

Sefer Devarim

THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE MERON AND SURFSIDE TRAGEDIES,
AND AS A ZECHUS FOR THE YESHUA OF KLAL YISROEL

סוכות

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

His Clouds of Glory

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Part I. Understanding Sukkos

Aftermath of Yom Kippur

When I was in yeshiva in Slabodka – a long time ago – on the day after Yom Kippur, in the morning, the Rosh Yeshiva said a few words to the *bnei yeshiva*. We were going home now; some of us stayed but most were going back now to their hometowns for Yomtiv and this would be the last talk we would hear from the Rosh Yeshiva until Cheshvan.

Now, we had built up during the month of Elul a great *binyan* of *da'as*; a great edifice of *yiras*

Hashem and understanding. Especially in those *yeshivos* where they spent time on *mussar*. Three times a week we heard long *shmuzin* and in Elul it was even more. And the *davening* in the yeshiva was of course extremely impressive. And then came Rosh Hashana, and then Yom Kippur. When *neilah* came to an end we were different people altogether; Yom Kippur had transformed us.

I'll tell you an anecdote. I remember on *motzei Yom Kippur* I went to my *stanzia* to eat with my *chavrusa*; we were sitting together at the table, two *chaveirim*. We didn't say one word throughout the entire *seudah* we were eating together. The experience of Yom Kippur had made such a tremendous impression on us and no one was going to open their mouth and deflate that feeling. We sat there eating in complete silence.

Buildings May Collapse

And so on the following morning, after *shacharis*, the Rosh Yeshiva spoke to all of us. "You all labored very much on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur," he said. "You put your hearts into your *tefillos* in the yeshiva and you were elevated and inspired; you accomplished a precious achievement. To pray in a good place these three days is equivalent to three months of learning."

"But it is important now that you should be on guard," he said. "Because when you go home soon, so Yomtiv comes and then Simchas Torah; you have to beware of *leitzanus*." *Leitzanus* means lightheadedness, lack of thought. He quoted to us the famous words of the *Mesillas Yescharim* that *leitzanus achas dochah meah tochachos* – one *leitzanus* can overthrow a built up tower, a skyscraper of over a hundred *tochachos*.

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Tochacha means lessons; lessons in *da'as*, in *seichel*, in *yiras shomayim*. Now, even one *tochacha* is more valuable than diamonds but let's say you go someplace to hear a hundred lectures on *yiras shomayim*. A hundred *tochachos* means you're a wealthy man! You have a big skyscraper now. It can bring in a lot of income, a skyscraper full of *da'as*.

But the Mesillas Yesharim is telling us that one *leitzanus* can make the whole building topple and fall down. One thoughtless jest can overthrow the results of a hundred sessions of serious thought. When a person becomes lightheaded and silly then all of his great ideals tumble away into nothing.

Flippant Frivolity

And therefore it is important now to be on guard. Because now begins Yomtiv; many days of happiness all the way through Simchas Torah. And so it depends how you'll celebrate. If it will be a thoughtful celebration, *lisheim shomayim*, very good. Of course you'll eat good foods. You'll be happy; you'll sing and dance too. קול רנה וישועה באהלי צדיקים - *In the homes of the righteous there are sounds of rejoicing and happiness*. Who else should be happy if not those who keep the Torah? But if it deteriorates into *hefkeirus*, into wildness and silly frivolity, then all of the achievements you gained on Yom Kippur go lost.

I remember in a certain *shtiebel* they used to throw wet towels at each other on Simchas Torah; wet towels on Simchas Torah! There's a *mitzvah* to make a towel wet on Yomtiv? It's a question if it's even permitted. But they threw wet towels at each other.

I was seventeen years old and I used to go up to *duchan*, *birkas kohanim*. I saw once an old man get up to *duchan* on Simchas Torah. He was standing next to me and he was supposed to say the bracha of *birkas kohanim*. He said "Boruch atah Hashem," and then instead of saying *asher kidishanu*, he said *shehakol nehiyeh bidvaro*. He lifted up his *tallis* and showed that he was drinking a *glezel* with schnapps. In the presence of the whole *tzibur* he took off the *tallis*, made a *shehakol* and drank schnapps! There

were all kinds of *leitzanus* they used to practice and the people lost what they had built up. That's a tragedy; Yom Kippur is a very precious possession and we have to hold onto the effects as long as possible.

Day of Precious Achievements

Now, some people might think that they didn't achieve too much on Yom Kippur anyhow. They were listening to the *chazan*, the *niggunim*, and looking at the clock counting how many hours there are until *neilah*; could be you were thinking about what will there be for supper time.

But *rabbosai*, you have to know that even the most simple Jew is transformed by Yom Kippur. Just to sit among *frum* Jews all day long is a *bracha*. If you're in a *frum shul* among *frum* people all day long that's already an achievement. That in itself is worth coming to *shul* for; just for that alone. Even if you didn't *daven* a single world.

