



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

**Sukkot תשפה**

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***Hello, Welcome!***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

As we progress through the Jewish calendar year, we enter different time zones. As we reach each new time zone, our Sages have given us a tool to take note of the fact that Hashem has granted us the gift of life to reach this new point in time, and to thank Him for it. That tool is the blessing of שהחיינו - “*shehechyanu*,” by which we thank Hashem (1) שהחיינו - for *giving us life* (2) וקיימנו - for *sustaining us*, and (3) והגיענו לזמן הזה – for *bringing us to this point in time*. The Rabbis instituted this blessing when the world enters a new epoch, and we are fortunate enough to be alive to be part of it.

Perhaps the most meaningful שהחיינו that we recite is the one that we say as Yom Kippur enters. Since our fate for the coming year is sealed on Yom Kippur, as we stand in front of Hashem alive, we realize that last year Hashem granted us another year of life. So many did not make it to this point, and, yet, I am still here. I should be filled with emotions of thanks for the incredible gift that I have received. What a tremendous debt of gratitude I owe Hashem for His gracious blessing to me!

After Yom Kippur, we enter a new time zone, זמן שמחתינו - *the time of our rejoicing*. Each of the three festivals, Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot heralds a new era for the Jewish nation; to commemorate it, we recite the *shehechyanu* blessing at the onset of each festival. Sukkot is “*the time of our rejoicing*,” Pesach is “*the time of our freedom*,” and Shavuot is “*the time of the giving of the Torah*.”

Being now in the middle of the Sukkot holiday, “the time of our rejoicing,” we should all be rejoicing and feeling great joy. Somehow, though, I don’t think that is what is happening. Perhaps it is because we simply don’t know what we should be rejoicing about. If a person who received an envelope in the mail informing him that he won the lottery and that he is now a millionaire, never opens the letter, even though he

has great cause for rejoicing, he will not. Similarly, if we don't appreciate the gift that Sukkot brings us, we will not feel any reason to rejoice.

Beginning on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tishrei, the Torah commands us to dwell in a sukkah for seven days. The essential component of the sukkah is its thatched, insubstantial roof, the סכך - *schach*. The walls and flooring can be as elaborate as one wishes, but the roof must be made of material that grows from the ground and remains in an unfinished state. Technically, you could use 2 x 4s for *schach* because they grew from the ground and are in an unfinished state, *viz*, they must be built into a structure to be useful. But you couldn't use a broom stick or closet pole because they are finished products.

The mitzvah to sit in a sukkah is to remind us of the clouds of glory that Hashem employed to protect the Jewish people in their forty-year journey through the wilderness. The Jews were enveloped from all six sides in special clouds that elevated them above the earth, both physically and spiritually. The clouds protected them from the elements, from nasty creatures like scorpions, and from their enemies. The clouds also showed the intense love that Hashem had for His people. It was as if He was swaddling them in His bosom, and lovingly carrying them throughout their journey.

As the Jewish people travelled through the wilderness, there was no question whence their protection came: There was but a single option. They knew that their existence depended completely on Hashem's kindness and protection. Indeed, after Aharon (in whose merit Hashem provided the special clouds) died, they disappeared for a while. Immediately, the Jewish nation was attacked by an enemy. For the first time, an enemy could identify them to attack. Shortly after that, in Moshe's merit, the clouds returned. The forty years in the wilderness served to imbue the Jewish people with the proper values and

foundations of Judaism, namely, that our existence is completely in Hashem's hands.

After the Jewish people entered Israel and resumed normal life without obvious miracles from Hashem, how would they maintain that concept of dependance on Hashem? Even though there are no open miracles, Hashem is still the source of our protection and sustenance. Enter the mitzvah of Sukkah to reinforce this lesson. Leave your secure home with your deadbolt locks and alarm systems and live in a hut with no protection from the elements and enemies. Once again, like the Jews in the wilderness, feel that you are completely in Hashem's hands for your protection. It's a two-way street. When we leave our secure homes and place our trust completely in Hashem, He will never abandon us. When Hashem responds to the trust that we have placed in Him by providing us with the needed protection, our trust in Him grows, and we will trust Him even more next time. This cycle may repeat itself many times, each one strengthening our trust and bond with Hashem. The seven days are designed to leave an indelible impression on us.

As to the secret for our rejoicing, when dwelling in the sukkah for seven days, we are reliving the reality that we are in Hashem's arms and that He is our sole protector. We can actually feel that our sukkahs are like the clouds of glory that Hashem wrapped around the Jewish people in the wilderness. What could be more exciting than that? Realizing that we are in Hashem's arms means that we are invincible and protected from all possible misfortune. We are not alone in this jungle of a world prone to random mishaps and accidents or to the malicious whims and wills of others. We are in Hashem's loving arms, and are as secure as a child in his mother's arms.

It may be hard, but we should extend this feeling even to events that are bitter or difficult to bear. Hashem hasn't abandoned us; rather,

He has determined that we are in need of some bitter medicine. We can be assured that He is doing it for our best interest. And if we understand this, we will always grow from the experience.

It is not coincidental that Sukkot comes right after Yom Kippur. Only after going through Rosh Hashana (the day of judgment), the Ten Days of Teshuva, and then Yom Kippur are we on a spiritual level high enough to appreciate this amazing reality. This thought should truly cause us to jump for joy!

The Sukkah brings us another reason to rejoice, and that is that it facilitates peace with our fellow Jew.

