

Adass Aish Kodesh

The Succos Collection

A Collection of articles by Harav Y Reuven Rubin
Shlita for Yom Tov

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Table of Contents

1. The safe space for serious talking
2. Facing the future in your succah
3. Rhythm of the Heart Chapter 37
4. Making the most of the Grand Finale
5. More Information

The safe space for serious talking

The safe space for serious talking

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The term “safe space” on university campuses generally refers to an autonomous place created for students who feel marginalized by society. Students who feel alienated gather together to communicate regarding their experiences and feelings of being excluded. These little rooms come with soft music, fluffy toys and an atmosphere that promises not to be confrontational nor challenging. It sounds so gentle and yes, safe, but such spaces can be counterproductive in that it just serves to confirm its denizens of whatever misconceptions they may harbour.

The Jewish Nation has a different sort of “safe place”, it is called the succah, and within its confines one finds a different sort of safety. The succah definitely is a separate space wherein we go to find strength and encouragement. It is that little area wherein we gather to think about what the Rosh Hashonoh-Yom Kippur experience really meant for us and how we can implement our commitments for a positive future. The unique days of the hielige tag have filled us with so much constructive hope, and in the succah we can share with loved ones and generate the needed energy to go forward. The succah is a minimalist abode, with what at best can be termed a dodgy roof, yet in just such a place we feel a unique closeness to Hashem that has been wrought through the determined prayers that we all shared during Rosh

Hashonoh and Yom Kippur.

“In this sanctuary we should all articulate truths, and bring hope where there would otherwise be darkness”

Chazal tell us that the spirituality of our holy ancestors hovers over our succahs and each night we highlight this aspect by inviting them into our humble setting. We should use this kedusha-filled safe space for real purpose, to talk of holiness, and aspire to greater reality than just the mundane. Turn

off the phones, close down the wifi, let the soft breeze of nature bring us closer. Before we re-enter the world of the everyday let us incorporate the Yom Tov lessons and bolster ourselves for the future.

In the shadows of the schach let us talk to one another about the safety of our kedusha and the brokenness of brethren for whom this message has somehow gone awry. There are problems that can't stand the light of day; they fester yet are never mentioned, the glare of their pain being too much for us to accept or even give a name to. Gutta Yidden were wont to say that the succah is the one mitzvah one can do wherein our entirety is immersed in its being, even our very shoes. There is no better place where we can quietly discuss matters of great importance that are left unsaid during the rest of the year.

Our world is complicated, our challenges enormous. When I was a youngster things seemed simpler, stress was not yet the greatest illness that plagues society, and we lived with a freshness that was borne out of the tragedies our elders endured. They were determined to bring us a Yiddishkiet that was alive and warm, one that sparkled with a fire of devotion. The years have been good to us; we have rebuilt, whole communities have been reborn, all created on the building blocks of those dedicated pioneers. Their bravery, despite all hindrance, made what we have today possible. Now we have new tasks, tests that need us to summon up new talents.

There are youngsters slipping away into the shadows of our lives, hurt, in pain, with no feeling of belonging. There is an expression: A Yuven in Succah, which literally means a Greek in the Succah. It intimates a gentle nuance that outsiders can never really fathom the secret of the succah. How can we

explain to a world that is intoxicated by the liberal notions of what passes for non-judgmental chaos? Others won't understand the pain of Klal Yisroel when even one

soul is lost to the fire of secular materialism run rampant.

We must devise new strategies and look within for new answers. We can't go on living in ignorance when over one hundred and thirty young Yiddisher neshomas have tragically died from drug overdoses and worse in heimishe American communities alone.

No one is immune. These problems are growing and are the direct result of a rapidly changing world that seeks to engulf our vulnerable youngsters and serve them up as sacrifices to their material gods.

The succah has always symbolized a safe space, a refuge from the stormy winds that blow from without. In this sanctuary we should all articulate truths, and bring hope where there would otherwise be darkness. The holy Aushpizin, our visitors from yesteryear, await our answers. The question remains: will we give any?

Facing the future in your succah

Facing the future in your succah

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

There is a school of design called “Minimalist.” The perceived beauty of this style is its simplicity. There are no elaborate carvings, just plain, functional lines. Those who extol this type of design say it wipes away all of life’s clutter and brings things into sharper focus. Minimalist design, they say, brings out the essential, the beauty without the frills. A word to the wise: Not only will your house be unencumbered by decorating in this style, but your bank account as well. With this style, everything becomes simple and uncluttered — except the designer’s wallet!