But you *davened* too; you spent the whole day speaking *lashon kodesh*. Did you ever think what a benefit it is to talk *lashon hakodesh* all day long? If Hakodosh Boruch Hu made a language, He made every letter purposeful. It sounds like *kabbalah*, but it's common sense. Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't do things at random. Everything has *chochma* in it so every letter of the *alef beis* is made for a purpose; it's a language that changes our souls, it transforms the *neshamos* of those who talk that language. I'm not talking about *ivrit* that they speak in Tel Aviv. I'm talking about the holy language of Hashem that's in the *machzor*, in the *Tanach*.

All day long you were saying *lashon hakodesh*, and it's prose that's written by holy men too. Besides words from *Tehillim*, the *piyutim* we say were written by holy men, by *gedolei Yisroel*. Ordinary people didn't write these poems; only great *tzaddikim* and *talmidei chachomim*. And they breathed into these *piyutim* a whole world of *kedusha*. So saying the words alone, even if you're an *am haaretz* and you don't know the meaning of the words, just saying it, the words transform your *neshama*.

Protecting The Skyscraper

The truth is you gained a great deal more than that. On Yom Kippur what are you doing? You're declaring all day long that who is going to be the author of your happiness? Who is the One who will protect you and your family all year long? Only Hashem. וְכַתּוּב לַחַיִּים טוֹבִים – He's the One who is going to give you a happy life. בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם – He's the One! All your words on Yom Kippur are directed to Him and you become convinced. You know what a *chinuch* that is? You're educating yourself in *bitachon*, trusting only in Him. He's our protection. On Yom Kippur you're standing all day gaining a very strong awareness that everything we have – our lives, our health, our wealth, our everything – is coming from Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

That's a wealth! It's a skyscraper of *daas* you've built for yourself. And so, when Yom Kippur is over, you're not the same man. You have changed fundamentally. Everyone is transformed by Yom Kippur.

And that's why after Yom Kippur we must be very careful, as much as possible, to maintain whatever we achieved on that great day. It could be that some people don't notice it because it goes lost right away. Even if you don't throw wet towels, but if you go back to regular living, *olam hazeh'digeh* living, living without thought, so it goes lost. And that's a tragedy. When people are successful on a day like that and they gain so many good things, so many great attitudes of the mind, it's a tragedy if they neglect to keep it. And that's why Sukkos comes immediately after Yom Kippur.

Seasonal Planning

In *ma'ariv* we mention “*meshane ittim*”, Hashem changes the times. Now, in the plan that we call “nature”, we understand how the seasons follow a purposeful order and they maintain the existence and the benefit of the world by following a certain *seder*. We spoke about that once, the benefits of night following the day, of the seasons changing.

For example, now the fall is coming; the leaves are changing colors and soon they will fall off the trees. There's a great benefit here that has been planned by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. In the summertime the leaves were needed; they gave us shade from the hot sun and they breathed in oxygen and carbon dioxide from the air to make the trees stronger and healthier.

But in the fall it is time for the trees to stop growing; the leaves are not needed for shade now and the earth needs to rest over the winter months and recoup its energy; and so, the leaves fall off and the materials that were expended in creating those leaves are returned to the earth now in the form of fertilizer where they will be transformed into energy for next year's plants. Every season, one after the other, has its benefits that were planned by the great Designer.

And exactly the same is the *seder* by which Hakodosh Boruch Hu made the *moadim* – the order of all the *moadim* are planned for our benefit. Of course our little minds are not capable of fathoming the reasons of the Torah, but to some extent we understand the great plan of having Sukkos follow Yom Kippur. We understand that Sukkos was planned by Hakodosh Boruch Hu to set in stone the achievements we made on Yom Kippur and to build on them.

Higher Than The Mitzvos

Which means this is the time that we should gain a keenness, a sharpness of *hargasha*, an awareness and sensory perception that we're actually living in Hakodosh Boruch Hu's protection. It's so important to utilize Sukkos properly.

Now of course if you're just an ordinary *frum* Jew, you built a *sukkah* that's kosher and you have everything else, you're *mekayem* all *mitzvos* of the Sukkah, we're not going to criticize you. But that's not the main achievement of Sukkos.

The *Chovos Halevovos* declares that all of the *mitzvos* of the Torah are made for a higher purpose. What's higher than a *mitzvah*? The *penimiyus* of the

mitzvah! To get an understanding of what the mitzvah is telling you. The *mitzvos* teach you a certain kind of wisdom and you perceive it more sharply by doing the mitzvah. And it's that wealth of the mind that is going to be the main achievement of Sukkos. Of course, it depends how much effort you'll invest into the mitzvah but the opportunity of using the *sukkah* to build onto that skyscraper you built on Yom Kippur is available to all of us.

