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The Difference Between Building and Sitting In The Succah

The *Mishnah* in Tractate *Succah*^[1] [1] brings an argument concerning an old *succah*: According to Beis Shammai, an old *succah* is invalid for use, and according to Beis Hilel, an old *succah* is kosher for use. Rashi explains that the argument is about if a *succah* needs to be made for the purpose of the festival or not. Beis Shammai requires a *succah* to be made for the purpose of the festival, while Beis Hilel does not require a *succah* to be made for the purpose of the festival.

So according to Beis Hilel, an old *succah* is kosher for use, whereas according to Beis Shammai, any *succah* made thirty days before the festival is not kosher unless it was made intentionally for use of the festival.

However, this argument is only concerning the building of the *succah*. When actually sitting in the *succah*, the *Bach*^[2] [2] writes that not only must one intend to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *succah*, but he must also intend to be aware of the reason for the *mitzvah*, which is “So that the generations will know, that in the succos I placed the children of Yisrael.”^[3] [3] The *Mishnah Berurah* says that while one still fulfills the *mitzvah* without knowing the reason for it, he does not fulfill the *mitzvah* if he does not know at all why he is sitting in the *succah*, or if he is unaware of the festival.^[4] [4]

Thus, there is a difference between building the *succah* and sitting in the *succah*. Later we will return to discuss this difference.

Defining the Mitzvah of Succah: Establishing A Temporary Dwelling Place

What defines the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *succah*? The Rambam requires one to make a blessing over the *succah* whenever he enters the *succah*, even if he enters it a hundred times a day^[5] [5], whereas Rabbeinu Tam requires one to make a blessing over the *succah* only if he eats a meal there.^[6] [6] The Shulchan Aruch^[7] [7] rules according to Rabbeinu Tam, but the Vilna Gaon^[8] [8] rules according to the Rambam. The Gemara says that whenever makes a blessing over a *mitzvah*, the blessing must be recited before the act of the *mitzvah*. Therefore, according to the Rambam, the *Magid Mishnah* rules that one must make the blessing over the *succah* before entering the *succah*.^[9] [9] However, this is not explicitly stated in the words of the Rambam, and as it is apparent, even those whose custom is like the Rambam do not make the blessing before entering the *succah*.

It seems that the definition of the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *succah* is not the actual entering of the *succah*, and neither is it defined by the act of eating or sleeping in the *succah*. Rather, the *mitzvah* is

to mentally establish the *succah* as a dwelling place. In other words, whenever one enters the *succah*, whether it is his own or another's, the blessing over the *succah* is because he has established the *succah* as his dwelling place to be in, on Succos. On Succos, a person's dwelling place is not his usual residence that he has during the rest of the year, which is permanent and established. Rather, on Succos one has a dwelling place that is temporary, and this is his current dwelling.

The blessing over the *mitzvah* of *succah*, as well as the *mitzvah* of the *succah* itself, is about this perspective – as opposed to being a mere act. And since one has mentally established the *succah* as his current dwelling place, it follows that he must treat the *succah* as his dwelling place, making sure to eat there, sleep there, and stroll there, etc. That is why the custom is not to make the blessing before entering the *succah*, for such an action would contradict the intention. Instead, one makes the blessing over the *mitzvah* of *succah* only when he is in the *succah*, and in this way he shows each time that he is establishing the *succah* as his dwelling place.

Succos – A Festival About the Future: Identifying One's True Place

From all of the three festivals - Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos - we do not find a specific reference to the future, except for Succos. Succos is related to the future, whereas Pesach and Shavuot celebrate the past. The Sages state: "In the future, Hashem will make a *succah* for the righteous, made out of leviathan skin."^[10] ^[10] This understanding of this statement is connected with what we have explained until now: that the entire concept of *succah* is about establishing for oneself a place to settle into.

In the words of our Sages, we find similar instances of this concept, of being settled into a place. One of the Sages said: "I see those who grow spiritually, but they are few."^[11] ^[11] What is it that determines a person's spiritual growth? It is not his deeds. It is about where he is found – to be found in a place above. The term "*ben olam haBa*,"^[12] ^[12] one who is destined for the World To Come, is also referring to one whose place is in the World To Come even as he is on This World. Another instance of this concept is the difference between those who reside in Eretz Yisrael with those who live outside of Eretz Yisrael, regarding Yom Tov. The place where one mainly resides in, is what determines how many days of Yom Tov he will need to keep. Thus, the place of a person establishes the level of his deeds, as opposed to his deeds establishing his place.

Hence, the *mitzvah* of *succah* is about establishing a place to be in, and as the Sages state about the *succah*, "Leave your permanent dwelling, and enter into a temporary dwelling." One needs to establish the *succah* as his "place" – resembling the future [when all of the Jewish people will sit], in the *succah* of leviathan's skin. One needs to make the *succah* into his newfound place, which he is settling into. The lesson of it is that one must regard this world as temporary by being aware that only the Next World is his permanent dwelling.

