

Emor

Sukkahs – Booths for War

For seven days you shall dwell in sukkahs, every citizen among Israel should live in sukkahs. This is so that future generations will know that I had the Jewish people live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt, I am Hashem your God.

Vayikra 23:42–43

The Sukkah, explains the Tur,⁵⁷⁴ is to remind us of the clouds of glory, the *annanei hakavod* that enveloped the Jewish people during the time they wandered in the wilderness. R. Yoel Sirkes, commonly known as the Bach,⁵⁷⁵ writes that this piece of information actually has *halachic* ramifications. When the Torah gives an explicit reason, as it does here – “for in Sukkas, I housed the Children of Israel...” – then, in order to fulfill the mitzvah, one must be conscious of the reason for it whilst performing it. This makes the Tur’s ruling a troubling one. The Gemara⁵⁷⁶ records two interpretations of the verse “for in Sukkas, I housed the Children of Israel.” One is that of Rabbi Eliezer, who understands that these Sukkas were the clouds of glory. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, understands that they were actual booths – *Sukkos mamish*. We always rule like Rabbi Akiva when he and Rabbi Eliezer disagree on anything *halachic*.⁵⁷⁷ Until the Bach came along, it would have been possible to account for the Tur’s siding with Rabbi Eliezer as a non-*halachic* statement. Since, as we all know, there is no accounting for taste, it would have simply appeared that the Tur liked Rabbi Eliezer’s image more, for whatever reason. But now that this is a *halachic* issue, why did the Tur not rule like Rabbi Akiva?

Another difficult thing to make sense of is the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. What on earth does he mean by “actual booths”? After all, the Jews did live inside of the clouds of glory. What need could they have had for booths? The Rokeach⁵⁷⁸ offers an explanation. He writes that although the Jews living in the desert never needed any booths to live in, since they lived in the clouds of glory, they nevertheless needed places to live when they went out to war against Sichon and Og. They left the clouds of glory then, and were unprotected. It was then that they built booths. Sukkos commemorates these booths. But why in the world should this be? What could be the meaning of a holiday to commemorate wartime booths?

574 *Orach Chaim*, 625

575 *Ibid.*

576 Sukkah 11b

577 Eruvin 46b

578 *Sefer Harokeach*, 219

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson⁵⁷⁹ asks another interesting question. Why would a battalion of warriors build above-ground booths rather than trenches? Does it really make any military sense to build a bunch of little booths with palm-branch roofs decorated with children's projects, construction paper chains, and pictures of the seven special fruits of Israel, when at battle? What were they thinking?

The answer to all of this lies in the amazing and beautiful words of the saintly Divrei Chaim of Sanz.⁵⁸⁰ The Divrei Chaim explains that the Sukkah is not something that one is meant only to eat in or sleep in. The Gemara says⁵⁸¹ that you are to relate to the Sukkah “*kein taduru*,” just as you might normally relate to your home. Just as one has his home as a residence even when he goes out to do other things, so is it with one's Sukkah. Explains the Divrei Chaim, just as the person who sits in the Sukkah is sitting in a place of holiness and is enveloped in the holiness of the Sukkah's shade, so does one who leaves the Sukkah for good reason. Even the person who leaves the Sukkah when he needs to, in order to do other good things that fulfill Hashem's will, is truly making the Sukkah his home, and takes the holiness of the Sukkah along with him. R. Moshe Wolfson explains that not only is this true about the Sukkah, it was certainly true about the original clouds of glory as well. The clouds of glory protected the Jewish people from all danger, but only those Jews who resided inside the clouds of glory.⁵⁸² However, they did protect the person who left the “Sukkah” for the right reasons. If a person left the clouds of glory to fulfill the will of Hashem, he took the powers of the clouds of glory along with him, and remained immune to damage, just as he was when inside the actual clouds, since their energy was with him. They were able to build Sukkahs in the line of fire, and were nevertheless untouchable.

