

Havineini



Shiurim of Harav Shimon Spitzer

Sukkos 5787 // Year 3

Exalted Days

מצות סוכה

Our Eternal Bond with Hashem Peeks Through the *Schach*

Settling into Our New Dwelling

The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* tell us that we enter the *succah* following our cleansing and purification on the exalted day of Yom Kippur, because, as we embark on searching for new ways to serve the Ribbono shel Olam, we enter the protective shade of the *Shechinah*... stepping into the home of the Ribbono shel Olam, as it were.

Over the preceding days—in the raging *Tashlich* waters, and in the *avodah* of casting away the Azazel—we have left behind our old ways. We have departed Yom Kippur absent the heavy loads that we had been lugging around all year—and now we're in search of a “new place to reside.”

When we ask this person where he lives, he will say, “I already know where I *don't* live... I have abandoned my habits and proclivities of old—and I'm still in the midst of

constructing a new abode where I *can* reside in my new life.” It is for this reason that we were given a few days before Succos—so we can think about this, and prepare a new place, with a new way of life, as we set out on a new journey of *avodas Hashem*.

Peeking Through the *Schach*

The *pasuk* describes the event of the *ברית בין הבתרים*, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu spoke to Avraham Avinu and foretold the bitter travails of the Jewish People that were to come. Hashem instructed him to look up at the sky and see whether he could count the stars. Explains the Rebbe Rav Hirsch of Rimanov: Avraham Avinu was deeply concerned. *How will my children manage the darkness of the world*, he wondered. *How will they contend with the realities of routine life after the holiness and the connection of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?!*

Said the Ribbono shel Olam: Look up at the stars. Your children

will build a *succah*, through the roof of which the stars must be visible. Through this, they will see Me! And when they do so, they will always remain connected to Me, and they will not become consumed by the frivolities of This World.

This *vort* contains tremendous depth. The Rebbe teaches us here that while we return to everyday life—and we even put a covering atop our *succah*, signaling a certain partition between This World and the Upper World—we must nevertheless ensure that the Heavens will *still* be visible through it! The *Schach* is expressly designed so that we can still reach out and connect with the Ribbono shel Olam, even amid our lives in *Olam HaZeh*.

Returning to Reality

The *tzaddikim* further teach us something very important that we must keep in mind regarding these exalted days: After living an entire

year with negative habits and undesirable thoughts and actions, no one—including, most importantly, the Ribbono shel Olam—thinks that we will abandon them from one day to the next.

No one expects that on the day following Yom Kippur, a person will have perfect *kavannah* during every word of *Shemoneh Esrei*, or that he will never engage in idle chatter... that he will *always* be joyful and embrace everything in his life with acceptance and love.... Of course, this is the way things *ought to be*, but the Ribbono shel Olam doesn't expect that it will happen in one moment following Yom Kippur.

While we may experience a great sense of holiness and exaltedness immediately following Yom Kippur, the next morning we return to our standard internal battles. Drastic change from moment to the next was never going to happen. Rather, the plan is for **a Yid to build himself an abode—and there convene with the Ribbono shel Olam... working together to find a way forward**, a way such that he will be able to repair and grow, slowly but surely. *This* was always the plan. And for that reason, we build our *succah* right after Yom Kippur.

A Place to Maintain Closeness

Often, when people grow older, their children want them to be close by, and they build a small apartment into their homes so their parents can live with them in their golden years.

Usually, people will work with their architect to design this apartment so that it will have just enough privacy for their parents to maintain independence, but it should be close enough so that when they need assistance, their children will be right there for them. Often, they'll even install a buzzer so that the children can be alerted when needed. This arrangement benefits both: While their parents live close by and can enjoy the company of their children and grandchildren, they still maintain autonomy and privacy.

Our *succah* works in exactly the same way—and for this reason, it must be a temporary dwelling. A *Yid* comes after Yom Kippur, and he designs his dwelling. He understands that “he must be able to see through to the stars”—for he has learned just how well he can get along on his own.... He may be preparing a private and personal dwelling—but **the most important thing is that he will be able to constantly look up and communicate with the Ribbono shel Olam!** His entire desire is to remain close—because he knows how much assistance he will need on his journey. He knows that he cannot do it alone—and so he builds his humble hut in this precise way.

A Cry for Help

It is specifically the Yom Tov of Succos that features our heartfelt cry from the heart: *הושענא, Help!* Every day, as we stand with our

dalet minim, we cry out, *הושענא למענך, אלוהינו, Help us for Your sake, our G-d.* We express incredible *tefillos* for assistance during these days.