One needs to know where his fixed place is, and this is not only a question to ask oneself on Succos. One may be destined for Gan Eden, or Gehinnom, depending on whatever level he is on. One's dwelling on This World is temporary, but he must see at every moment where his true place is, where his eternal place is. One must be able to define for himself, at every moment: "Where is my true place? Where do I belong to?" And the true definition of where we belong, is in our true, fixed place, which is in the Heavenly, whereas on This World we are only here temporarily.

Our True Place Is "The Clouds of Glory" – As Opposed To This World

There is a well-known dispute between the Sages if the *succah* commemorates the actual *succos* huts which the Jewish people dwelled in, in their sojourn in their desert after leaving Egypt (the opinion of Rebbi Akiva), or if the *succah* is in remembrance of the Clouds of Glory (the opinion of Rebbi

Eliezer).[\[13\]](#) ^[13]

The *halachah* is according to Rabbi Eliezer, and this is perplexing, because usually the *halachah* is according to Rabbi Akiva. The *Bach* and the *Gra* deal with this question. But we can also provide another answer: Here it is different, because even the actual *succos* which Hashem made for the people in the desert was not their permanent dwelling place, for they were en route to Eretz Yisrael. The *succah* is all about establishing a dwelling place to be in, and it is only the Clouds of Glory which can establish a true place. [That is why the *halachah* here is like Rabbi Eliezer, even though normally the *halachah* follows Rabbi Akiva].

There is a *halachah* that the *s'chach* (the covering of the *succah*) must come from a product of the ground, and it must be removed from the ground, and it should not be able to contract *tum'ah* (spiritual defilement). Rashi explains that this is because the *succah* is compared to the clouds, which cannot contract *tum'ah*, for the *succah* is in remembrance of the Clouds of Glory. We can also add another point, that the clouds are not attached to the earth. The Gemara there explains that this is all according to Rabbi Eliezer's view that the *succah* is in remembrance of the Clouds of Glory. From these laws, we see that the *succah* is about changing one's place, removing oneself from the "ground" - foregoing the materialism of this world as one's true place, and instead, to become detached from the ground, and to make the Clouds of Glory into one's true place.

The opinion of Beis Hilel, as mentioned earlier, is that a *succah* does not have to be built for the purpose of the festival. As is well-known, Chazal state that "From ulterior motives (*shelo lishmah*) one is led to pure motives (*lishmah*)", and when we apply this to the laws of *succah*, it will mean that even when the *succah* isn't made *lishmah* - meaning that it was not made for the purpose of the festival - still, a person will be able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *succah*, which represents *lishmah*.

Simply speaking, the *succah* is about leaving one's permanent dwelling and living in a temporary dwelling, as is Rabbi Akiva's view, that the *succah* commemorates the actual *succos* that the people dwelled in. This would be in the category of *shelo lishmah*, with regards to the intention in dwelling in the *succah*. The higher level is to consider the *succah* as one's permanent dwelling, which reflects Rabbi Eliezer's view, that the *succah* represents the Clouds of Glory. One needs to realize that his true place is in the Clouds of Glory [detachment from the materialism of This World], and this represents the concept of *lishmah*.

Being Entirely In The Succah

There is a well-known *Midrash* that entering the *succah* is a form of entering into exile.[\[14\]](#) ^[14] If a person during the days of judgment was sentenced to exile, going into the *succah* fulfills the decree of exile upon him, and then he will be saved from having to endure actual exile.

Exile is about separateness, disparateness, and division. In contrast, redemption is when all of the Jewish people will return to their land, "*And the children will return to their borders*"[\[15\]](#) ^[15]- it is a state of complete mutual connection, rectification, and unity. Chazal said of sitting in the *succah* that one should sit in it in a way that resembles how one lives.[\[16\]](#) ^[16] The meaning of this is that sitting in the *succah* is about having the entire spectrum of one's body and soul in it. Although one fulfills the *mitzvah* as long as his head and most of his body is in the *succah*[\[17\]](#) ^[17], the complete level of sitting in the *succah* is only when one is entirely in it. As a hint, the total numerical value of the word *succah* (סוכה) is equal to 248[\[18\]](#) ^[18], hinting that all 248 parts of a person should be in the *succah*.

Gathered Together In One Place - The Complete Rectification For The Soul

If a person sinned with many different parts of his body, for example, if he didn't don *tefillin* on his left

arm, but he used his right arm to perform acts of *chessed*, then the parts of his body which sinned will need to be reincarnated in his next lifetime (as a *gilgul*) whereas the parts of his body which didn't sin will not need to be reincarnated.^[19] ^[19] When exile is decreed upon the soul – meaning, when the soul has to be reincarnated in another lifetime and return to This World – only the parts of the soul which need rectification are sent down again. There is a separation between all of the 'limbs' in the soul. But through the *mitzvah* of *succah*, which corresponds to the 248 parts of the body, all of the parts of the body are in one place. The *succah* represents one unified structure, where the entire body is placed in and unified underneath it.

It is also known that the Four Species correspond to the four different types of people.^[20] ^[20] On a deeper level, these four different types of people are part of every person's soul. Therefore, everyone has these four parts to themselves. The concept of the *succah* is about taking all of one's parts and establishing one place for them. How can this be done, if some parts of the soul are rectified and some parts of the soul are not, part of the soul is destined for Gan Eden, another part is heading towards Gehinnom, and another part will be reincarnated in another lifetime?