I’m far from an expert about such things, but I can understand where they’re coming from. Once a year, we Jews all over the world go into their backyard and build minimalist abodes. We don’t add much inside by way of furniture, except perhaps a sturdy table, some chairs and a folding bed. It must be the original minimalist housing, and it preceded the big name designers by some two thousand years or so. In fact, the true designer of these small, uncluttered homes is the Creator of the world Himself, for it is in keeping with His mitzvos that we build them.

In certain areas, though, we do permit a measure of extravagance: succah decorations. They can actually take on a sophistication that would turn those fancy designers green with envy. There is a certain science to decorating a

succah; certain rules to follow. Before you can start, you must know which customs the succah's owner follows.

Like most things Jewish, the world of succah decorations is replete with options about what should and shouldn't be used. Some say not to hang anything from the schach; others say, "Why not?" One succah will have a few apples and nuts dangling from ancient string, while its next-door neighbour will be festooned with glittering bulbs that twinkle and turn. It's all part of the rich tapestry that makes up Torah life.

"There is no better starting point than in the succah, where new beginnings can start with visions of those who inspired our past"

Family Rubin, like most families, has inherited several customs. Post-War America saw people from different communities joining together as no other generation had in the past. Litvish, Chassidish, you name it, they all melded together, and with this came a whole new understanding of which family customs were vital and which could be sacrificed in the name of shalom bayis. Of course, there is always the third way, that is where one tries to mix everything together, giving each part of the family some comfort. My Rebbetzin is the product of razor-sharp, sharfa Polish Chassidim, combined with the dignity of Litvish rabbonim. This has been welded to yours truly, third generation Yankee who studied in Chassidishe yeshivas of America. After all these wonderful years together, we have succah decorating down to perfection. We let the grandchildren do it!

One thing the kids do that I find very inspiring is they hang up pictures of tzaddikim. Let me explain why I find this so special. The succah is where we go after the soul cleansing of Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur. We enter its plain environs with a clean slate, and we sit down and find ourselves gazing at the stars as they peep through the chinks in the schach. All is calm. We can face our inner selves and ask where we want to go. We are able, for these few days, to communicate the aspirations of our souls. There is nothing cluttering up our view because all the furniture of our everyday lives has been left inside the house.

People, as we know, think in pictures, not words. Our mind envisions what we

want and what we fear. Sitting in a succah, what better vision is there to keep in front of our eyes than that of a Gutte Yid from past times? It is often said that such visual input is

vital for the young. Their minds are not yet set and the stimulus of seeing holy faces can give them a positive example for their own identity.

However, we don't speak enough about how important such visions are for adults as well. It may not sound very mature or rabbinic, but I can look at pictures of our holy leaders all day. In our home, we have several pictures of my Rebbes hanging in every room. They are usually pictures that were taken by photographers who did so surreptitiously, often as not in the midst of the tzaddik's avodah. While looking at their faces, I find a certain calm coming over me, a calm mingled with a deep desire to be a better Jew. There is no better starting point than in the succah, where new beginnings can start with visions of those who inspired our past.

There is yet another dynamic at work. We live in times where there is great pressure on each of us to be impressed with those who seem to be prosperous, despite their cleaving to a path that is contradictory to our Torah. The materialism of this world screams out at every corner and at every turn. Our young are deluged with images foreign to Torah values. Technology has opened up a world that can be carried in the hand, a world not always wholesome or beneficial. Sitting in the succah, away from the distractions of the everyday may be the perfect setting to discuss with our young, and in fact with one another, how to relate to this growing problem. Like so much more in life, each family will have to face this challenge, given its unique composition, but face it we must, and there is no better family setting than in the quiet of the succah's hallowed walls. We can sit in the succah, live in its beautiful yet basic environment, and gaze at the image of those tzaddikim who led Yidden out of the morass and into the oases of our Torah.

Each generation must face its unique challenge, and for the Yied, the succah has always been the source of renewed strength and bitochon.

Rhythm of the Heart

Chapter 37

Tehillim Kapittel 37

By Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

There is a school of design called “Minimalist.” The perceived beauty of this style is its simplicity. There are no elaborate carvings, just plain, functional lines. Those who extol this type of design say it wipes away all life’s clutter and brings things into sharper focus. Minimalist design, they say, brings out the essential, the beauty without the frills. A word to the wise: Not only will your house be unencumbered by decorating in this style, but your bank account as well. With this style, everything becomes simple and uncluttered — except the designer’s wallet.

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sukka; certain rules to follow. Before you can start, you must know customs the sukka's owner adheres.