Part II. Seeing Sukkos

Lower The Ceiling

There's a *din* in the *mishna*, סִכָּה שְׁהִיא גְבוּהָהּ, מִעֲשָׂרִים אַמָּה פְּסוּלָה. When you make a *sukkah*, it can't be higher than twenty *amos*. If the *schach* is more than twenty *amos* from the floor to the ceiling, the *sukkah* is *possul*.

Now, you might have thought that a taller *sukkah* is more *hidur mitzvah*; the bigger the *sukkah*, the better. It's more beautiful; why not? But the Tanna says no; it can't be higher than twenty *amos* – that's about three stories. And it's a question – why is that so? Why can't I build a very tall *sukkah*?

And the answer is that it states in the Torah – it's a very important teaching we're learning now – that the purpose of going into the *sukkah* for seven days is לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דוֹרוֹתֵיכֶם – *in order that your generations should know*, כִּי בַסִּבּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – *that I caused the Bnei Yisrael to dwell in sukkos*, בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם when I took them out of Eretz Mitzrayim (Vayikra 23:43). It means that you sit under the *schach* in order to be reminded of something; to remember how we sat in *sukkos*, in huts, for forty years in the wilderness.

And in order to know the purpose of the *schach* you have to see it. A very important point! The *schach* is there for you to see, לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ, to teach you *daas*, to remind you of what took place in the wilderness. And if it's too high, if it's higher than twenty *amos*, you have to crane your neck. You might not do it and you'll miss seeing the *schach*; it

means you missed the entire purpose of the *sukkah*. But under twenty *amos* you could easily see it and that's what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants from us. And the more you look, the better.

Fabulous Forty

Now, a lot of people know that *mishna* – it's the first one in *Mesichta Sukkah* after all – but we have to *listen well* to that *din*. It's a great lesson and very many people don't think about it enough; Hakodosh Boruch Hu expects us to take a look at the *schach*. And when you look at the *schach*, you have to know what you're seeing. If you're looking up but you don't know what you're looking at, it's a waste. You're looking לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ, in order to gain *da'as* about those forty years when Hashem kept us in the *midbar*.

Now pay attention because it's not that simple. The Rambam writes the following words in his *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:50). “The greatest of all *nissim* that our nation ever experienced,” he says, “is the forty years that the Am Yisroel spent in the *midbar*.” We're not talking about Yetzias Mitzrayim. We're not even talking about *Matan Torah*. Just to live forty years in the *midbar*, a nation of two million, three million people, that's the greatest *neis* of all.

Storms, Sickness and Starvation

All kinds of things could have happened. In the desert, there are sandstorms that could bury people. And rains; there are sudden downpours that come down and make floods that drown people. It happens in the desert – flash floods that drown out entire caravans.

Every kind of illness travels through desert camps. There's a prevalence of all kinds of disease. When people are crowded together in one small place, all you need is one ill person to set off an epidemic. And then it speeds like lightning through the whole camp killing people. And yet, nothing happened! Nothing ever happened!

And what about food? A nation of millions and they didn't have any fields to cultivate; what would they eat? They should have starved to death in the

midbar! Where would they find food? Even water they couldn't find. It was unbelievable that a nation of more than two million men, women and children should exist in a place where nothing grew.

Loner on the Lot

And they were surrounded by enemies too. We know on one side was Egypt. The Mitzrim suffered so much from us and they were full of hatred and anger at us. All the other nations – Edom, Midyan, Amalek – were jealous of us and worried about what we might do next; they wanted to destroy us.

And everybody knew that we took out *kesev* *vezahav*, all the wealth, of Mitzrayim. Now, had we had fortified cities in the *midbar*, high walls and people standing on the walls with bows and arrows prepared to shoot at the enemy, maybe. But we had nothing at all.

I always give the same *mashal*. Suppose you go let's say to Harlem or Bedford Stuyvesant and you make a tent on an empty lot and you want to sleep there that night. And everybody, all the people who live there, know that you have a pile of money in your tent. What chance do you have to survive?

And it wasn't one night. It wasn't a month or even a year. It happened for forty years! You know what it means to live for forty years in a wilderness where food and water is not available, and where danger lurks at any moment?! And yet this nation of millions was protected and sustained! They lived!

Guarded by Glory

And where did they live? Not in walled cities. Not in houses. They were in *sukkos*. A *sukkah* is a flimsy building, a flimsy little thing. You put up some thin walls, you put sticks on top, whatever it is, and finished. That's a protection?! It's almost nothing at all.

The answer is that it was the most effective of all protections. You know why? Because the *sukkah* was nothing. It was just a facade. Who was really protecting them? Only Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Overhead they saw the *ananei kavod*, the clouds of

Hashem's Glory, and they knew it was only Hashem. Every night you could see the cloud of fire overhead!

Every day and night for forty years they saw that! And they were learning an important lesson; that our only protection in this world is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. For forty years they were reviewing that lesson and it got into their bones.

