains that the Clouds of Glory had another function: they represented the return of the Divine Presence to the Jewish nation. As he explains:

לְפִי שֶׁכִּשְׁעָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל נִסְתַּלְקוּ הָעֲנָנִים וְאִזּוֹ לֹא חָזְרוּ עַד שֶׁהִתְחִילוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּמִשָּׁה יָרַד בַּיּוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים וּבְמַחֲרַת יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים "וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" וְצִוִּיהוּ עַל מְלֹאכֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, זֶה הָיָה בִּי"א תְּשֵׁרֵי וְכַתִּיב "וְהָעַם הֵבִיאוּ [עוֹד נִדְבָה] בְּבוֹקֵר בְּבוֹקֵר" עוֹד שְׁנֵי יָמִים, הָרִי ל"ג בְּתִשְׂרִי, וּבִי"ד בְּתִשְׂרִי נִטְלוּ כֹל חֶכֶם לֵב מִמֹּשֶׁה אֶת הַזֹּהָב בְּמִנִּין וּבְמִשְׁקָל וּבִט"ו הִתְחִילוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, וְאִזּוֹ חָזְרוּ עֲנֵנֵי כְבוֹד וְלִכְךָ אֲנִי עוֹשִׂין סֻכּוֹת בִּט"ו.

When the Jews made the Golden Calf

(in Tammuz), the Clouds of Glory disappeared, only to return when the Jews began to build the Mishkan. Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second Tablets on Yom Kippur. The following day, the eleventh day of Tishrei, Moshe gathered the nation and commanded them to build the Mishkan. Then, as the Torah writes, the next two days, the twelfth and thirteenth of Tishrei, the Jews contributed materials and precious metals to build the Mishkan. On the fourteenth of Tishrei the Sages who were designated to construct the Mishkan and its vessels took the gold from Moshe. And on the fifteenth of Tishrei the Jews began to build the Mishkan and the Clouds of Glory returned. This is why we celebrate Sukkot on the fifteenth of Tishrei.

According to the Vilna Gaon, the clouds not only offered protection,

they also acted as a sign. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem removed the clouds from over the Jewish people, but after the Mishkan was built, the clouds returned and remained with them until their entry into Israel. The sukkah, and thereby the clouds it comes to represent, are a sign of G-d's continued love for the Jewish people even after the tragic sin of the Golden Calf. No matter how far you have fallen as a person, or even a nation, the door to repentance is always open.

Less Olam Hazeh

Rabbi Meir Simchah HaCohen of Dvinsk, the *Meshech Chochmah*, (Vayikra 23:42) informs us that the dwelling in a sukkah empowers us with the ability to counter the tendency to get over-attached to the

physical world. He explains that God's Torah contains mitzvot that help a person battle against his inherent nature; and there are other mitzvot that are not intended to change one's nature, but rather to purify and refine a person's existing, inherent nature.

The mitzvah of sukkah helps us accomplish the former:

אחרי שהאדם הוא עמל בשדה כל הקיץ, יחרוש, יזרע, ויעדור, ויקצור, ויעמר, ועמל בשדה, ויאסוף את גרנו, ואסמיו מלאו בר, ולבו שמח בפרי עמלו, מה מתוקה לו מנוחתו להסתופף בצל ביתו. אז באה התורה ואמרה: צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת ארעי! זה נגד הטבע לקדש כוחות האדם והרגשותיו מגבול החמרי... אמנם, יש מצוות שהן כפי חוקי הטבע. רק שהוא על פי חוקי החכמה העליונה בפרטים מצוינים לפי טעמי החכמה האלקית ... והנה מחק הטבעי לשמוח עת האסיף בזרעונים ובעטרות של שבליים - כנהוג בין העמים - על זה באה התורה והגבילה ד' מינים



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ידועים בקבלה, ואמרה "ושמחתם לפני ה' שבעת ימים".

After a person toils in the field plowing, planting, cultivating, reaping, and bundling; working in the field to gather the produce; filling the storehouse with the produce; and then rejoicing in the result of the labor, it would be so sweet to be able to rest at home. At that very moment the Torah instructs us to leave our homes and to enter temporary dwellings in order to sanctify our natural tendencies and feelings by limiting the influence of the physical world ... However, there are other mitzvot that teach us to do what we would naturally desire. These mitzvot contain details which are given according to God's wisdom ... It is human nature to celebrate at the time of the ingathering of the produce with the different types of produce that have been gathered, as is common throughout the world. For this the Torah comes and specifies taking the four species, and instructs us to rejoice with them for seven days.

While the sukkah detaches us from the physical world, the *arba minim*, four species, allow us to celebrate our physical riches at the same time. These two mitzvot represent the conflict between the physical world and spiritual world. Ultimately the sukkah and *arba minim* work in tandem, they are two parts of the same whole. Although the *arba minim* can be shaken anywhere, according to some traditions, the preferred place to shake the *arba minim* is in the sukkah itself. The sukkah therefore becomes a dwelling place for the *arba minim*. This way we perform a mitzvah (shaking the *arba minim*) while being surrounded by another mitzvah, (the sukkah). We live in a physical world and perform mitzvot that are physical in nature. Our job is to take the physical and elevate it so that physical acts can become spiritual experiences.

What else does the Sukkah help us achieve?