Like most things Jewish, the world of sukka decorations is replete with options about should and shouldn't be used. Some say not to hang anything from the *schach*; others say, "Why not?" One sukka will have a few apples and nuts dangling from ancient string, while its next-door neighbor will be festooned with glittering bulbs that twinkle and turn. It's all part of the rich tapestry that makes up Torah life.

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People, as we know, think in pictures, not words. Our mind envisions what we want and what we fear. Sitting in a sukka, what better vision is there to keep in front of our eyes

than that of a *Guttes Yid* from past times? It is often said that such visual input is vital for the young. Their minds are not yet set, and the stimulus of seeing holy faces can give them a positive example for their own identity.

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my Rebbes hanging in every room. They are usually pictures that were taken by photographers who did so surreptitiously, often as not in the midst of the tzaddik's *avoda*. While looking at their faces, I find a certain calm come over me, a calm mingled with a deep desire to be a better Jew. There is no better starting point than in the sukka, where new beginnings can start with visions of those who inspired our past.

There is yet another dynamic at work. We live in times where there is great pressure on each of us to be impressed with those who seem to be prosperous, despite their cleaving to a path that is contradictory to our Torah. The materialism of this world screams out at every corner and at every turn. What can we do? We can run into the sukka, live in its beautiful yet basic environment, and gaze at the image of those tzaddikim who led Yidden out of the morass and into the oases of our Torah.

This *kapitel* speaks to the soul of any sukka dweller. Let's embrace its words and conjure with their intent.

Do not compete with evildoers or be jealous of wrongdoers. My sweet *Yiddele*, don't get distracted over the seemingly successful evildoers in our world. Theirs is a hollow existence, not worthy of your grief and pain.

For like hay, they will soon be cut, and like green grass, they will wither. Sure, when the sun shines and the rains fall, the grass always seems to be greener on the other side of the fence. But this is an illusion, for once the grass is cut from its roots, it is condemned to wither and fade. Those who seek to do wrong and who strive to corrupt this world have no real roots. Their nourishment comes from others, and when they are separated from

those sources, they cannot have any life of their own.

Trust in Hashem and do good so that you may dwell in the land and be sustained by your faith. Doing good despite the evil all around is an act of faith, but it brings in

its wake true nourishment. Sitting in the sukka epitomizes this. The Jews who left Egypt did so fueled by faith. They didn't know where they were going or what would be asked of them. They lived in temporary quarters, and did so for an entire generation. This faith led to even more faith. The earliest acts of belief were the seeds for each consecutive one

that followed.

Take pleasure in Hashem, and He will give you your heart's desires. When we become focused on Hashem's will and only seek to do that which brings light, then our only true pleasure is found in Hashem. If we reach this level, our desires will be G-dly as well, and will certainly be granted.

When I said earlier that people think in pictures, I myself was envisioning how a person could imagine himself living a life as focused as the one our *kapitel* describes. The sukka is a good place to dream such dreams. Look around. There are no distractions. On all sides are the images of those tzaddikim who ploughed a path for us. We say the words of invitation to the *ushpizin*, the holy Forefathers, who developed our essence as a people. All is possible if we only remain true to our actual needs.

Commit to your approach to Hashem and trust in Him, and He will act on your behalf. When we commit ourselves to the path that has been cherished by *Yidden* from our beginnings, everything that follows is seen from the right perspective. We no longer wonder at what seems to be unfair. Hashem will grant us the greatest of gifts: the realization that He is with us at all times.

He will make your acquittal and your integrity as obvious as the light of day. In the world of falseness, evil works only in the darkness of the heart. If we do good — the will of Hashem — then our personal integrity will become visible to all. We will be enabled to stand tall at any reckoning, never fearing the light of day. Those who dabble in darkness can never stand such light, and this in itself is ample reward for those who choose to follow Hashem's will.

The *kapitel* touches on this theme repeatedly, in vivid terms. King David knew

that one of the most difficult trials is remaining steadfast in the face of the wicked man's unseemly success.

This is one of the secrets of the sukka. We sit in a shaky fragile hut while all around us

are the sturdy homes of those who reject Hashem's mitzvos. Are we foolish? Don't we want what others seem to come by with such ease? But we have a vision. Look at those loving images of people so holy and pure who lived in huts like these before us. They too had to grapple with these questions, and their positive answers are written in the walls that surround us.