Best Time in History

The *midbar* was the best time in our history. They were transformed by being in that *machane*; they became great. What a tremendous experience that was! Some people think it was terrible to be in the *midbar*; they pity the people who were in the *midbar*. Oh no! On the contrary, you should be *envious* of them. That was *the* time to be alive. We're so sorry we weren't there. That's the way we should feel. Oh, I wish I could have been in the *dor hamidbar*. Ah! To be every day under the clouds of glory. It became fixed in their hearts forever. That's how they became the *dor deah*; they were the generation that knew Hashem more than any other generation.

Now, if you're a person who desires pleasures, if you're looking for good times, the wilderness was not the place, that's certain. וְנַפְשֵׁנוּ קָצָה בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל (Bamidbar 21:5)! If you were a dandy, a fop who's accustomed to luxuries then you became disgusted with that daily diet, the same thing always. You were weary of being crushed together in that camp where a couple of million people lived side by side in tents jammed together.

But for those who know that they're in this world for one purpose only, to achieve perfection of the mind, so there's nothing better than living under the *ananei kavod*. If you were seeking perfection, if you wanted to make progress, there was no place in the world that would be better. To live in a camp that was invulnerable because there was a Sukkah overhead – the *Ananei Kavod*, the Clouds of the Presence of Hashem – protecting them, that transformed a person more than learning a hundred *seforim* about *yiras shomayim*.

Sentiments in the Sukkah

And that's what we're trying to do when we come into our *sukkahs*. We're trying to recapture that feeling. When Yomtiv comes and we walk into that little edifice that we erected and we look up at the *schach* – so because you're here tonight you'll remember that the *schach* is trying to teach you something. Everyone is talking, looking at the *noi sukkah*, finding their seats, squeezing into the little *sukkah*, very good, very good. But you're thinking; you look up at the *schach* and you're thinking.

“Once upon a time our forefathers sat in little huts like this for forty years. And they were the safest, the most protected of any generation in our entire history because they had the *ananei hakavod*; they had Hakodosh Boruch Hu protecting them. In the *midbar* there was nothing but *schach* overhead and still they were more secure in the *midbar* than ever afterwards in our history.”

That's why our *chachamim* tell us that when we look at the flimsy *schach*, in addition to the thought that we were protected by such a flimsy covering, we have to understand that the *schach* is a *dugma*, an example, of the *ananei hakavod*, the clouds overhead in the *midbar*.

Holiness Overhead

Now you know a reason why it shouldn't be a *davar mekabel tumah*; everybody knows that the *schach* cannot be made out of *peiros*, out of anything fit to eat, or any *keili*, anything that's *mekabel tumah*. Why is it that the *schach* is *possul* if it's made out of a *davar hamekabel tumah*?

Now, I'm not capable of telling the secrets of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, but we can easily understand a superficial explanation. Because the *schach* reminds us of something very, very holy; something that's *kadosh*. It's reminding us of the *Shechina* overhead. We can't make the *Shechina tamei*!

And so you're sitting in the *sukkah* and you're looking at the *schach* and thinking, “This *sukkah* is a pretty flimsy protection. There's no roof of masonry. There's no iron door. There's nothing. It's only

schach. Anybody can climb up and jump into the *sukkah* through the *schach*, *chas veshalom*. Is this how they sat for forty years in the dangerous wilderness?!”

Yes! Because they had the *ananei kavod*, the *Shechina*, protecting them. That's what we're remembering on Sukkos. לִמְעַן יִרְעוּ – it's the most important lesson to think about when sitting in the *sukkah*. The only true security is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Moshe Rabbeinu was leading us – we had Aharon Hakohen and Yehoshua and Miriam and other *tzadikim* too – but it was Hakodosh Baruch Hu who was standing guard over the Am Yisroel.

Part III. Protected by Sukkos

Forever Guarded

Now, that's a very important subject but you have to know that it's only the beginning – we're just scratching the surface. Because the *sukkah* is not just a reminder about the past; it's also a lesson for the present and for the future forever. Because we're going to learn now that the *sukkah* we go into on Yomtiv is not only for the purpose of reminding us about the *ananei kavod* in the wilderness, but just as important it's reminding us that we are being protected by Hashem's clouds overhead *right now*.

As we sit in the *sukkah* and we're looking up at the *schach* and we're thinking, “In addition to the fact that Hashem protected us in the *midbar* – without any fortified cities we were the safest in our entire history – but also, I'm looking up at the *schach* and I'm reminding myself of the *ananei hakavod* that are overhead right now.” When you raise your eyes to the *schach*, you have to think that. That's the lesson. “I'm reminding myself of the *ananei hakavod* that are overhead right now! Even in our generation we're being protected by Hashem's Clouds of Glory.”

You Can't Move!

That's why the Jews, when they talk about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, they say *Hamakom*. Everybody

knows, “*Hamakom yenachem eschem.*” *Hamakom* this, *Hamakom* that. *Hamakom* means “The Place.”