This brings us a deep understanding in regard to establishing our new path post-Yom Kippur. We daven to Hashem from the depths of our hearts—knowing that we cannot make a move without His help—but **these tefillos are an illustration of our love and closeness to Hashem.** This is why we these *tefillos* were instituted *davka* on Succos, when we sit with the Ribbono shel Olam in such close proximity.

Every time a *Yid* experiences challenge and difficulty, and he turns to the Ribbono shel Olam for help (which is essentially every day) we must know this: **This isn't an emergency phone line that we call only when we're in trouble;** rather, we have an ongoing deep and close bond with the Ribbono shel Olam that we constantly maintain, and we can draw on this constant connection at every moment.

Actual Friendship

This is akin to a person who has a Hatzolah member in his neighborhood. Understandably, everyone turns to this person when they have a medical emergency.

But then this person has a close friend with whom he consults regarding everything in his life. He talks to him at least twice every day,

and he receives advice and counsel from him. He unburdens his feelings to him, and he receives much help from his friend.

Everyone understands that these relationships are two very different things. While the first person is a great address to call on in case of emergency, the second person is a close friend. Although the second person helps you out of many problems as well, he is first and foremost a friend. **I'm close to him, and therefore I can ask him for help—but this is not what our friendship is predicated on!** The relationship is about the close bond and connection that these two share.

A Marital Bond Based on Mutual Help

Let's think of this in the context of marriage. In a healthy marital relationship, a husband comes home after a long day's work, and he discusses the many issues that arose throughout his day. His wife is waiting for him with an entire list

of matters to discuss, so together they can figure out how to deal with them.

This is surely not a technical, transactional relationship in which the husband provides advice and money in order to solve problems; it is a bond between two people—first and foremost—one of the features of which is that they work together to solve problems.

Our Close Connection to Hashem

The same applies to our spiritual connection to Hashem. When a *Yid* enters a lifestyle of living with the Ribbono shel Olam, he doesn't view the Ribbono shel Olam as an "emergency contact" to Whom he turns when he's in trouble. It is a constant bond and connection—the Source to which he can turn for everything, the One to Whom he can tell everything in his life.

This *Yid* gets up with his *dalet minim* in hand... he recites *Hallel* with extraordinary joy, and he cries

his heart out during *Hoshanos* as he calls for help—because this cements his *kesher* with the Ribbono shel Olam. His problems and dilemmas are a vessel through which he can conduct his continuous dialogue with Hashem. His struggles and challenges ensure that he will remember that the Ribbono shel Olam sustains him every step of the way. His feelings of difficulty and being lost are the way that he finds his way to Hashem—because he recognizes that "I have no way forward; only *You* can help me!"

Our entire *tefillah* is merely a *mehaclech* for how we can maintain our inner connection—for this reason, we sit in the *succah*, a temporary dwelling, under the stars... because we rejoice with the Ribbono shel Olam Himself in the most intimate way. The *Hoshanos*—our pleas for help—are merely a byproduct of the intensely close relationship and closeness to Hashem illustrated for us by the *succah*.

סוכה זד' מינים

The Close Connection Built Through This *Yom Tov*

The Filling Light and the Surrounding Light

The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* explain to us—in the language of *kabbalah*—that there are two modes of the Ribbono shel Olam's existence in This World: *כל*

עלמין וסובב כל עלמין, *filling all the worlds with His light, and surrounding the worlds with His light.*

Without wading too deeply into the idea, the practical application of *סוכה ומזל* is that the Ribbono shel

Olam can be found *surrounding* us as well as *inside* us—and we must seek closeness to Him in both of these ways.

On the *Yom Tov* of *Succos*, we serve the Ribbono shel Olam with

both levels. The *succah*—which surrounds and encompasses us with Hashem's light—represents *סובב כל*, while the *dalet minim*, which we grasp and pull towards ourselves, represent our *inner* connection with Hashem.

Surrounding and Being Surrounded

The mitzvah of Succah is an *inyan* of *וימינו תחבקני*, *His right hand embraces me*, as we're protected in the Heavenly shade. Outside, there are difficulty and challenges and problems—but the *succah* protects us from them all, because we're embraced by the Ribbono shel Olam.

The *dalet minim*, on the other hand, signify an inner connection. We grasp them close to our heart—and the Gemara relates that the people of Yerushalayim would hold the *dalet minim* all day! We embrace tightly, as it were, the Ribbono shel Olam Himself, and we thank and plead and supplicate Him!

For this reason, we embrace the *dalet minim* as we recite *Hallel*—because, on Succos, we don't merely express words of praise and thanks, *we grab on tightly*, as it were.... These are lofty concepts and ideas, but this is the way Chazal designed it.