Leave Your Home — Leave This World Behind

The sukkah, says Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Derash Moshe, Derash 22*), teaches us to internalize that this world is only a means to the World to Come:

הנה דור המדבר שהשיגו מדריגה גדולה מאד כנביאים וזכו לענני כבוד מ"מ סוכות ממש ג"כ עשו להם פי' שהוצרכו להיות במדבר ארבעים שנה ולחיות רק חיי עראי ולאכול מן כדי ללמוד ולשנן שהעולם הוא רק פרוודור כדי ששכיבואו לארץ לא ישתקעו בחיי ההבל. *The generation in the desert, which achieved a very high spiritual level like that of the prophets, and merited the Clouds of Glory, nevertheless also sat in actual booths. The explanation why they needed both the Clouds of Glory and to sit in booths, is that they needed to be in the desert for forty years and live a temporal existence and eat the Manna in order to learn to internalize that this world is only a passageway to the future world. In this way, when they would enter the Land of Israel, they would not become absorbed in a mundane existence.*

The sukkah is like a portal into Olam Habah. It acts as a device to keep us unattached to the temporal world of Olam Hazeh, and keep us connected to Olam Habah. Just like the Clouds of Glory and the huts we erected in the desert reminded us of G-d's ultimate protection and the future world of Israel we were about to enter, the sukkah is reminding us that we are headed into the future world of Olam Habah, a place of higher existence, where Hashem's presence will more palpably be felt. An amazing story told about the Chafetz Chaim illustrates this idea perfectly.

Where's Your Furniture?

One day the Chafetz Chaim was visited by a small group of travelers from a far off town in Europe. Upon entering the Chafetz Chaim's home they were struck by how humble and sparse his abode was. Seeing the lack of contents in the home of the great tzaddik, one of the men blurted out in surprise, "Rebbi, where is your furniture?" Without missing a beat the Chafetz Chaim responded, "Where is your furniture?" Smiling, the man said, "We don't live here, we are just passing through." Upon which the Chafetz Chaim responded, "So am I."

This may answer the original question we began this essay with. Why does the Torah demand for us to live in the sukkah day and night and why do we have to be surrounded by the sukkah, thereby fulfilling the mitzvah with our entire body? The answer may be related to what the sukkah does for us, building our faith in Hashem and reminding us of Olam Habah. Faith is something we build with our entire being. To grow in faith, we need to invest our entire being. One body part isn't sufficient in helping us grow in faith. It can't just be our sense or sight, hearing, touch or speech that engages in faith. Faith involves our hearts — how we feel, our minds — how we think, and every part of our life. That means a full investment of our very selves.

How does all this relate to the sukkah being a part of Olam Habah?

The World to Come is defined in the Gemarah (*Berachot 17a*) in the following manner:

מרגלא בפומיה דרב [לא כעולם הזה העולם הבא] העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה ולא משא ומתן ולא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות אלא צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה.

A favorite saying of Rav was: "The future world is not like this world. In the future world, there is neither eating, nor drinking, nor propagation, nor business, nor jealousy, nor hatred, nor competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence."

This may not be a good description of the sukkah experience, but it is revealing in how closely we connect to Olam Habah through the sukkah. For one whole week, we give up the creature comforts of our homes. Rich or poor, smart or foolish, successful or not so, every Jew replaces their home for a leaky roofed hut made of naturally grown items that are disconnected from the earth, and which have never been fashioned into any form of a meaningful vessel. How much jealousy can be aroused from watching anyone live in such a hut? How much hatred? How much competition? All this brilliantly recreates the basic framework of Olam Habah, while at the same time allowing us to celebrate the time of year and miracles that our ancestors experienced after leaving Egypt.

Don't "Kick" Your Sukkah, or any Mitzvah

The Gemarah in *Avodah Zarah* 3a-b, tells us that Hashem will use the sukkah as a test for the nations of the world. The mitzvah of sukkah, says the Gemarah, is an easy mitzvah as it does not entail a major financial sacrifice. It will therefore be chosen as a way to determine whether the nations of

the world would have been worthy of the Torah. The nations will then construct and dwell in their sukkot. G-d will then test them by allowing the scorching heat of the sun to pierce their sukkot. This burning heat will leave them so frustrated with the mitzvah that they will storm out of

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competition?**

their sukkah and kick it in aggravation as they leave.

Rava is puzzled by this, and wonders why the nations should be judged harshly for this reaction to leaving the sukkah from the heat. Aren't the Jewish people also exempt from this mitzvah in uncomfortable conditions — *mitztaer patur min hasukkah*? The Gemarah answers that although the nations had the right to leave the sukkah, they didn't need to show their disdain by kicking it as they left.

I believe this Gemarah demonstrates another valuable lesson when it comes to mitzvah observance, especially

in relation to how our children see us perform mitzvot. Many times, performance of mitzvot takes our time, money and comfort. When this happens, we sometimes display our frustration and show the members of our family how irritated we are with the obligations G-d and His Torah have placed upon us. While we are human, and we all sometimes experience challenges in the face of performing mitzvot, not allowing these frustrations to overtake our experience of Torah and mitzvot is key.

This is especially important when it comes to our children watching how we react to a life of mitzvot. As Rav Moshe Feinstein once pointed out, many Jews left Judaism because their parents kept their mitzvot with a "kvetch." By listening to their parents constantly complain about Judaism in the modern age with high tuition bills, expensive kosher food, Jewish people misbehaving in the public eye etc., and not focusing on the positive aspects of Jewish life, our children's connection to an authentic Torah Judaism can be damaged. You can sometimes leave the sukkah, but don't "kick" it on the way out. We should teach our children that a Torah life isn't always the most convenient, but it's still the right thing to do, and we love it.

May we all see the coming of the Mashiach and enjoy the real sukkah celebration of Olam Habah speedily in our days.



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