Why do we call Hashem “The Place”? Because there's no such thing as any space where Hashem isn't. He's the *makom* of the world. Not He's in the world. The world is *in Him!* He is *The place.* We live in Him. You think you live in a house? No! You're living in Hashem! The Jewish people especially. They live in Hashem! He's our home! Even if you move; if you move from Brooklyn to Lakewood or from Boro Park to Williamsburg, you're not moving. You are where you always were. You were in Hashem before; you're in Hashem now too!

And you should think about that when you're sitting under the *schach*; yes think about that. לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ – You should know. You should gain an awareness; a sensory feeling that the *shechina* is overhead at all times on our nation. And the *schach* is there to aid you to gain that perception that He's watching over us.

Sheltered In the Sukkah

I want to quote two *pessukim* in *Tehillim* (31:19, 21) to illustrate that. It's talking there about when Dovid was surrounded by enemies who were speaking against him on all sides; Dovid is talking for himself but he's speaking on behalf of all of Klal Yisroel too. He says, “תִּאֲלַמְנָה שִׁפְתֵי שָׂקָר” – *All the lips should be stricken down*, הַדְּבָרוֹת עַל צְדִיק עָתֵק, – *those who speak falsehood against the righteous man*, בְּגִאֲוָה, – *with arrogance and contempt.*

תִּסְתִּירם – *You, Hashem, will hide them*; it means You will shelter the Jewish nation, בְּסִתְרֵךְ פָּנֶיךָ, *in the protection of Your Countenance.* You will protect them מִמְרֻכְסֵי אִישׁ, *from the wickedness of men.*

How will Hashem protect us from the wickedness of men? תִּצְפְּנֵם בְּסֻכָּה – *You will conceal them in a the sukkah*; You will protect them in Your *sukkah* מִמְרִיב לְשִׁנוֹת, – *from the battle of tongues against us.*

Surviving In the Sukkah

It means we are living in a world of enemies and it's only because we are in Hashem's *sukkah*

that we survive. We always have had enemies who are talking against us, all kinds of falsehoods. Every kind of canard, all the time. The UN for instance even now came out with a declaration that *Medinas Yisroel* is to blame for shooting the Arabs. Arabs are innocent fellows, of course. The murderous Arabs, the very worst, are poor innocent fellows and Israel is guilty. So they all came together and they made a declaration blaming Israel. And our honorable President, maybe he wasn't too happy about it, but he also joined in.

Now I'm not a big patriot of Israel, but we see that UN is one big gathering of anti-Semites. They didn't even let Israel come into any one of their committees. No committee was open to Israel to become a member.

Not only in the UN On all sides, anti-Semites are busy all the time. There's a tremendous literature of antisemitism and it's been like that from the earliest times.

And still we're here. The enemies who slandered us disappeared already. The Greeks were the worst of all. Josephus quotes many Greek writers and their falsehoods against us. The Greeks never stopped writing against us and now they're gone. Greece of today is not the Greece of antiquity. Greece is entirely lost. All their gods have gone lost. Their religion and culture have gone lost.

Yesh Chochma Bagoyim

Edom hated us. Midyan hated us. Moav hated us. And they're all gone. Bavel is gone and Persia is gone. They're all disappearing one after the other. But we're still here. It's good to hear what a goy says about this. Everybody knows how I always quote Mark Twain. Mark Twain said that “the Jew walks on the graves of all his oppressors.” They're all gone and we walk on their graves.

How does such a thing happen? How is it that we're traveling through the wilderness of the nations for so many years and we're protected? It's because Hashem keeps us in His *sukkah*. Overhead are the *ananei hakavod* and they are protecting us

exactly as they did in the *midbar*. הַפּוֹרִים סִבְתָּ שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל – He spreads a *sukkah* of peace over us and that's the only reason we're still here.

And that's what we should be thinking about when we sit in the *sukkah*; the *schach* is reminding us that we are forever protected by Hashem. As you're sitting in the *sukkah*, everybody is talking. *Simchas Yomtiv*. Very good, why not. The *sukkah* is a sociable place; why not.

However, you're different. You're sitting and thinking. "I'm looking at the *schach* and I know that it's *mamish* the *ananei hakavod* overhead. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is overhead right now. I won't see it like we saw it in the *midbar* but He's overhead, absolutely. And despite the fact that many nations rise up against us, in the end they will all be frustrated because Hakodosh Boruch Hu is מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם. His *ananei kavod* are with us forever.

Everyone's Little Sukkah

I want to add another point now. The Rambam tells us an important *klal* that applies to all of us. He says that the stories that we read about in the *chumash* about the whole nation apply equally to each person individually.

And that means that just as our nation in general is protected by the *sukkah* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, in addition, each person should know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has a *sukkah* around him personally. Hashem is protecting you individually.

Hashem is the one who helps you come to where you are today. Now, maybe you're too young to realize that. Someday you'll look back on your life's history and you'll be amazed at the things that happened that protected you and caused things to turn out in the best way for you. When you're an old man you'll look back and you'll see, "Oh, *boruch Hashem* that You were a *sukkah* to me!"

