

## *Walk through the Parsha*

with **Rabbi David Walk**

# A Sukka for All

Back in 1977, the first night of Sukkot was accompanied by rain and high winds. We got to eat in the Sukka that first night just fine, but next morning many Sukkot had been destroyed. One Sukka in Monsey, NY, literally just blew away, never to be seen again. I just hope that the Munchkins enjoyed it as much as Dorothy's house. The point is that these temporary dwellings are by their nature flimsy. The only rule is that they withstand 'a normal wind' (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 628:2). The gusts of the early morning of September 28, 1977 didn't constitute a normal wind. But is that the ideal Sukka? What is the ultimate Sukka supposed to be like?

Where to begin? The Torah doesn't tell us much about Sukka construction. Rabbi Soloveitchik once described Sukkot as the holiday of Torah She'Ba'al Peh (the Oral Law), because the Torah itself is so sparse with details about the building codes. The three walls, must let in rain criteria, are purely Oral tradition. Really all we're told is, 'For a seven-day period you shall live in booths (Aramaic: M'TALAYA, 'shade givers'). Every resident among the Israelites shall live in booths, in order that your future generations should know that I caused the children of Israel live in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your

God (Vayikra 23:42-43). The lack of clarity in this verse spawned a famous disagreement between Rabbi Eliezar and Rabbi Akiva over whether these were real booths or represent God's Clouds of Glory, which accompanied the Jews in the desert (Sukka 11b).

Actually, it makes no difference, because the Torah demands structures which remind us of the desert experience. These huts do the job as either desert booths or fluffy clouds, because we're obviously supposed to use our imaginations. When you lie back in your Sukka on the first night of the Chag and see that big, full moon peeking between the branches, it's easy to imagine the desert sky all those millennia ago. I've always felt that this is more emotionally evocative of that generation than the carefully orchestrated customs of the Pesach Seder.

But back to my original question: What's the perfect Sukka? Is it the one with finest furniture or fanciest furnishings? The Talmud says, 'All Israel should merit to sit in one Sukka (Sukka 27b).' Wow! I saw 90,000 Jews in Met Life Stadium for the Siyum Hashas. Okay, that's less than 1% of the world's Jews. I can't begin to imagine a structure one hundred times that large, or imagine every rabbi agreeing to its kashrut. What's the Gemara talking about?

Clearly, it's a metaphor. But for what? My son and a few friends built a trebuchet (Look it up!) in high school, and the whole school went out to a field to see this medieval machine at work. After some guffaws at their

struggles, they finally got a projectile (actually, a five-pound pumpkin) to soar through the crisp Autumn air. One of the rebbe'im gushed, 'This is no longer a school project. It's a metaphor!' And, of course, we know what he meant. Whether Punkin' Chunckin' or Sukka buildin', every great metaphor is a metaphor for life.

When we moon-gaze through our branches, we're just a few days separated from Yom Kippur. The goal of that awesome date is, of course, SELICHA, MECHILA, KAPPARA (forgiveness, pardon, atonement). The purpose of that immense spiritual effort of the Ten Days of Repentance is to bring us to a state of Teshuva. On the eleventh of Tishrei we should all feel like BA'ALEI TESHUVA, penitents. The test of that status is our feelings for others. Sin separates; repentance repairs. We should feel that since all of our transgressions have been banished, we have removed all barriers between us and every other Jew, and, hopefully, every human. We have become AGUDA ACHAT, one unified group. The roadblock to sitting under one roof isn't architectural; it's sociological. When we say there's no tent large enough to contain all the Jews, that's not a discussion about tents. It's a heart-breaking discussion about how we feel about each other.

This idea of AGUDA ACHAT is also the famous metaphor of the four species. Each vegetation which we shake during the festival represents another personality type, but we hold them all together representing the goal of unity

within our people and our world.

The S'fat Emet (1892) teaches that the essential Teshuva actually occurs on Sukkot. He begins quoting Yeshayahu, 'Your sins were like a big cloud, but I wiped them all away. Your sins are gone, like a cloud that disappeared into thin air. I rescued and protected you, so come back to Me' (44:22). This is the authentic Teshuva, not out of fear, but love. Teshuva for no other reason than to return to God's presence. As the Rebbe said, 'It's only when one yearns to return to God, to awaken the love which was hidden by the sins, that's complete Teshuva.' Sukkot is the proof that we have returned to God. When we gaze through our S'CHACH, we imagine all the clouds blurring our relationship with God are dispersing. The 'gathering clouds of Elul' have become the dissipating clouds of Tishrei.

During Sukkot we can assess the success of the Teshuva process. Are we closer to God? Have the animosity and friction between the Jews been assuaged? We can gage the outcome as we sit in our Sukkot and wave our LULAV.

Now we can understand the prayer we recite as we sadly depart our Sukkot: May it be Your will, Lord our God, and God of our ancestors just as I fulfilled the mitzva of sitting in the Sukka, so, next year may I merit to sit in the Sukka made of the skin of Livyatan. It's not about a carcass. It's about the unity of our people. Chag Samei'ach! 🍂