A sukkah must be a temporary dwelling. It may not be higher than 20 cubits (about 40 feet), because otherwise it would have to be built as a permanent structure. (If it is lower than 40 feet, even though it has permanent walls, it is still kosher.)

Knowing that the time spent in the sukkah is limited to seven days enables us to get by without many of the conveniences and luxuries that are built into our houses. Why bring out the sofa? For seven days I can sit on a chair. Knowing that the inconvenience is but temporary enables us to deal with it. We don't get upset or depressed about the situation because we know that it will pass soon enough.

The sukkah is thus a metaphor for this world, which is also just a temporary dwelling for every human being. We come into the world for a limited time, and then we are off to the next world. Internalizing this message can help us deal with many of life's challenges. This is just a temporary inconvenience! Why get upset about it? I can handle it for a while.

Two people came to Rabbi Chaim Volozhin זצ"ל (d. 1821) with a dispute over a tract of land. One claimed that it was in his family for many

years and that he inherited it from his father, while the other claimed that he knows that *his* father purchased the land from the other fellow's father but just cannot find the deed.

After hearing their positions on the matter, Rabbi Volozhin asked them to take him to the pieceparcel of land; he wanted to see what they were talking about.

When they arrived, the rabbi asked each of them to repeat his claim. After hearing what each one said, the rabbi dropped to his knees and put his ear to the ground, as if he was listening to something that the ground was telling him. When he arose, the men asked him what he had just done.

Addressing the litigants, he said: "Well, I heard what each of you had to say about the land, but then, I wanted to hear what the *land* had to say about the case."

Following his setup, they asked him, "Nu, Rabbi, so what ***did*** the land have to say?"

Rabbi Volozhin responded, "The land said, 'I really don't know what these two men are arguing about; they are both going to be ***mine, soon anyway!***'"

With this approach to life, it becomes easier to get along with others. When someone wrongs me, or does something that I dislike, I can (and should) look at it as a temporary inconvenience or annoyance and not get bent out of shape from it and get on with life.

Indeed, foregoing our upset at others in this world provides an additional benefit. We will be handsomely rewarded for it in the world to come. Nothing is more precious to Hashem than peace between His children, and He has a special reward for those who are prepared to forgo their pride to preserve that peace. If we see our station here as a

transitory one, we can more easily endure the passing discomfort, and, thus, turn every offensive act by another into an opportunity to overcome our pride for the greater reward that we will receive in the world to come.

Not only will the person who foregoes his pride and holds his tongue ultimately receive great reward, our Sages tell us that if at that time he prays for something or gives someone a blessing, his blessing is guaranteed to come true. Of the many stories about this phenomenon, the following one is quite moving.

After not having children for many years and after visiting every specialist possible, a couple were told by yet another big specialist that they simply could not have children. With nowhere else to turn, the couple sought the blessing of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky זצ"ל a great sage whose blessings were known to always come true. Yet to their great disappointment, the sage refrained from bestowing a blessing for a child upon them saying, "I cannot give you a blessing, I don't see children in your future. It is beyond my abilities." Hearing the great rabbi's devastating words, they broke down crying and begged the rabbi, "Isn't there anything that you can do for us?" The rabbi responded, "There is one option. If you receive a blessing from someone who remained silent and didn't respond in the face of being insulted and humiliated by another person, if he gives you a blessing at that moment, that blessing is guaranteed to come true. That's the best I can do for you."

At first, the man thought it would be simple to find such a person, but as time passed, he saw that it was not so easy. One evening, while at a wedding, he heard someone berating another man, insulting and embarrassing him in public. The one being insulted did not react and ignored the man insulting and embarrassing him. The person needing the blessing realized that he had finally met his man. As the insulting man



continued his harangue, the target of the insults found it harder and harder to remain silent. Seeing this, the man needing the blessing quickly approached him and implored him not to respond. "I will explain, but, please, I beg you, don't respond!" The man complied and, finally, because he didn't receive a response, the angry man walked away. The childless father then related to victim what the Sage had told him about receiving a blessing from one who remained silent even when being publicly embarrassed. Upon hearing his words, the fellow realized the great opportunity that had come his way and gave the man a heartfelt blessing for a child. Nine months later, the childless parents celebrated a bris for their newborn son!

The blessing of a simple man who held his tongue and maintained the peace with the person who publicly embarrassed him accomplished what even the blessing of the greatest Sage could not. We see from this how important peace between Jews is to Hashem.

There is another way that the sukkah operates as a peacemaker between Jews.

The rule is that the *schach* – the sukkah's thatched roof - may be made only of unfinished material that grew from the ground, such as tree branches or bamboo sticks. Any finished material, even if it grew from the ground, such as broom sticks or closet pole, would constitute invalid *schach*. Interestingly, the name of the holiday Sukkot comes from the word *schach*; in other words, the sukkah's roof defines the sukkah and makes it uniquely a sukkah.

The upshot is that no matter a person's wealth, he must still cover his sukkah with the same unfinished branches that the poorest person uses. If it rains, both get just as wet.

What sometimes divides people is the *haves* vs. the *have nots*. How could I invite *him* to my home? He lives in a mansion, and he will laugh at the simple place that we call home. On the other hand, the rich person doesn't want anything to do with someone who lives in a low-class home. On Sukkot, everyone is the same, and everyone can feel free to invite anyone to his Sukkah. In this sense, the Sukkah is a great equalizer.

If we take these lessons of Sukkot to heart, we will surely find them good reasons for rejoicing. Hashem, who can do anything is watching over us and protecting us, and we can feel at peace with our fellow Jews. What could be better than that?