I won't take up your time but could tell you stories that happened to me again and again. I can tell you at least four instances when Hashem did something to me – at the time I thought it was a loss, a failure for me, and it turned out that these

four failures saved me. Four times in my history I remember; there were more than that, but four times I remember I tried to do something and I failed and it turned out it was *boruch Hashem* that I failed. Had I succeeded, I wouldn't be here today. I would be ruined.

Stealing From The Mafia

Everybody can think back and see how he was protected in Hashem's *sukkah*. We had a man here in our shul; a hardworking man who never had a chance to come to any of the *shiurim* in *gemara*. Even to *davening* he couldn't always come. He was working like a slave in his shop.

Then one day he took an order for merchandise from a huge store; a big order from a Stop and Shop store, a chain store. And he didn't know that this store was already a customer of someone else, someone in the Mafia. By accident he took away a customer from the Mafia. When they saw that he took away their customer, so at night they came to his shop and they exploded his store with a bomb.

So he came running to me early in the morning, "What should I do now?!" He was afraid for his life! The Mafia was after him for stealing away a customer.

So the first thing I said was, "Where's your car parked?"

"In front of my house; in the driveway."

So I said, "Right away, hurry up. They'll bomb your car! Take it and park it five blocks away from the house."

Saved By The Mafia

And then I said to him, "Do you know who this person is whose toes you stepped on?" He said he knows, he knows who it is. I said, "Call him up right now and tell him you're quitting business. Tell him that as of now you've resigned – you're closing up shop."

He called him up and the Mafia man said, "Oh, is that so? I'm so sorry to hear that. If I can be of any help to you in the future, please let me know."

So now he's out of a job. You know what happened? He had to get a city job. And now he started coming to shul every day. He started coming to *shiurim*, and after a while he became a *shtikel lamdan* too. And now he's teaching others *gemara*! He's a different personality now.

Staying In The Sukkah

And so when Sukkos comes, that's the time to think, "Boruch Hashem, boruch Hashem. Hashem is giving me His full attention – each one of us; He's doing what's best for each one of us. *על גוזליו ירחף*, like the eagle hovers over its nest and spreads its wings to cover its little goslings (Devarim 32:11). That's how Hakodosh Boruch Hu is protecting me. He's helping me at every step; protecting me *mamash*."

Here's a man who's sitting in his *sukkah* and he's thinking, "How did I come to this, to be sitting in the *sukkah*? So many young people like myself are not in the *sukkah* today. Where are they? I don't know. Where is everyone else? I was *zocheh* to sit in the yeshiva; the yeshiva is a *sukkah*. Oh, it's a *zechus*!

So many people didn't make it. Sometimes you have a second cousin; what happened to him? A *rachmonus* on him. But I'm here! You have to think how lucky you are that you belong among the *frum* Jews. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is keeping you in His *sukkah*; He's protecting you.

The Real Sukkah

So everybody must know that this *sukkah* you're sitting in is only a *meshal* for the real *sukkah* over you – He is protecting you personally. There's a cloud overhead to protect you, a *sukkah* all around you, a *sukkas shlomecha* for your benefit. You look through the cracks in the *schach* at the sky and you're reminded of the *ananei hakavod*, of your *ananei hakavod*.

And even though we don't see overhead the clouds of glory that they saw in the *midbar*, the Shechina is still overhead. *אשריך ישראל מי כמוך* – Who is like you, Yisroel? *רכב שמים בעזרך* – that you have an Hashem who rides in the skies to help you. You don't

see it, but He's riding in the skies, in His chariot, to help you. *ובגאותו שחקים* – He's in the clouds (Devarim 33:26). He's above you, still looking down upon you, to this day.

Part IV. Skies of Sukkos

Explaining the Abstract

That's a very important *possuk* to listen to. *רכב שמים בעזרך* – Hashem is riding through the sky in a chariot to protect us. Some people when they hear such things, they get nervous. Hashem in a chariot? Riding in the skies? It seems so anthropomorphic; putting Hashem like a human, *chas v'shalom*.

So before we continue with the subject I'm going to say a few words about an important principle of the Torah. If you learn *Moreh Nevuchim*, you know that the first third of that *sefer* is very boring to us. It's dedicated to one subject, to explain away all the physical expressions, about Hashem; *yad Hashem, eini Hashem* – the hand of Hashem, the eyes of Hashem. The Torah is full of such things.

And so the Rambam spends many pages explaining these phrases away – they're only *meshalim* he says. Hashem doesn't have hands. He doesn't have eyes. He doesn't need eyes to see. He can see just fine without eyes. And so the Rambam explains all these in an abstract and more noble way. He explains to us the ideals that are meant instead of the plain words.

