

# PARABLE

## A PARABLE WITH A MESSAGE

Sukkos

בסבת תשבו שבועת ימים כל האזרח  
בישראל ישובו בסבת.

In a large, bustling city lived a Jewish man named Nachum. His small apartment was on the third floor of an old building, overlooking a street that hardly ever grew quiet. Long after dark, people wandered among the shops, music drifted through open windows, and a familiar group of friends gathered at the corner. They talked, laughed, and passed the hours together, often forgetting how late it had become.

Nachum was one of them. He knew everyone, and everyone knew him. Whenever he arrived, someone pulled up a chair. Whenever he told a joke, everyone laughed. Days slipped into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. Torah and mitzvos were far removed from his life. He did not know how to learn a page of Gemara, and he had never davened an entire tefillah from a siddur.

Yet sometimes, when he returned home late at night and closed the door behind him, the silence felt strangely heavy. There was no one here to laugh with. He would put his keys on the table, sit down, and stare at the walls. "Another day is over," he would think. **"And what do I have to show for it?"** He had no clear answer. The next morning, his friends would call, and he would return to the corner.

One afternoon, someone from a kiruv organization invited him to spend a week at a hotel where a seminar would be taking place. There would be classes, opportunities to ask questions, and a chance to learn about Yiddishkeit. At first, Nachum brushed the invitation aside. He imagined people looking him up and down, criticizing his life, or asking questions he would have no idea how to answer.

The man listened patiently. "Come and hear," he said gently. "Ask whatever is on your mind. No one expects you to know anything yet." Nachum held the little leaflet between his fingers. A week away from the street. A week without anyone calling him down to the same old corner. He thought of those silent nights in his apartment, and

at last, he agreed to go.

When he arrived at the hotel, he stopped just inside the entrance, his travel bag in his hand. People were sitting with seforim open before them, and nearby, a smiling man was welcoming the new arrivals. Nachum felt completely out of place. He considered turning around, but the man approached him, greeted him by name, and showed him where to put his belongings. The warmth of that welcome helped him relax.

At the first class, he chose a seat in the back row, close to the door. If he became uncomfortable, he wanted to leave quietly. But the speaker explained things with such simplicity and clarity that Nachum found himself listening closely. He spoke about the Jewish neshamah, about the Creator, and about the relationship every Jew could have with Hashem. Around him, the other listeners sat quietly. No one was making jokes.

After the class, Nachum approached the rav with a small question. One question led to another, and long after the room had nearly emptied, they were still sitting together. The rav did not hurry him. For the first time, Nachum began expressing thoughts he had carried inside for years. Finally, he asked the question that troubled him most: **“Can someone like me still begin? After so many wasted years?”**

The rav looked at him warmly. “You can begin,” he answered. “And we will help you learn, one step at a time.” Nachum lowered his eyes. He had expected a stern lecture. Instead, someone was offering him patience and understanding. It was very late when he finally returned to his room, opened the little siddur he had been given, and gazed at the words he could barely read, least of all understand.

With each passing day, he became more interested. He no longer sat near the exit; he pulled up a chair at the table. When he did not understand, he asked. He learned to make a brachah and began discovering what Shabbos meant. Slowly, he realized that what was missing from his life went far deeper than another evening’s entertainment. He wanted to draw closer to Hashem and live a life of Torah and mitzvos.

The first Shabbos in the hotel touched him deeply. The beautifully set tables, the candles, the Kiddush, and the zemiros rising around him stirred a feeling he could not express. Only a few days earlier, these people had been strangers. Now he felt that he belonged. Someone showed him the place in the zemiros, and he followed along, quietly singing whatever he could.

On the final day, Nachum packed his bag, placing the siddur carefully on top where he could reach it easily. Before leaving, he went to say goodbye to the rav. “I mean it,” he said. “I want to learn. I want to keep Shabbos. I don’t want to return to the life I was living. Please tell me—where should I begin?”

The rav invited him to sit down. “Nachum, I am very happy to hear how much you want this,” he said. “But now we need to speak about what happens when you go home. Where are you going back to?” He asked about

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Nachum’s neighborhood, his closest friends, and how he spent his evenings. Whom could he turn to with a question? Nachum answered each question honestly, wondering where the conversation was leading.

The rav was quiet for a moment. Then he said earnestly, **“You need to find a new environment. This fresh beginning of yours needs a place where it can grow.”** Nachum leaned forward. “You mean I should move away?” The rav nodded. “We will help you find a place among people who live the life you want to build, with people to daven with, learn with, and turn to for guidance.”

