

Sukkot: Reaching For The Stars

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Mishna asks, if one cannot see the stars through the top of the *sukkah*, is the *sukkah* kosher? Beit Shammai says no, and Beit Hillel says yes.

The Leket V'halibuv notes that there's a deeper message here. On a metaphysical level we have to see the stars within ourselves. We have to find our inherent greatness. Commenting on the verse, "U'matzdikei *harabim k'kochavim*," the Gemara says that people who teach little children are called stars. When one looks at a star it seems very small but in reality it's a vast mass. Those who teach *aleph beit* to small kids are looked down upon, when in reality the whole world rests on them. This is true of each one of us. A person must recognize his incredible potential and believe in the greatness of his soul. The Arizal notes that the minimum halachic requirement of the *sukkah* is two sides and a bit of the third side, similar to a hug. The *sukkah* represents Hashem embracing us. We have to recognize that Hashem believes in us, that we can have a loving relationship with Him and that we can all shine like extraordinary stars.

Rashi explains that *kochvei hachama* are the rays of the sun that must come into the *sukkah*. It symbolizes the divine light that comes into our life. A Jew has to sense Hashem's presence every moment of his existence. The Rambam says the *kochvei hachama* are brilliant stars that can be seen even when the sun shines.

Rashi's view is what comes into the *sukkah*. The Rambam's view sees beyond the *sukkah*. The physical world blocks out spirituality. We have to look behind the mask and recognize Hashem in this world. The *schach*, the top of the *sukkah*, is the break between this world and the heavenly world. The *sukkah* gives us

the ability to pierce through the thick darkness to perceive Hashem's light. It tells us to strive for something higher, to move beyond the here and now and discover a world of greatness. After the High Holy days it is as if Hashem says, "You've attained such high spiritual levels. I want you to concretize this. Go out of your home. Look up at the heavens and see the spiritual potential within yourself. Reach for that vision of greatness." When we sit in our *sukkah* we have to be able to see the great stars, even when the sun is shining. In the physical world of cause and effect we have to be able to look up and recognize the stars.

The Rambam asks, what was so severe about the sin of the *ben sorer umore* (the rebellious son) that he was put to death? He answers that he was held accountable for not living a life of holiness, for not fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *u'bo sidbak* (And you shall cleave to Him). This seems perplexing. Most of us aren't holding at that level either. The Siftei Chaim answers that if a person has a vision of the goal he wants to reach, he's able to direct all his actions towards that goal. You can't be a true servant of Hashem unless you have objectives you want to reach. The problem of the *ben sorer umore* was that he didn't have the vision of where he wanted to go. He was so caught up in the here and now that he lost sight of his true purpose. As we look up at the *kochavei chamah*, we must ask ourselves what our spiritual goals are.

The Michtav M'Eliyahu points out that if a person believes he will reach a certain level or acquire a certain spiritual attribute, then to some extent he's already reached his objective. When a person is unsuccessful, it has nothing to do with ability. His problem is his vision. Did he aim for the stars? When we sit in the *sukkah* we have to ask ourselves, "Do I recognize my inner light? What do I hope to become?" Hashem's first

words to the first Jew Avraham was, "*Lech lecha*," Go to yourself, move forward, never stand still. Rabbi Frand writes that there are two images of every person, one in heaven of what he could be, and one on earth of where he is at the moment. Our mission on this earth is to meld these two images together. The Midrash says when an episode begins with *Vayeishev* (he sat) it's a sign of foreboding. The Maharal explains that sitting in one place spells calamity. A Jew must constantly push forward, grow, and reach new levels of achievement.

We live in such a superficial technologically driven world that it's hard to think in a deep meaningful way. On *Sukkot* we take ourselves out of that world. The Rambam says see the stars, be inspired, and pursue your visions. Rashi says bring the spiritual light in a measured form into your life. Too much light makes the *sukkah* invalid. We must allow in just enough light to be able to take the vision and work with it, to live above the *schach*, to have vision and passion and unify it with our soul. There has to be *achdut* between the body and soul, between the vision and bringing it in to the world of reality.