The Frying Pan and The Fire

Now the question arises, why does the Torah bother using these expressions that it should become necessary now to explain them away. Even Targum Unkelos bothers with it. Many times Targum Unkelos takes a physical expression about Hashem and he explains it in a different way. So why was this trouble caused? Hashem could have said it like the Rambam explained it. He could have used noble words like the Rambam and Unkelos did.

And the way it's written now is very dangerous because if you really believe that, you're finished. If

you think Hashem has a hand or eyes or a nose to smell, you're an *apikores* – you lose your portion in the World to Come. So why did Hakadosh Baruch Hu fill the the entire Torah with such booby traps? At every step, a man can trip up and *chalilah* lose his *chelek l'Olam Haba*.

The answer is if Hashem would have spoken like the Rambam wanted it said, we wouldn't have any kind of *hargasha*, any feeling about Hashem at all, and that would be an even bigger danger. It is true – it is a very big peril to portray Hakadosh Baruch Hu with *gashmiyus*. But there is a bigger peril, and that is, to portray Him without *gashmiyus*!

Because to have weak pictures in one's mind about Hakadosh Boruch Hu is worse than to have wrong pictures. To be a *frum* Jew, a really observant Jew who would never even entertain a picture of Hakadosh Baruch Hu as a physical being, but to have such a faint impression of him that he is nothing but an intellectual concept, a word in a *sefer*, that is much worse.

The Real Rider

We have to feel the presence of Hashem and therefore it's very important to feel that Hashem has eyes; עֵינֵי הַשָּׁם הֵמָּה מְשׁוּטָטִים בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ – Hashem's eyes are traveling over all the world and looking everywhere (Zecharia 4:10). That's how we have to think. We must work hard in order to gain a *gashmiyusdike* attitude towards Hashem.

Of course, the Rambam adds, you can't believe that it's literal – you're belittling Hakadosh Boruch Hu if you think such things. And yet it's our *chiyuv* to live with these ideas all our lives – the attitude of Hashem with eyes and hands must continue. It's called a dichotomy. There's a big difference between the actual truth and what we're supposed to think. The Rambam doesn't want us to get rid of that attitude; he only wants to explain it to us. We're supposed to live with these ideas as much as possible.

That's why we say, "Hashem rides in the heavens to help us." Because that's how we are supposed to

think! Not merely to be a philosopher who knows there's Hashem someplace; a word, an idea. Oh no! Hashem is the most real of all realities and we have to do everything we can to gain that attitude while we're still in this world.

Using The Sky

Now this brings us to one of the very great functions of the *shomayim*. *Hashomayim mesaprim kevod Keil* – the skies are a demonstration of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. The sky, you have to know, is very important to look at, not just on *Sukkos*; it's important all year round. That's why there's a *din* that when you *daven* you have to have a room where there are windows (Shulchan Oruch O.C. 90:4). And the purpose is you should see the sky. It doesn't mean you have to look at it all the time, but the sky has to be visible.

Hakadosh Boruch Hu wants us to know when we look at the clouds, at the skies, we should think of Him. *Hashomayim mesaprim*; now when you look at the skies it should remind you of Hashem. That's your *ananei hakavod*. It's not *Sukkos*. It's *Purim*, it's *Chanukah*, and overhead you see the sky. The sky is your *sukkah* every day.

Now pay attention. I'm saying a practical statement right now. Practice this when you walk in the street; look for a moment in the sky. It should remind you of Hashem. Don't disdain what you're hearing now; don't think it's unimportant. It's very important! The sky overhead is a big opportunity. Look at the sky; it's there to make you think of Hashem, to remind you that He's there watching over you.

That's how you should live your life. Whenever you pass in the street, look up at the sky at the clouds and they will remind you that you're under the clouds of Hashem's glory. That's what the sky is there for! *L'maan yeidu* – in order to let you know, to remind you about the *ananei hakavod*.

Sieve in the Sky

Of course the *shomayim* has other functions too. It's a wonderful supply of fresh air for us. Two

hundred miles straight up of fresh air. We need that. You need that fresh air. There's carbon dioxide there that causes the plants to grow and produce fruit. There's nitrogen and there's other important gases that enter into all the things we need to exist. The air is like a storehouse of all kinds of necessities of life. People don't realize that food and clothing come mostly from the air.

The sky has so many functions. The sky is like a sieve and it sifts out the harmful effects of the sun's rays as they come down. As the sun's rays make their way through the miles and miles of atmosphere and come down to the earth, they come with the qualities that are suited to the necessities of the earth. Everything is done with a purpose. There's very much to say about the sky.

And yet, the most important function of the sky is *hashamayim mesaprim kevod Kel*. The sky is there to make us think about Hashem and it's that most important function that is most neglected by us.

Acquiring Anablephobia

That's why you say that someone is a "yarei *shomayim*." What's a *yarei shomayim*? It's fear of Hashem, not fear of *shomayim*! The answer is Hashem is symbolized by the *shomayim*. Because a *yarei shomayim*, that's a person who fears Hashem with a physical feeling; he looks up at the sky all the time and he reminds himself that Hashem is in the sky watching over Him.