Thanks for the Past, Supplication for the Future

A *Yid* stands at *Hallel* grasping the *dalet minim* with such closeness to the Ribbono shel Olam! He

expresses his gratitude and thanks: *הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו*! Thank You, Hashem, for all the kindnesses of the past. The *Yid* breaks down in tears, overwhelmed with gratitude. Simultaneously, he pleads for the future, saying, "Don't abandon me, Hashem! When I experienced challenges and suffering, I called out to You *מן המצור*, *from the depths of distress*, and You answered me. I come to You once again, pleading that You never abandon me."

The commentaries explain that the chronology of *Hallel* is designed like a story that every *Yid* relates: "I was in trouble, and I turned to Hashem, and He answered me—and therefore, I turn to Him again! We say in *Nishmas*: *עד הנה עזרתנו רחמך ולא*, *Until now Your mercies have helped us, and Your kindnesses have not forsaken us*—we cannot do a thing without the Ribbono shel Olam. Continue to help me just as You have never abandoned me. I know that You will surely continue to help me. *ואל תטשנו ה' אלוֹקינו לנצח*, *Cast us not off, O Lord, our G-d, forever*. I have no doubt that You will never abandon me, and I know that if You were to abandon me even for a moment, I would lose everything!

Help!

On the Yom Tov of Succos, we have been given a further special opportunity with the additional *tefillos* of *Hoshaanah*—our plea for help from the depths of our hearts! This is not provided for us at any other time of the year—the

ability to follow up our expressions of thanks and gratitude of *Hallel* with a supplication for continued assistance from Hashem. We find a similar concept in *Modim*, in which we say, *על שהחיייתנו וקיימתנו כן תחיינו ותקיימנו*, *just as You have given us life and sustained us, so too should You continue to do so*.

Thus, there are two aspects to this Yom Tov: The embrace of the Ribbono shel Olam, which illustrates His protection from all outside threats, and the inner connection with the Ribbono shel Olam, which is illustrated by the *dalet minim*. When we grasp the *lulav* while we are in the *succah*, we bring together these two modes of our connection to Hashem.

An Abode Outside, a Bond Inside

When a couple marries and prepares to establish a *Yiddishe* home, they must first find an apartment. This isn't a simple endeavor in many Jewish communities... but we find what we can.

But when we think about it, the actual house is superficial, peripheral compared with the incredible events that will transpire *within* the home. A Jewish home is no small thing. It is a place of *השראת השכינה* from where generations of *neshamos* will come forth. We cannot even grasp the greatness of this. Chazal tell us that it's akin to rebuilding one of the ruins of Yerushalayim. Something very holy and lofty is taking place in that apartment.

But this requires the technical, physical existence of a home. Only after establishing the physical walls of an abode can all the great and lofty events take place. A person can't say, "I won't sully myself with silliness such as acquiring an apartment.... Instead, I will learn the writings of the Arizal about the greatness of marriage." Surely, we need earthly vessels where the *Shechinah* could rest.

Welcoming the Shechinah into Our Abode

The same thing plays out every *Tishrei*, with every *Yid*. The *Mishnah* tells us that יום חתונתו ויום שמחתו לבו, *the day of our nuptials and the day of the joy of our heart*, refers to Yom Kippur. This day features great joy—like a wedding day; we celebrate the building of a new home between the Ribbono shel Olam and His children.

The new home is the *succah*! We build a small and humble hut where we will convene with Hashem. It's not all that glorious physically—but the union and the connection with Hashem that we celebrate here surely are. In the *succah*, we speak with the Ribbono shel Olam, we sing to the Ribbono shel Olam, we cleave to and pine for the Ribbono shel Olam... we do everything that we do following a wedding!

Staying Home

The *succah* is the vessel for השראת השכינה. In this place, we build and

strengthen our inner bond with the Ribbono shel Olam—and **once it is built upon the proper foundations, the relationship will remain that way forever**. Even if a person should depart for a while, the bond will remain.

We see this in a marriage between husband and wife. A few years after their wedding, the husband may need to leave home for a few days—for business or otherwise—and the relationship continues to function. Because the home has been established properly.

But during the first year of marriage, the שנה ראשונה, we don't go anywhere. We remain home—because this is the time of establishing the foundations. In later years, the husband may come home late after learning... but it's no longer an issue, because the foundations have been set.