It emerges that even the opinion of Rabbi Akiva is that the Sukkahs that we sit in commemorate the power of the clouds of glory⁵⁸³ – it simply extends that power to even outside the clouds of glory. The Tur is following even the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. Every year, we sit in a booth that is not of clouds of glory, to remember that we can, indeed, extend that power to wherever we need to. The ability to engage in the physical world, and nevertheless remain in the embrace of the clouds of glory, is what Sukkos is meant to help us achieve. In your Sukkah, even the completely lifeless act of sleeping is a great mitzvah. Just having a pulse in a Sukkah is enough to be fulfilling a mitzvah. Anything can become spiritual

579 *Emunas Itecha*. Moadim, pp. 124–5

580 *Divrei Chaim al Hatorah, inyanei Sukkos*, p. 10b

581 Sukkah 26a

582 See Dvarim 25:19 and Rashi's comments, s.v. *kol hanechshalim*. See also Rashi to Bamidbar 21:1, s.v. *vayishma*.

583 See also Chasam Sofer in *Torah Moshe* to Emor, s.v. *ki basukkos*, where he explains an alternative explanation of the Rokeach. He explains that we commemorate the time that we had to build Sukkas to remind ourselves that it was only twice that we actually needed to build housing, and that otherwise, we were taken care of entirely. (Sometimes, we only appreciate what we have when we don't have it for a little while.) That is why, explains the Chasam Sofer, we build Sukkas to remember the *Sukkos mamash*. Thus, according to the Chasam Sofer as well, we see that the real purpose of the mitzvah of Sukkah, even according to Rabbi Akiva, is to remember the clouds of glory.

when in the Sukkah. This is what Rabbi Akiva teaches us.

On the last day of Sukkos, Hashem turns to the Jewish people and says, “It is hard for Me to see you go. Please stay one more day.”⁵⁸⁴ That extra day is Shmini Atzeres. But is it really any easier to leave after that “one more day”? Wouldn’t it be easier to just get the goodbye over with – like removing the proverbial Band-Aid in one clean shot? We are taught in the Gemara⁵⁸⁵ that Shmini Atzeres has its own special character as a holiday; it is a *regel bifnei atzma*. Rashi⁵⁸⁶ explains that it is, indeed, its very own day, since “we do not sit in a Sukkah.” Is that really enough to make a day meaningful? What is a day of “not sitting in the Sukkah” all about?

R. Yechezkel Weinfeld⁵⁸⁷ points to the Targum Yonason,⁵⁸⁸ who tells us that the word *Atzeres* means “a joyous return to one’s home” – from the Sukkah. The nature of the holiday of Sukkos was for us to “leave [our] permanent home and enter a temporary home,”⁵⁸⁹ teach our Sages. This world is all temporal. The person who loves his child will gladly give everything else up to protect him or her. He would never consider giving his child’s life for 500 billion dollars. Only when you have something that makes everything else completely worthless have you begun to live. The “time of our joy,” as we refer to Sukkos in our prayers, is also the time when we read all about how everything under the sun is “futility of futilities.”⁵⁹⁰ We remind ourselves what is real and what is not when we can leave our big, strong homes for a time. But the goal is not to forget that after the holiday, when we go back home, but rather, to take that spiritual achievement back home with us. The goal of Shmini Atzeres is to move back into our permanent mansions with the feeling that we are living in no more than a flimsy booth. It is a holiday of *not* sitting in the Sukkah.

The holiness of the Sukkah – the great spiritual gains that we earn from sitting in its shade and breathing its air – are ones that can extend outside the Sukkah, and through our entire year.

584 Rashi to Vaykira 23:36, s.v. *atzeres hi*.
585 Sukkah 48a
586 Ibid., s.v. *regel*
587 *Chachmei Lev* 6, Simchas Torah 5767, p. 944
588 Bamidbar 29:35
589 Sukkah 2a
590 Koheles 1:2