Nachum fell silent. He had not expected this. His apartment was comfortable, he knew the neighborhood, and his friends were people he had known for years. “But I’ve already decided to change,” he said. “I’ll

explain that I'm living differently now." The rav listened. "Your decision is precious," he replied. "And you need to protect it, especially when you no longer feel the warmth you feel here."

"Here, people are happy when you ask a question," the rav continued. "What will happen when someone there laughs at you? Here, a friend invites you to a shiur. Where will your old friends invite you? Right now, your enthusiasm makes you feel that nothing can stand in your way. But ordinary days will come, with tiredness and difficulties. Then you will need people beside you who will help you remain faithful to your decision."

Nachum promised to think about it. The rav gave him a telephone number and mentioned a possible apartment in a suitable neighborhood. Nachum slipped the paper into his siddur. On the journey home, he watched the familiar streets and shops come into view. He reassured himself: he knew what he wanted. He had spent an entire week listening and learning. Surely he would not forget it all so quickly.

He had not yet reached his building when a voice called from the corner. "Nachum! Where have you been all week?" One friend came over, followed by two more. Nachum wanted to explain where he had been, but before he could finish, someone noticed his yarmulke. The man looked him up and down and burst out laughing. "What happened here? Nachum's become a tzaddik!"

Someone made a joke, and another added a comment. Nachum tried to smile, but he could not quite manage it. He began explaining that he had heard serious, meaningful things. "Yes, yes," one of them interrupted. "You can tell us all about it. Come, sit down. You're still our Nachum." Someone pulled out his familiar chair, and Nachum stood there with his bag in his hand.

It was the same chair in which he had spent so many evenings, surrounded by the same voices and jokes. Suddenly, saying that he wanted to go upstairs felt terribly difficult. No one was forcing him to stay, yet everyone was waiting for him to sit. Perhaps a few minutes would do no harm. He put down his bag, and a friend began telling him everything he had missed.

Nachum was about to sit when he noticed the siddur peeking out of his bag. The rav's question returned to

him: **"Where will your old friends invite you?"** A chill ran through him. He had barely returned to his street, and already he was embarrassed by something that had meant so much to him yesterday. He picked up his bag. "I need to go upstairs now," he said, and didn't look back despite their calls.

As he climbed the stairs, the laughter gradually faded. He entered his apartment, closed the door, and stood still. The walls were the same. Everything he had left before his trip was still lying on the table. It all seemed to be waiting for him to carry on exactly as before. Nachum opened his siddur and took out the little slip of paper.

Holding the telephone number, he thought about the chair downstairs. **"I really do want to change,"** he said quietly. **"But now I understand why I need help."** He called the rav. When he heard the familiar voice, there was no need for a long explanation. "I came home," he said, "and now I understand. If that apartment is still available, I would like to come."

Over the next few days, they helped him move. His new apartment was smaller, and some things were less convenient. He had to get used to unfamiliar streets and new neighbors. But on his first evening, a neighbor knocked and invited him to Maariv. Nachum went along. After davening, someone showed him a seat at the table and opened a sefer with him.

There were difficult days there, too. Sometimes he struggled to understand what he was learning. Sometimes he felt discouraged by how far he still had to go. But when he asked, someone answered. When he felt disheartened, a friend encouraged him. In time, he had a regular learning session, a place in shul, and people who rejoiced in his progress. **His decision had begun to take root in everyday life.**

Several weeks later, the rav came to visit. Nachum welcomed him and pulled a chair up to the table. A few seforim stood on the shelf, and the little siddur lay open beside his seat. "How are things going?" the rav asked. Nachum smiled. "I still have a great deal to learn," he said. "But here, people help me learn." Then, more quietly, he added:

**"That week gave me the desire. Here, I am learning how to live by it."**

# THE INTERPRETATION.....

Dear friends, this mashal opens a window into a precious teaching about Sukkos from Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt”l. Following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur come the seven days of Sukkos, and then Shemini Atzeres. During those seven days, a Jew leaves his home and enters the sukkah, bringing his freshly awakened desire to serve Hashem into a holy environment where that desire can endure.

Let us pause and think about the baal teshuvah in our story. How precious is such a Jew! He had been far away, immersed in a life without Torah and mitzvos. Now his heart has opened, and he wants to approach his Creator. His need for a new environment does not diminish his sincerity. **Because his teshuvah is so precious, it deserves to be protected.** A fresh beginning needs a place where it can flourish.