The First Seven Days

On Succos, we're celebrating the שבע ברכות with the Ribbono shel Olam! This is a time of establishing and cementing the relationship so that it can weather the storms that will come later. When Cheshvan arrives and we will no longer be in the *Tishrei* mode, the "home" will have been established, and everything will run smoothly even though we're no longer in that first period of the relationship.

During these holy and exalted days of Succos, we must be preoccupied *only* with the Ribbono shel Olam! We must focus only on thanking and praising, singing and pleading. **It's the middle of our שבע ברכות!** This is no time to spend with friends... we're celebrating our *sheva brachos*!

"I'll Be a Little Late"

A *chosson* in *Sheva Brachos* who's delayed in coming home will usually take out his cellphone and call home to inform his wife that he'll be about ten minutes late (*halevai* that we would keep this practice in later years as well).

Similarly, if, during the days of Succos, we wish to take a break... following Shacharis or during a learning session, we should at least excuse ourselves: **"I am leaving the succah for a moment... I'll be right back."**

Being with Hashem

This is indeed found in *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the mitzvah of *succah*. מט"ל בסוכה כל שבעת הימים, *one should spend enjoyable time in the succah all seven days*. When you want some down time, do it in the *succah*! Do it with the Ribbono shel Olam!

This person isn't eating or drinking, learning or davening... he wants to be... himself, to rest up. **This, too, is a time to be with the Ribbono shel Olam!** We're with Him

constantly. We think about Him. We speak with Him.

Building Our Home

The humble *succah* is our new home. It is the natural expression of the positive resolutions that we accepted during the holy and exalted days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we resolved to become close with

our Creator. We don't yet know how exactly it will materialize, but **the first thing is to move into the apartment, and then we begin building a relationship.**

True *shalom bayis* takes years to build. We don't mean that until then the relationship is terrible, but it takes time until husband and wife

understand each other. It doesn't happen in an instant.

It is similar regarding our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam: **There's much work to be done, but the *succah* is the beginning of a new home**, a place of closeness and deep intimacy that sets the tone for our relationship with Hashem throughout the year.

שמיני עצרת

The Culmination of It All

The Ultimate Purpose

The Focal Point of All Yamim Tovim

The Chasam Sofer quotes earlier tzaddikim who note that we describe the Yom Tov of Shemini Atzeres differently from the way we do any other Yom Tov. In davening we say, שמיני עצרת החג הזה. The word *chag*, he explains, is the same as מחוג, which is the “arbor” of a clock, that is, the central axle around which the hands turn. This is because Shemini Atzeres is the focal point around which all other exalted Yamim Tovim revolve—it is the ultimate point to which we aim with everything we have accomplished during all the other Yamim Tovim.

This point is conveyed by countless *Sefarim HaKedoshim*. They explain that the *avodah* of every Yom Tov is to carry a *Yid* forward—bringing him closer to the *nekudah* of *deveikus* in Hashem, which is

ultimately reached on the exalted day of Shemini Atzeres.

Rav Dovid of Tolna (see Magen Dovid for *Shavuot*) says that **Shemini Atzeres is the time of [i.e., the purpose of] the existence of all the worlds, and the unity and perfection of all worlds.** The more a person has utilized the previous Yamim Tovim, the more he will be aided from Above in rejoicing during this exalted day.

Cleaving for Connection

This cycle of toiling for our connection with the Ribbono shel Olam is essentially the model for our entire *avodah* in This World—not only for Shemini Atzeres itself.

The Ribbono shel Olam wants us to work on our connection to Him, ultimately attaining the sweetness of *kirvas Elokim*—and then we must begin the work anew on a whole new level and plane. Once we have tasted

the flavor of this connection, we will continue to aspire to it, wishing to taste it once again.

The *hakafos* of Shemini Atzeres—the joy, the fervor, and the connection that we experience—are the ultimate expression of the inherent *deveikus* of this day. It is the vehicle through which we express our *kirvas Elokim* in the most practical way. All day, we're in a state of yearning and cleaving to Hashem. We taste *Olam HaBah* itself, and we express it through our fervent dancing. We sing and dance before the Ribbono shel Olam as we aspire to go higher—recognizing that only such a life is considered life, and everything else is foolishness and nonsense.

We Mustn't Squander This Day

Shemini Atzeres is a day when the loftiest levels are being given to all of us. It is a day when the *neshamah* can

access the most incredible closeness and connection—literally tasting the World to Come. But there's one condition: **We must show up.** If we sleepwalk our way through it, we won't be given this access.

Yiddishe Kinder don't sleep or eat too much on this day in any case—but we can nevertheless lose everything in a short time. If, instead of participating and joining the fervor inside the shul, a person spends his time schmoozing in the hallways, he can't expect to feel the sweetness of *kirvas Elokim* afterward—because it's not being distributed outside!

