



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

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Ma Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha Yisrael - How good are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Yisrael...

These words which we recite each and every morning upon entering our *Batei Knesset*, were of course originally uttered by *Bilaam HaRasha*, when he intended initially to curse the Jewish people, and *Hashem*, caused these words of blessing to flow forth from his mouth instead. What exactly is the significance of this statement - How good are your tents, *Yaakov*, your dwelling places, *Yisrael*?

The *Netivot Shalom*, the *Slonimer Rebbe zy'a*, points out that as *Bilaam* was about to curse the Jewish People as a whole, instead the words uttered are uttered in the singular - *Ohalecha Yaakov* - Your (singular) tents *Yaakov*, *Mishkenotecha* - your (singular) dwelling places *Yisrael*. What served to protect *Am Yisrael* from *Bilaam*, and any other who might seek to harm us, is *Achdut*. When the Jewish People are united, as one

singular entity, we are protected from each and every *Bilaam*, who might seek to harm us.

Rav Kook,zt'l, offers a different insight regarding the significance of this verse. *Rav Kook* points out that an *ohel* - a tent, is a specific type of *mishkan* - dwelling place. We as Jews, explains *Rav Kook*, should always perceive ourselves as if we are dwelling in an *Ohel*, a tent. A tent is a dwelling place, providing shelter for those who are on a journey. *Rav Kook* explains that, each of us should view ourselves as if we are on a journey, moving forward in growth, striving to come closer to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, and not *chas v'shalom*, remaining stagnant, settled and stuck in one place. Each of us must learn the goodness of what it means to dwell in tents, to continue to move forward, to journey on, to grow in our *Avodat Hashem*.

The *Avodat Elazar of Kozhnitz zy'a*, offers yet another beautiful interpretation of our *pasuk*. *Ma Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha Yisrael* - what makes *Am Yisrael* unique amongst the nations, is the fact that even our private homes become a *mishkan* - a place for the *Shechina's* presence, through the *mitzvot* we engage in each and everyday within our homes.

Yehi Ratzon, may we merit to heed these powerful messages encrypted in this familiar *pasuk*, and may we indeed be blessed to fill our homes with *mitzvot*, and move forward, journeying together, united as one. ■

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