For us, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are like those days at the seminar. A Jew steps out of his ordinary routine. He stands in shul, hears the shofar, davens, pleads, does teshuvah, and accepts new commitments. His heart grows serious. Things that occupied him all year suddenly seem less significant, while matters he continually pushed aside become important. He wants to daven better, learn more, and conduct himself with greater refinement.

At Ne’ilah, a Jew may feel with his entire heart that he truly wants to change. He begs forgiveness for the past year and thinks about the year ahead. **The desire is real. The regret is real.** The commitment is real. But afterward, that desire must go home with him. It must survive an ordinary day, when the aron kodesh is closed and his familiar routine begins again.

Then comes the question the rav asked Nachum: **“Where are you going back to?”** What kind of environment will greet your commitments? Perhaps the same conversations are waiting to consume another evening. Perhaps someone turns every serious subject into a joke. Perhaps old habits are so deeply ingrained that you slip back almost without noticing. Something has awakened in shul, but at home, everything remains in its old place.

The chair at the corner did not need to say a word to Nachum. His place was ready and waiting. We, too, can find our old place waiting just after resolving to change. Someone invites us to the familiar gathering. When we say that we want to learn, we hear, “Since when did you become such a tzaddik?” One mocking remark can make us ashamed of a commitment over which we wept yesterday.

This is the danger we need to recognize. A person may think that because his desire is sincere, he is strong enough to withstand whatever comes. But, **a sincere desire still needs to be guarded.** In the hotel, Nachum could not understand why the rav spoke about moving. Only at the old corner did he feel the power of his surroundings. That realization gave him the courage to take the next step.

This helps us appreciate the holy mitzvah of sukkah. It is as though Hashem is telling us, “You have passed through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You have drawn closer and want to begin again. Now leave your usual dwelling and enter the sukkah. Give your renewed desire a setting in which it can grow.” The change becomes something we actually do, involving the way we live.

A Jew carries his table into the sukkah, prepares his place, and sits down to eat. His house remains where it always stood, but his daily life now takes place beneath the schach. Through this act, he can absorb a powerful thought: “I want to preserve what I received during the Yamim Nora’im. My commitments need a place at my table, in my conversations, and in my daily schedule.”

And who are our companions in this holy environment? The holy Ushpizin: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and Dovid. These are the exalted guests whose company we are privileged to share in the sukkah. A Jew who has been surrounded by influences that pull him downward now enters an atmosphere of kedushah, helping him continue along the path he began during the Yamim Nora’im.

Think of the difference in Nachum’s story. He stood before his old friends holding a siddur, and someone laughed. He entered his new shul with that same siddur, and someone made room for him. The siddur was the same, and Nachum was the same. But now his surroundings encouraged the goodness within him to grow. His desire had found a place where it was welcomed and supported.

This is how a Jew should look at his sukkah: **“Here, my Yiras Shamayim has a home. Here, I can nurture my desire to draw closer to Hashem.”** In the company of the holy Ushpizin, he can consider how he speaks, what occupies his thoughts, and how he conducts himself. He wants the life he leads within these walls to be worthy of the holy guests who join him.

From the sukkah, we must carry this lesson into the rest of the year. With whom can I establish a regular learning session? Who will encourage me when I feel weak? Which conversations leave

me with less desire to learn, and which friends inspire me to improve? Nachum still faced difficulties in his new apartment, but now he had someone to turn to when he needed help.

That is the strength of a good environment: **even when our enthusiasm weakens, the support around us remains.** Nachum’s story should therefore give us chizuk. When a Jew finds a nisayon difficult, he need not immediately conclude that his teshuvah was insincere. He can recognize that his precious new beginning needs support, and take practical steps to provide it.

He can take out his siddur, find that little slip of paper, and reach for help. He can draw closer to a good friend, commit to a regular shiur, and step away from surroundings that weaken him. His sincere desire deserves that protection. Just as Nachum acted to preserve what had awakened within him, every Jew can make room in his life for the person he wants to become.

This is what the sukkah teaches us after Yom Kippur. Hashem gives us a holy place and holy guests so that we can continue growing. Let us enter with our commitments and give them a place in our lives. Let us choose the conversations, friendships, and regular learning sessions that will help us keep them, carrying the kedushah of these days into the ordinary days ahead.

**Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur awaken the heart. In the sukkah, we learn how to live with that awakened heart—and, with the right companions beside us, carry its warmth into the entire year.**

*Based on a teaching of Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt”l.*

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