A *Yid* must place himself in the proper place and mode of thought on such a day—among likeminded *Yidden*. Tzaddikim taught us regarding this day, עוצרת תהיה לכם—a gathering it shall be for you—in the plural, indicating that many *Yidden* should come together to celebrate this day.... To dance with the *Sefer Torah* together, to cleave to and yearn for closeness to Hashem together, to give thanks and praise to the Ribbono shel Olam together: this is the place where we must be found so that we will receive the *kirvas Elokim* that is being doled out so freely.

The Culmination of Our Year-Round Avodah

We must contemplate the *avodah* that we have invested over all the Yamim Tovim of the year—and we must understand that this day is the

culmination of it all, the moment when we come to the climax of all our *avodah*.

We tend to have short memories. We forget that we have relatively recently experienced a *Seder* night and all the preceding *avodah* to cleanse ourselves of *chametz*. The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* tell us here that **our Seder night isn't over yet!** We're now reaping the rewards of this *avodah* in the form of the great *deveikus b'Hashem* that we're being given. On Shemini Atzeres, we're showered with the earthly reward for our year-round *avodah*—**the ultimate purpose of it all, which is to experience pleasure in the Ribbono shel Olam** and to cleave to Him.

Our Closeness to Hashem Chases Away All Darkness Trampling the Kelipos

The great tzaddikim have taught us—each in his own words—that our *avodah* of these exalted days of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah bring tremendous benefit to our *neshamah*, for through our *avodah*, we trample the *kelipos* and the darkness.

That is, on this day, **we banish the kelipos with a completely different approach from that of the rest of the year.** Generally, there's a *mehalech* of battle—going to war with the forces of evil. But on this day—after we have offered over Succos the ע' פרס that correspond to the nations of the world, with the aim of weakening

them—we have completed the *avodah* of battle. **Now, the סתרת אחרת is felled—not through our battle—but through the power of our deveikus in Hashem.**

Light Banishes the Darkness

To better understand how this works, let's us examine the words of Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (see *Pri Tzaddik* on Pesach) who explains that during *Makkas Bechoros* all the Egyptian firstborn died of exposure to the blinding light of Hashem revealing Himself. At that time, the Ribbono shel Olam Himself was revealed, and the impure forces automatically ceased to exist.

There are times when we must battle with the כח הרע, and although it is very difficult, our *avodah* requires battle. Yet there are times when battle is unnecessary. There is so much *kedushah* being exposed that the צר הרע is simply immobilized. **“You have nothing to look for here. This isn't your day. You're outside of all this.”**

On this day, we convene with the Ribbono shel Olam Himself—as the Zohar HaKadosh teaches us that on Shemini Atzeres we're בלחודי עם מלכא, *alone with the King*. The great *deveikus* that we attain on this day itself fells all the forces of טומאה. The darkness is banished automatically—because the light of the elevated state of our *neshamah* is so great.

When a *Yid* is “alone with the King,” the darkness simply finds no place near him. It automatically flies away, because it is the polar opposite of the great light that defines this day.

Light Accomplishes More Than War

On the day of Shemini Atzeres, when a *Yid* attains *deveikus* with the Ribbono shel Olam, he can purify and cleanse very deep aspects of his *nefesh* that he couldn't access previously. He has tried battling those struggles and weaknesses—to no avail. But through the power of *deveikus* in Hashem, he can illuminate those areas too.

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b) tell us that we blow two sets of *תקיעות* on Rosh Hashanah to try to confuse the *Satan*. Rashi explains that when the *Satan* sees the way the *Yidden* cherish the mitzvos, he is stunned into silence, and he is unable to speak ill of Klal Yisrael.

Because, as we have noted, **when the *Satan* sees the depth of *deveikus* that we achieve with the Ribbono shel Olam, he is automatically banished.**

The *avodah* of Shemini Atzeres, to feel a closeness and a connection with the Ribbono shel Olam, is the ultimate expression of the *avodah* of *סוד מרע עשה טוב* through goodness and light. The Gemara tells us that when we encounter the *yetzer hara*, we must

drag him to the Beis Medrash. However, sometimes the basic level of *עשה טוב* is insufficient. But on Shemini Atzeres—when *everything* is *Olam HaBah*—all the struggles disappear, because we're so much higher than all of them.

Where We Truly Belong

Sometimes, we see a person—even someone who does some part of what he is supposed to—who is just not as he should be. The *Sitra Achara* says, “He's one of mine.”

