



# SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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OU ISRAEL

Our *sedra* this week contains one of our most familiar verses: *Ma Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha Yisrael.*- *How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisrael...*

These words which we recite each and every morning upon entering our *Batei Knesset*, were originally uttered by *Bilaam HaRasha*, when he intended 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*”? Why of all possible *pesukim* that we might choose to focus on as we enter our synagogues, was this particular verse selected?

The great *Reb Dov Ber, the Maggid Mezeritch, zy'a*, one of the prime disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh*, explained that we begin each day by reciting this verse, which reminds us to acknowledge the goodness within the tents of *Yaakov*, the innate goodness of each member of *Klal Yisrael*. Before

we can daven, or embark on any other activity, we must first condition ourselves to see and appreciate that innate goodness.

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)*



Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l

*tents Yaakov, Mishkenotecha (your (singular) dwelling places Yisrael.* What served to protect *Am Yisrael* from *Bilaam*, and others 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, zy'a* 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

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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.

There is deep wisdom and relevance contained within each of these four beautiful insights. Each morning as we begin our day through *tefila*, we recite this verse to center us, to ground us, and root within us these four fundamental values-acknowledging goodness,unity, spiritual and emotional growth, and sacred space.

*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, shielded from all those who wish us harm, because we continue to journey together, united as one. ■



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