Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l

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The Sukkah Mat

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Sukkos

The Sukkah Mat

Erev Sukkos in the Kugelbaum sukkah

Totty stepped into the sukkah carrying the Shabbos lamp and an extension cord, but he stopped suddenly.

Meshulem was kneeling on the floor, carefully spreading a small rug in the middle of the sukkah.

"Uh, Meshulem. What are you doing with Mommy's rug?"

Meshulem looked up proudly. "It's the bowing mat."

"The what?!"

"The bowing mat. I read the Toras Avigdor — the one for adults that you brought home from shul."

Totty slowly put down the lamp and extension cord.

"I'm almost afraid to ask."

Meshulem explained that he had read how in the olden days, when the Jewish people came to the Beis Hamikdash on Yom Tov, one of the important things they did was bow down to Hashem. It was a way of showing how humble we are before Him.

"That's all true," Totty said. "But what does that have to do with taking Mommy's rug and putting it in the middle of our sukkah?"

"Because Rav Miller said that one of the reasons for the mitzvah of sukkah is to teach us humility before Hashem. So I'm setting everything up now. Right after Kiddush tomorrow, everyone gets a turn."

Totty looked down.

Next to the rug was a handwritten sign:

BOW HEAR. REMOOV SHOOZ PLEEZE

"Meshulem," Totty said, trying not to laugh, "Rav Miller wasn't starting a new Sukkos minhag."

Meshulem looked disappointed. "But he said bowing down is a very important avodah!"

"It is. When Am Yisroel came to Yerushalayim for Yom Tov, bowing down before Hashem was part of that great experience. But Rav Miller wasn't telling you to start bowing on Mommy's rug. He was teaching you the lesson of bowing — that we have to train ourselves to be humble before Hashem."

Totty sat down beside him.

"You know, being humble doesn't mean only to be humble to people. It's even more important to be humble to Hashem. When you bow to Him it's like you're saying,

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'Hashem, I'm making myself low in front of You to remind myself that even though I'm important because I'm a Jew, but in front of You, I'm nothing.'

"And tomorrow in shul, in Mussaf, we'll say that when we have the Beis Hamikdash again we'll go there to bow down before Hashem. But in the sukkah, you can learn that same lesson without any bowing mats."

Totty pointed upward.

"What do you see?"

"The decoration that Mendy and I—"

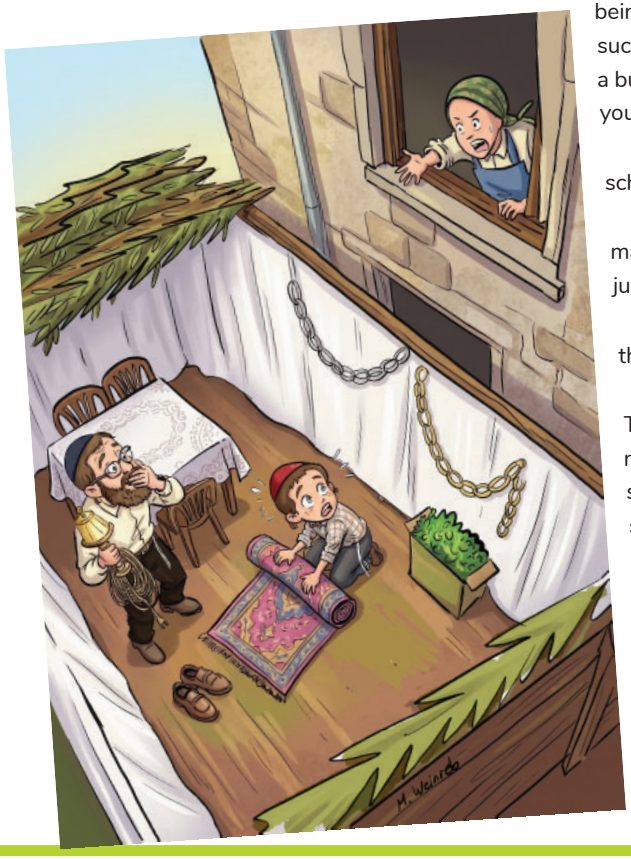
"No, no. The schach."

"Oh."

"All year long we live in a solid house with strong walls and a strong roof. We feel safe and established. A person can start thinking, 'I have my house. I have everything I need. I'm pretty important.'"

Totty tapped the sukkah wall.

"Then Sukkos comes and Hashem says, 'Leave your strong house and move into a little hut.' And for seven days we live under some bamboo sticks. It's almost like being homeless. You can't feel like such a big shot when your roof is a bunch of sticks. You look up and you're reminded about Hashem."



Meshulem looked up at the schach.

"So going into the sukkah makes us humble to Hashem, just like bowing does."

"Exactly! As long as you think about it."

Meshulem looked around. The sukkah looked different now. The walls suddenly seemed a little flimsier, and the schach overhead didn't look much like a roof at all.

"So the whole sukkah is teaching us how to bow down without actually bowing down."

Totty smiled. "That's a very good way of putting it."

Meshulem looked sadly at his rug.

"So we can't practice the real bowing until Moshiach comes?"

"Of course you can practice. You do it three times every day."

Meshulem looked puzzled.

"Why do you bend over at the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei when you say Boruch Atah?"

"Because my Artscroll siddur says to. And also everyone else does it."

"That's exactly the problem!" Totty said. "Rav Miller once said that people can waste that whole opportunity. They bend over like robots and straighten up again. But when you bow, you're supposed to think, 'I'm bending over before the King of Kings. I'm making myself low before Hashem.'"

Meshulem nodded slowly.

"So tomorrow morning when I bow in Shemoneh Esrei, I should actually think about what I'm doing."

"Exactly."

"And someday, when the Beis Hamikdash comes back, we'll go to Yerushalayim on Sukkos and bow down for real."

"Exactly."

Meshulem looked down at the rug.

"So I don't need this."

"Nope."

Just then Mommy's voice came through the kitchen window.

"Has anybody seen my little rug from the hallway?"

Meshulem froze.

Totty looked at him.

Meshulem quickly rolled up the rug.

"I think the bowing area is officially closed."

"Good idea," Totty said. "Before Mommy teaches you another lesson in humility."

Have A Wonderful Sukkos!

Rav Miller Speaks:

"The purpose of the sukkah is to teach you how to think. One of the most important thoughts is that we're nothing without Hashem. We're humbled before Him."
September 1988

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