But when this *Yid* shows up in shul on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, and he clutches and embraces the Torah, we know where he *really* belongs! No matter what happens the rest of the year, this day brings out the essence of every *Yid* and his *deveikus* in Hashem. The *Satan* says, “I lost him! He's not mine!” When a *Yid* dances with a feeling of love, of yearning, and with a joy for the Torah, he proclaims that he belongs to the Ribbono shel Olam... and all the negativity and struggle automatically slide off of him.

Remember How Exalted You Are

The Gemara (*Berachos* 8a) says that the *pasuk* (*Yeshaya* 1:28), *ועוזבי ה' יכלו*, *those who abandon Hashem shall perish*, refers to those who leave behind an open *Sefer Torah* as they leave the shul. Said the Imrei Emes of Ger: This can be applied to those who depart from the Yom Tov of Shavuot—when

we're given so much revelation in Torah—and we leave behind an “open *Sefer Torah*.”

In many ways, this applies to us as we approach the climax and the culmination of Chodesh Tishrei, and as we explained, the *avodah* of the entire year: If we could properly appreciate how pure and how elevated we have now become, how transformed and remade we have become, we would view ourselves completely differently!

We must properly appreciate how much weight has been lifted from us! We have acquired a *לב בשר*, a *soft heart of flesh* which is open and ready and primed for G-dliness. We have become fitting vessels for *deveikus* in Hashem, because we have tasted *deveikus b'Hashem*! The *yetzer hara* is afraid to approach us in our current state! But we must make sure not to return to our negative habits of old.

If we'd properly appreciate and internalize this, we wouldn't even be tempted to look at the other side. **Concealment stems only from our lack of awareness of how exalted we have become.** These are such great and awesome days when we can daven for and attain the highest levels of connection to Hashem, to let go of our unwanted habits and struggles through the pure light that permeates these days—illuminating every single *Yiddishe neshamah*.

won't feel the need to accumulate extras and luxuries.

When Livelihood Becomes Life

Often, a person invests his entire energy into his *parnassah* and material success, and this is where he derives his entire *chiyus*. **He mamash becomes tethered to Olam HaZeh.** When we ask him why he does this, he says, “What do you mean? We need *parnassah*!” And he’s right. We *do* need certain things. But when we look back, we will see that he started out like everyone else, doing what he needed to for *parnassah* in a normal context... but then the *kelipah* became involved, and he became attached to *gashmiyus* and his pursuit of it.

This *kelipah* comes when we do something that isn’t wrong; it’s acceptable and permitted, **but when we become attached to it, then it becomes a problem.** We can perform the same actions with apathy and aloofness; instead, we choose to sink into it.

The way we can ascertain our own state is by ascertaining the source of the animation of our *nefesh* and our *chiyus*. This is the big tell whether we deviated.... If the *gashmiyus* overtook a person’s desires and yearning, it’s everything he talks about and thinks about, then we know he has gone off course.

What Stirs the Soul?

Chazal have taught us that שיחת חולין של תלמידי חכמים צריכה לימוד, *the mundane talk of a talmid chacham requires study and analysis.* Why is this? Because the idea is to see what animates him when he *isn’t* learning, when he’s engaged in mundane matters. This is when we see what matters to him and what excites him. For a *talmid chacham*, it will usually be something elevated—and *that* is what we must study and internalize.

Every person becomes animated or excited when we touch upon “his” core. Sometimes, we’re talking to a person about this and that, and suddenly, he comes alive... filled with excitement. What happened? We touched his *nekudah*, his sensitive spot! We must know this person, his character, and his past, to understand why he just became excited. If we know him, we’ll know that this is “his thing...” his entire *chiyus* is tied to this topic....

A Reminder Not to Pursue Olam HaZeh

But the Ribbono shel Olam saves us from becoming overly excited about material matters by reminding us not to pursue קנאה תאוה וכבוד so much. Sure, we must do what we need to do... but we should not pursue it with such excitement... rather, when we run, it should be towards Him....

The best remedy for this is **when we pick up a person and place him into a simple, temporary dwelling.** Of course, that is effective only when the person remembers to internalize the light and illumination from this mitzvah; as the Sfas Emes says: our דעת (knowledge of, and connection to Hashem) for the entire year is rooted in the mitzvah of *sukkah*. This means that the knowledge of a person, the matters to which he feels connected, and the essence of the person are all rooted in Sukkos. This mitzvah elevates a person and doesn’t allow him to become immersed in his *gashmiyus* and be animated by it.