The answer to this lies in what the Gemara says that the "the ground of the earth is all one."^[21] ^[21] Within the *succah*, there is a unification of all aspects. The view of Rabbi Akiva is that Hashem made a physical *succah*, meaning that there is a *succah* on a physical level of this earth. There is also the view of Rabbi Eliezer, that the *succah* which Hashem made refers to the Clouds of Glory, meaning that it was a *succah* on a heavenly level. And, from another viewpoint in the Sages, the *succah* is a form of going into exile. How are all these different aspects of the *succah* unified? When we view the *succah* as containing all of the above aspects.

One can see all of these aspects in the *succah*: the fact that it is a physical *succah*, the fact that they are in remembrance of the Clouds of Glory, a spiritual light that envelopes us, and the fact that the *succah* is a form of exile. One can attain his soul-rectification (*tikkun*) in the *succah*, by establishing the *succah* as his only place to be in, for he has no other place. One only needs to acquire a more expansive view.

Otherwise, a person just sees himself as scattered, with one part of him in Gan Eden and another part of him that belongs in Gehinnom, and in this way, a person becomes terribly scattered inside himself, with his pieces spread out endlessly and all over the place. Instead, one needs to see all of his aspects collected into one place. When that is his perspective, all of his many parts become rectified, through the secret of the *succah*. His many parts become unified into one whole.

Of this it says, "In the shadow of Your wings, they take shelter."^[22] ^[22] Even a part of one's soul which is in need of rectification, which may not even have the merit of taking shelter under Hashem's wing, can indeed become sheltered and protected from Hashem, when one establishes a place for himself where all of his aspects will become integrated and unified into one whole, where his many parts aren't in a scattered state.

The Sages state that "There will be no Gehinnom, in the World To Come. Rather, Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath, and the righteous will be healed from it, and the wicked will be judged with it."^[23] ^[23] Today, there is either a state of Gan Eden or Gehinnom, but in the future, the same point will rectify both the righteous and the wicked. All the parts will become repaired through the same place.

Our *avodah* is to unify and repair all the parts of the soul, from the same point. This matter depends on a person's perspective. One needs to see the *succah* as a unifying point, meaning that it is the place which unifies together all aspects. As opposed to many pieces scattered together, all of the pieces are unified together as one, under the *succah*. The Sages state that "the Jewish people are all

eligible to sit under one *succah*”^[24] ^[24], meaning that all 600,000 neshamos in the Jewish people can be integrated in one *succah*. This includes 600,000 different viewpoints, perspectives, and outlooks – they can all become integrated into one soul. This unifying perspective, *achdus*, is the way to repair all of the scattered parts.

Through viewing the *succah* with this perspective, one can then come to *Simchas Torah*, to the 600,000 letters of the Torah, a Torah that is like one *succah* which unifies all 600,000 viewpoints within the Jewish people.

Thus, the *succah* is a place where one becomes unified under one place, which he doesn’t leave from. The rectification (*tikkun*) for everything takes place there.

The Succah: A State of Redemption Within Exile

Here we have learned of a concept of how opposites can be contained in one matter. The *succah* is a form of exile, but it is also the very opposite of the state of exile.

In exile, a person leaves his fixed place, but we have learned here that the *succah* should be viewed as one place, as opposed to a mere “temporary dwelling”. One can consider the *succah* as his place to live in, and at the same time, he can view it as a form of exile. He is in exile in the *succah*, but he is still living in one place [which is the state of redemption]. This is not a contradiction, because it is only an exile regarding one part of his soul which is in exile, whereas it is not an exile regarding a different part of his soul – instead, it is his true place. For one can see everything in one point, in one *havayah* (one existing reality) – and “the rest is the explanation, go finish it.”

^[1] ^[25] Succah 9a

^[2] ^[26] Bach: Orach Chaim 625

^[3] ^[27] Vayikra 23:43

^[4] ^[28] Mishnah Berurah 625:1

^[5] ^[29] Rambam Hilchos Succah 6:12

^[6] ^[30] Rosh Succah 4:3

^[7] ^[31] Orach Chaim 639:5

^[8] ^[32] Biur HaGra *ibid.*

^[9] ^[33] Magid Mishnah, *ibid*

[10] [34] Bava Basra 75a

[11] [35] Succah 45b

[12] [36] Megillah 28b

[13] [37] Succah 11b

[14] [38] Yalkut Shimeoni Emor 653

[15] [39] Yirmiyahu 31:16

[16] [40] Succah 28b

[17] [41] Succah 28a

[18] [42] The "miluy" (full spelling) of the word succah (סוכה) is ה"א ,כ"ף, וי"ו, סמ"ך, which is equal in numerical value to the word רמח, 248.

[19] [43] Shaarei Kedushah (R' Chaim Vital) 2:3

[20] [44] Vayikra Rabbah Emor 30:12

[21] [45] Kiddushin 27b

[22] [46] Tehillim 36:8

[23] [47] Nedarim 8b

[24] [48] Succah 27b

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