Making the most of the Grand Finale

Making the most of the Grand Finale

Rabbi Y. R. Rubin

The days skip forward; yesterday becomes the day you had promised yourself would mark your change. Yet, maybe it will be tomorrow. All Yidden are holy and we all want to be close to Hashem. Sadly, we are bedeviled by the everyday and find ourselves slipping into old negative habits. Outlets that destroy our souls become a sad comfort zone that corrupts us further. We know we need change, but it seems beyond our ability.

Gutta Yidden tell us: “wherever a person’s thoughts are, that is where his reality is”. Yes, we harbour holiness, yet our fleeting thoughts fly from one subject to another and within moments our minds are alighting upon thoughts we dare not even recognise as our own. This is the way our eternal enemy, the yetzer hora works; he will never allow you space; his is a constant drumroll of distraction.

Hashem knows His children and feels their bewilderment and in His overwhelming love He gives us tools to bring clarity into our chaos.

The Yom Tovim that take up most of the month of Tishrei are nuclear weapons that can blast through the maze of our day to day existence and bring new hope to the most broken of souls.

It starts even before with Selichos in the last week of Elul, followed by the majesty of Rosh Hashonoh, turning soon to Yom Kippur. The days march forward,

keeping us involved, new timetables, different prayers. Everything seems more edgy; we are on call to hear our inner souls cry. There are moments when we feel so close, yet, in a blink of an unwary eye we can fall down. All these holy opportunities are building blocks that are cemented together with our fragile hopes, yet march on we do, with some inner understanding that Hashem knows our weakness and holds our hand.

"Each one of us has all these aspects, good, not so good, and everything in between; yet we are bonded together with cries of Hoshanah."

Sukkos arrives; we sit under the stars and hear the whispers of the breeze as we catch our breath. It has been a rollercoaster ride, up and down, yet the question still hovers somewhere over the schach: have we succeeded? Success is something we really can't measure when it comes to the spirit, one soul's success is the next one's failure. We must measure things according to who we are and what we need to fix within ourselves.

There is one last moment in all this that to me seems to be a grand finale; it expresses all that we have striven for throughout these special days.

On Hoshanah Rabboh we take together all the complexities of these Yomim Tovim, tie them together and proceed around the centrality of our faith with prayers that are tinged with our last minute plea for clemency. The bimah stands with the Torah scrolls surrounding it; we go around with our lulovim and esrogim seven times, as if to remind us of the creation of the world. We, too, want to recreate the world that is within us and now everything is possible. The different parts of our lulovim represent the entirety of our people; in fact our inner landscape. Each one of us has all these aspects, good, not so good, and everything in between; yet we are bonded together with cries of Hoshanah. *Mi Ke'amcha Yisroel!* What other nation is there, Hashem, that is so in love with Your Torah?

As a youngster I had the merit to spend many of these special days in the shadow of that great light the Bobover Rebbe, Rebbe Shlomo ztl and those last moments of the Hoshanah Rabboh service still shine in my mind's eye. The Beis Medrash was a sea of lulovim, held preciously in the hands of a mass of talleisim. In the centre could be seen one long straight lulov held higher than all the rest. This belonged to the Rov ztl and it swayed and dipped with the grace of Melochim. His voice cried out, we all wept, then

he would move forward, the lulav constantly showing the way. Hoshanah, Lemancha Hashem! , it's all for You Ribono Shel Olam, Hoshanah. We are so wretched yet wanting to be good. Hoshanah! Remember the pain, the tears of those we have lost, Please, Hashem, Hoshanah.

The Rov's voice would be choking with tears, his yearning was contagious. Nothing in that Beis Medrash was of the here and now; we were transported into a different realm, one sparkling with Hashem's splendour. Hoshanah, one last chance please, Hashem. This time we will find the courage, this time we will be true.

The end of the davening drew near. Lulavim were set aside, the Rov picked up the Hoshanos, twigs bound the night before with strips of lulavim. We sense victory. The Rov holds the bunch high; we all dance in place, The Rov radiates such passion; we have striven over these weeks for this moment. We are one people; we are healed as we slap the twigs against the floor.

These words can't do justice to what my heart experienced in those days, over half a century ago. I share this with you now so that we can all know that victory is ours, if we only keep on trying. Hashem will then hoist us aloft and give us strength. Hoshanah, Hashem, and the answer will always be "yes" because we are His children.

More Information

For more inspirational articles from the Rov Shlita and to find out more about us and what we do, please check out our website,
www.theinformalproject.com

To dedicate one of our weekly publications, or a collection (like the one you are holding) please contact us on
aakletter+sponsor@gmail.com

Wishing you a Lovely Yom Tov

Adass Aish Kodesh

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