When Attachment Goes Too Far

Every person has things he’s attached to, and some of them are good attachments... there’s nothing wrong with them. The problem is when the attachment goes too far; then he’s too strongly connected to it.

For example, it can happen that a mother’s relationship with her daughter is extremely deep, but it becomes an unhealthy relationship—to the extent that when the daughter gets married, the mother doesn’t know whether to be happy or sad. This is unhealthy, because the Ribbono shel Olam has arranged the world in a way that there are relationships—but if it gets out of hand, it’s not good for either

side. A child cannot remain tied to her mother's apron forever....

In cases where the relationship goes too far, experts must become involved and separate them a bit. Sometimes, the couple must be sent to live overseas for a few months. They must build their own relationship, away from the shadow of the parents....

A Cure for Our Attachment to Materialism

Similarly, when a person has an unhealthy attachment to *gashmiyus*; it started out normally enough, but he soon became completely attached to it in an unhealthy way. Just as in an unhealthy relationship, one person must constantly know what the other is thinking and doing... so too, this person becomes obsessed with his bank account.... He must always and constantly peek to see what's happening there. *But you just checked it an hour ago! But he wants to see it again... he wants to follow the numbers.*

This person may have heard a deep *mussar derashah* and experienced a Yom Kippur; well-meaning people tried to speak with him, but the unhealthy relationship simply runs too deep. He can't untether himself.... In such a case, it's not enough to talk; we must pick him up and place him into the *sukkah*. *Let go of your home... let go of your mind, which races with how to acquire more and more gashmiyus.*

When we say "*gashmiyus*," we don't mean simply money—money is just one manifestation of it. *Gashmiyus* means to be obsessed and concerned only with what the other person is thinking. This person seeks to draw his *chiyus* not from *kirvas Elokoim*, and not from the truth, but from peripheral and unimportant things. "*Gashmiyus*" refers to the countless manifestations of קנאה וכבוד, תאוה וכבוד, and we must find the way to detach ourselves from our unhealthy obsession with it.

This is the *avodah* that the Ribbono shel Olam wants from us—and when we do it, we will begin living! When we internalize the דעת offered by the *sukkah*, and when we begin to know and understand the world as it really is, we will begin to feel blissful and fortunate. And then, it is fine for us to return to our permanent abode—because we have been cleansed of our unhealthy attachment, and we're now focused on Torah, *avodah*, *tefillah*, *bitachon*, *teshuvah*, *chesed*, and every other good thing that a *Yid* must be focused on. We simply became healthier people!

Remember Why We're Here

This is the simple reason for the mitzvah that the *Kadmonim* teach us we must keep in mind as we're sitting in this temporary dwelling, and this is what it is important to remember throughout the Yom Tov—even after the initial excitement for the *sukkah* of the first night wears off. We must ask

ourselves: *Why am I sitting in the sukkah?*

The *Bach* (Orach Chaim Siman 625:1) rules that whenever the Torah tells us to perform a mitzvah "למען, because"... then we are obligated to keep in mind that reason as we perform the mitzvah, otherwise it has not been properly fulfilled.

Can We Ever Understand a Mitzvah?

This ruling from the *Bach* is a great *chiddush*, because all the *sefarim hakedoshim* teach us that the reasons behind the mitzvos are simply beyond our grasp and understanding. To the contrary, they teach, the greatest level is to perform the mitzvah without understanding—simply to fulfill the command of Hashem. In fact, there's a well-known incident relating that the Ba'al Shem Tov once hid all the *kavannos* from his *ba'al tokeah* at the last minute—because the primary *kavannah* must be that "Hashem commanded us to blow." Even when a person does understand some of the deeper meaning behind the mitzvos, the ultimate *kavannah* is not to think about the meaning that he understands—but to perform the *ratzon Hashem* with *bittul*.

This is a fundamental *yesod* that was often espoused by chassidim—because a person must be reminded how small his mind is, and how little his grasp is in the mitzvos. **Don't limit your mitzvos to the grasp of your mind! It is so much higher than this!**

If so, when the Bach tells us that we're *required* to have in mind that the Ribbono shel Olam fashioned for us a *sukkah* from the ענני הכבוד, which is a wonderful insight into this mitzvah, doesn't this limit the mitzvah?!

When the Mitzvah Is Personal

The answer to this question is quite simple. When it comes to something that's essential and fundamental to *Yiddishkeit*, we *must* know it and keep it in mind. That, of course, isn't the whole essence of the mitzvah. But there are some thoughts that are critical to keep in mind always. When the Ribbono shel Olam commanded us to put on *tefillin*—which contain the *parashiyos* related to living a life with Hashem at its center—He told us, “I gave you this commandment so you will live with these fundamental foundations and always remember it... tether it to your heart and mind.” Surely, at the heart of this mitzvah is the awareness of these tenets.