You remember when Yonah was travelling on the ship and he fell asleep in the bottom of the boat? So the captain came to him and said, "Why are you asleep?" he said. "What are you sleeping for? Arise! קוים קרא אל אלקיך – *Get up and call out to your Elokim.*"

And then when he discovered that Yonah was the one who was the cause of the terrible hurricane – they threw lots and it fell on him – and the ship was about to sink only because of Yonah, so they asked him, "Who is your Elokim?"

So what did Yonah answer? He said, *Elokei hashomayim ani yarei* – I fear the Elokim of the sky." That's a tremendous statement! *Elokei hashamayim!*

Now, if you'd be a philosopher so you'd say, "Hashem is everywhere; He's not in the *shomayim*." And yet Yonah was wiser than the philosopher and he said "*Elokei hashomayim* – My G-d is in the sky. I look up at the *shomayim* and I think of Elokim." Yonah knew what the sky is for.

Now Is The Time

Hashem is overhead everywhere. When we look at the sky we think about it *lema'aseh*. It's not merely something, a *machshavah* to hear. Look in the sky once in a while and it should remind you of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That's the purpose of the sky. And if we live our lives without utilizing that, we should know we are wasting a glorious opportunity.

Now, as much as it's an attitude that we work to achieve all year long, every *Yomtiv* has a certain amount of opportunities and the opportunity of *Sukkos* is especially dedicated to this idea. As much as possible, use the *sukkah* to gain an awareness of that great fact that Hakadosh Boruch Hu is overhead and He is the one who is guiding us and protecting us forever and ever. No matter what the *goyim* try to do against us, we are going to exist and we will live longer than the gentiles.

And each person too should think, individually, that Hashem is protecting him all his life. That's the truth – He's going to be our *sukkah* forever and He's going to be your *sukkah* forever. As you enter the *sukkah*, you're doing all the good things; Jewish *minhagim*, very good. *Ushpizin, noi sukkah, zemiros*, everything; *simchas Yomtiv*, very good! But don't neglect the opportunity of thinking that the *sukkah* now is a lesson to you that Hashem protects our nation forever and ever.

And in the *zechus* of the *mitzvah* that you're performing now by looking at the *schach* and understanding that He protects us overhead in every generation like He did in the *midbar*, commensurate with your *emunah*, that's how much He's going to watch over you forever and ever.

Have A Wonderful Yom Tov

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Making Use of The Sukkah

This year, I will use every day of the Yom Tov to learn the lessons that the *sukkah* is trying to teach me.

While eating in the *sukkah* I will look at the *schach* and spend one minute straight picturing the flimsy *sukkots* that our forefathers sat in for forty years in the wilderness and all the dangers there, and how they were protected from all the dangers only because of the *ananei hakavod* that were overhead.

I will also make sure to go into the *sukkah* once a day specifically for the purpose of reminding myself about the *ananei hakavod* that protect us even today; I will walk into the *sukkah* just for the purpose of spending one minute thinking about the *sukkah* that is spread over the Am Yisroel forever, and about how I've merited to see that protection throughout my own life.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What is the meaning of shaking the *lulav* in all different directions?

A:

There are a number of meanings, but one meaning is the same as when we say *kriyas shema*. *Shema yisroel, hashem echad*. You are One; north, south, east, west, above and below, in all directions there's nobody but You. So we point the *lulav* in all directions, exactly for the same significance. *Hashem echad*; that's what the *lulav* says.

Another significance is that the *lulav* goes toward Hashem and comes back to us. This means we serve You, we thank You, we express our appreciation to You, and You bestow Your bounty on us; it comes back to us. It also means our thanks are to You because it came from You to us. We shake in all directions because we say, no matter from where the good comes from, it's only coming from You.

Of course, the more thought you put into it the better. So when you make the *na'anuim*, you should think, "I'm thanking You Hashem that You gave me a good heart." The *esrog* is like the heart, the *medrash* says. You know, many people have sick hearts. They wish they could have your heart! So as you hold up the *esrog* you think, "Thank You Hashem for giving me a good solid healthy heart."

"And You gave me good eyes." Many people have trouble with their eyes. And that's what the *hadassim* are telling us. The *hadassim* are eyes.

"Thank You Hashem; You gave me a good backbone." Many people, *lo aleichem*, are bent over. They have hunchbacks. Their spines are bent. And you have a straight back. Now, that's something to think about when you pick up the *lulav*.

And the *aravos*, those are your lips, your mouth, and you say, "I'm going to dedicate my mouth to You now for what You did for me. I'll always be thanking You with my lips."

And so as the person makes the *na'anuim*, he's recognizing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Melech in power everywhere. Back and forth, back and forth; it's all coming from You to me, Hashem and I express my gratitude back to You. That's how you should think when you make the *na'anuim*. It shouldn't just be a mechanical thing.