If passion and ambition and knowing our goals is the prerequisite in the world of the stars, what is the prerequisite in bringing it down to reality, in allowing the sun rays to impact us? The Gemara says nothing stands in the way of desire. In the path we want to go we will be successful. When a person has a vision he must then have the will to bring it to reality. We should never give up on the stars. We can reach them. If we really believe in our visions and have the desire to fulfill them, we will. This *Sukkot*, may we take the *sukkah* experience as an inspiration to move beyond ourselves and may the rays of Hashem's love illuminate our way.



An Invitation To Hashem's House

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

One would think Sukkot should have been after Pesach, when Hashem took us out of Egypt. That was when the Jews dwelt in sukkot in the desert. Yet the holiday comes close on the heels of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It is as if Hashem says, "You invited me into your home, now I will invite you into my abode."

Sukkot contains an aspect of the world to come. For one special week we merit to dwell in the shade of the Divine Presence. The *halachot* (laws) of this special mitzva help us understand how to come closer to Him. Everything in the physical world has a form and shape, something that gives it borders. Holiness, however has no boundaries. Just as Hashem is expansive and fills the world, spirituality has no limits. The sukkah's width is boundless. This teaches us that everything in the world can be included within the frame-

work of *kedusha* (sanctity). We sleep and eat and spend the greater part of our time in the sukkah as a way of showing Hashem that all physicality can be sanctified for Him. Yet the walls of the sukkah cannot be higher than twenty amot because the boundaries of *kedusha* require a vessel.

The Ramchal in Mesilat Yesharim writes that a person can make himself into a *mishkan* (tabernacle) for Hashem. Just as the *mishkan* traveled from place to place, a person can connect to Hashem wherever he is. The more a person attaches himself to Hashem, the more he transforms himself into a dwelling place for Him. On Sukkot we take everything we have and place it within the firm boundaries of the sukkah walls and elevate it for Hashem. Sukkot comes after Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, days of tremendous closeness to Hashem. On Rosh Hashana we pray for

sustenance, life, good health, children and a sweet new year. The sweetness is the aspect of uplifting what we have for Hashem. On Sukkot we actualize this by inviting Hashem into our homes and hearts.

The Gemara says that the merit of building the walls of the sukkah drives away both our physical and spiritual enemies. The sukkah protects us. It must have more shade than sun. Sun represents the power of the nations. It never changes or grows. We are compared to the moon, which constantly experiences renewal and rebirth.

Sukkot is a tremendous opportunity to store up *kedusha* and *tahara* (purity). This is why it is called *zman simchateinu*. This is what eternal joy is about.

Megilat Kohelet: Perek 7

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

"A good name is better than good oil and the day of death is better than the day of birth." This seems to be a strange comparison. Why compare a good name to good oil? The simple meaning is that the good oil refers to the oil that was used for anointing. When a person is born into a high position, it means their starting point is different than someone born into a lower position who must reach a higher level on their own. A king who is the son of a king is at a different position than the very first king. But, however a person starts and however sanctified their beginning point is, what's important at their ultimate judgment is where they end up.

Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya, allowed themselves to be thrown into the fiery furnace rather than bow down to Nevuchadnezzar.

Hashem saw their self-sacrifice and saved them. In contrast, Nadav and Avihu, in a moment of religious ecstasy, went into the most sanctified part of the *ohel moed* to offer incense without the appropriate preparation. They were consumed by a fire sent by Hashem and weren't miraculously saved. This shows us that a person who develops their *madreiga* (spiritual level) on their own and does it fully, ends up better than someone who was the son of the high pries, but doesn't put themselves fully under Hashem's authority. Their last day is different.

"It's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting because that is the end of all men and those who live shall place this on their heart." It's certainly more enjoyable to go to a party than to a house of mourning. There's ambience, warmth, and

good food. But there's more to be gained in a house of mourning. What's spoken about is what was lost with the person's death and what he meant to others. One learns more what life is about there, than what one will ever learn at a party.

After the funeral of the Holtzbergs who were killed in Mumbai, the non-Jewish woman who saved their little boy was interrogated. They asked her where the couple had kept their personal things. She answered that they had none. Everything was accessible. Their home and hearts were open to all. When you hear something like that you learn much more about what reality could be then at a party. This is meant to affect us emotionally so that our yearnings and strivings have enduring meaning, not things that are transient.