The Ribbono shel Olam expressly wanted us to keep these things in mind as we don *tefillin*. If a person will say, *What do we know? ... We have no inkling of this mitzvah...*, that is not right. It's like a person who learns Gemara without understanding a word, and he tells himself, “*Who am I to even attempt to understand the Ribbono shel Olam's Torah?*” When it comes to something important and crucial to our success, we're certainly obligated to understand it—for the reason we were

given the mitzvah is *precisely* to internalize these truths.

Learning to Live with Less

Say the *Kadmonim* to us: The Ribbono shel Olam has given us a mitzvah of *sukkah*. Leave your permanent abode and go into a temporary dwelling. Accustom yourself to it.... It's fine like this... even if everything isn't “just so.” Even if there are some ramshackle walls... it's okay....

Sometimes, a nagging and aggravating thought runs through a person's mind: *All my friends already bought homes, and I am sitting here in a rented apartment. It's not normal... I need my own place. It used to suit my needs, but now, we have completely outgrown the space. Every time the married kids come for Shabbos, it's a whole issue... it simply can't go on this way.*

The truth is, however, that everything is just fine. These things tend to matter when we're looking at what other people have. If the Ribbono shel Olam wants to, He can give you everything right now. For the moment, everything is fine, everything is normal, and everything is okay. It may be a temporary dwelling, but it's just fine.

Lowering Expectations

When a person buys a business-class ticket, and he gets a bed that is about a quarter the size of his usual bed, he's generally very satisfied with this. Why? Because, for a temporary dwelling, it's not bad. He doesn't expect more. He can manage fine with

it—especially in contrast to the other passengers sitting behind him in economy class.

The mitzvah of *sukkah* teaches us that we can live with less. And if so, we can be happy with what we have. After all, all we need is a place to make a nice Shabbos meal, and we have that. Imagine that we came to this neighborhood for a Shabbos, and someone provided us with this apartment. There are nice neighbors, there are shuls and groceries in the area, it's *mamash gevaldig*.

Thinking this way helps us lower our expectations. It spares us from bitterness and sadness, as well as being excessively immersed with *gashmiyus*. The Ribbono shel Olam can and wants to send all of us peace of mind—but we must do our part to distance ourselves from the pursuit of those things that will never bring us happiness anyway (as the aforementioned *Agra d'Kallah* teaches us).

This is what we must take with us from the mitzvah of *sukkah*. This is a time of harvest, when a person gathers his profits. If we will keep this sentiment in mind, the Ribbono shel Olam will enable us to keep this דעת—knowledge and awareness—long after we have returned to our permanent abode. This awareness will accompany us, help us, and bring us joy throughout the entire year.

Point to Ponder

Living Comfortably in a Temporary Dwelling

The Sukkah Drags Us Out of Material Successes

The *Kadmonim* teach us that one of the reasons for the mitzvah of *sukkah* is that it comes at a time of harvest, when a person gathers his produce from the field. This man has toiled and worked throughout the planting and growing seasons, and finally, at long last, the earnings begin to flow in... the cash begins to trickle in. Such a person is liable to become consumed by materialism—since his mind becomes consumed by money and the pursuit of wealth, and he is, in fact, seeing material success.

Precisely at this time, the Ribbono shel Olam wants us *not*

to be dragged into the trap. At a time when our minds may be clouded by the *gashmiyus*, our minds aren't working properly, says the Ribbono shel Olam: *Davka at this time, I want you to leave your home... make yourself a temporary dwelling, so you will become less materialistic.*

The Serenity of Simplicity

The Torah tells us, ויסעו מרעמסס ויחנו בסוכות. In *Agra d'Kallah*, the Bnei Yisasschar offers the following beautiful insight. In Ramses, we know, everything the *Yidden* built soon fell apart. This alludes to material pursuits, which also have no durability... they never last. A person works,

he invests, he thinks he's building something, but nothing remains in the end.

For this reason, we were given the mitzvah of *sukkah*—to sit in a temporary dwelling—to show us that it's okay when our *gashmiyus* isn't perfect. It's enough to have a temporary home. The provisions are minimal... there's a chair, a table... and not much room for excessive material objects.

Says the Bnei Yisasschar: The more ויסעו מרעמסס, *the more a person distances himself from gashmiyus*, then the more ויחנו בסוכות, *he will attain more serenity and peace of mind for avodas Hashem, and he*

Continued on page 9 >>>

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