

**BADERECH****RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASCH
AUTHOR OF BADERECH SERIES**SUKKOT**

Sheltering Together In Divine Presence

As the Baal Shem Tov haKadosh sat in his *sukkah*, a great tumult raged outside.

In the early days of the Chasidic movement, some of its revolutionary practices, as well as the spiritual awakening of the followers of the Baal Shem Tov, drew prejudice, strife and legal controversy. While detractors and opponents were always on the lookout for an opportunity to attack the *tzadik* and undermine the fledgling movement, this time it seemed there was good reason to make their claims.

The Ba'al Shem Tov had constructed what looked to be a highly questionable *sukkah*, stitching together a patchwork of materials that seemed to barely pass even the minimal halachic requirements. The rickety looking hut relied on so many *kulahs* in Jewish Law and all the loopholes detailed in *masechet Sukkah*, it was barely recognizable to the rabbis

who were now gathering at the *Sukkah*, ready for a confrontation, and to accuse him of blatant laxity in halacha.

A debate ensued between the scandalized scholars and the *tzaddik*. They summoned a variety of sources and opinions denouncing the *sukkah*, while the Baal Shem Tov calmly defended it on each count. Finally, the rabbonim of Brodt bluntly declared it to be *pasul* and a spiritual danger to the community.

Seeing that his explanations had fallen on deaf ears, the Ba'al Shem Tov closed his eyes, entered a meditative state and began to pray. The *rabbonim* were unsure how to react. At that moment, a piece of paper fell from the *s'chach*, a note signed by no less than an angel from heaven, *Matat Sar haPanim*, attesting to the validity of the *sukkah*: "The *sukkah* of the Baal Shem Tov is kosher!"

Opening his eyes, the Baal Shem Tov then began an instructional shiur, explaining the intricate laws of constructing a *sukkah*, listing the various 'leniencies' that he had relied on, such as *dofen akumah*, *gud achis mechitztah*, *gud asik*, *lavud*, *avir*, and others. He also detailed how each particular *halacha* and its structural application related to a different spiritual state and level of observance.

"There are many different types of Jews in Klal Yisrael of varying levels of education,

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knowledge and observance. The *sukkah* is kosher,” concluded the Baal Shem Tov, “and so are the *Yidden*.”

בַּסֵּכֶת תִּשְׁבּוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כֹּל־
הָאָדָם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבּוּ בַּסֵּכֶת:
“For seven days... all who
belong to the people of
Israel will live in *sukkos*”
(*Vayikra*, 23:42)

ללמד שכל ישראל ראויין לישב בסוכה אחת.
...This teaches that it is fitting for all of Israel
to sit in one *sukkah*. (*Sukkah*, 27b)

“One ought to bind themselves and be
focused on being part of the entire *klal*...and
strive to fill their home with great love and
shalom, so that their love shine outward and
spread forth; In that way, it will be considered
as if all of Israel dwells together in one *suk-*
kah.” (Reb Nosson of Breslov, zy’a)

Zeman simchaseinu, the simcha of the Fes-
tival of Sukkos, flows forth from the *Yamim*
Noraim. Our exuberant joy is framed by the
gravity and *achrayus* of our committed rela-
tionship with the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. The
celebration of Sukkos is an invitation for us
to actualize our declarations and intent. It is
a call to Divine intimacy, welcoming us into
the ineffable embrace and union between *Am*
Yisrael and *Hashem Yisborach*.

Knesses Yisrael, Hashem’s beloved Kallah, is
summoned to enter:

הַבִּיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמָחָה בָּךְ
“The King has brought me into His cham-
bers, we will be joyful and happy together.”
(*Shir haShirim*, 1:4)

Beneath the stars and sky, under a can-
opy held up by poles and prayers, and the

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‘*chuppah*’ of *s’chach* hovering over us, we
are a royal bride and Groom entering into a
covenant of *Kidushin*, sanctity and exclusive
commitment. As a bride and groom fast in
preparation for their new beginning, we fast
on Yom Kippur. Just as they celebrate a week
of ‘*sheva brachos*’, we celebrate seven days
in the *sukkah*, rejoicing in our new state of
union. At each of the seven festive meals
we welcome *panim chadashos*, ‘new faces’:
the *Ushpizin Kadishin*, different holy guests
each night, who join us in celebrating our
wedding.

The Navi describes the *ananei ha-kavod* as a
chuppah that covers us from above and enve-
lopes us in Divine love:

וּבָרָא ה' עַל כָּל־מִכּוֹן הַר־צִיּוֹן וְעַל־מִקְרָאָהָ עָנָן יוֹמָם
וְעֶשֶׂן וְנֹגֶה אֵשׁ לְהִבָּה לְיִלָּה כִּי עַל־כָּל־כְּבוֹד חֻפָּה...
וְסֻכָּה תִּהְיֶה לְצִל־יוֹמָם מִחֹרֵב וּלְמִחְסָה וּלְמִסְתוֹר מִזֶּרֶם
וּמִמְטָר:

“Hashem will create a cloud by day and
smoke with a glow of flaming fire by night
hovering over the shrine and meeting place
of Har Zion; Indeed, over all the glory shall
hang a canopy, and it shall serve as a *sukkah*
for shade from heat by day and as a shelter
for protection against drenching rain.” (*Yesha-*
yah, 4:5)

The Baal haTurim (*Vayikra*, 23:42) invokes
the specific term *chuppah*, and suggests an

additional aspect to the *ananei haKavod*. They imply intimacy and loving connectivity, the manifestation of a marital bond in which two individuals become one. Sheltering together in Hashem's Presence, we are bonded together, and become one in the *sukkah*.

In the tradition of the Baal Shem Tov, the day after Yom Kippur is referred to as *Gott's Numen*, 'God's Name'. Having spent *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* addressing the Ribbono Shel Olam with the honorific *haMelech haKadosh*, we begin to use the more intimate and familiar name, *haKeil haKadosh*. These four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos are days of closeness, corresponding to the four letters of our Beloved One's name, שם הוי"ה, the Tetragrammaton. And perhaps this is the source for Rebbe Pinchas of Koretz's statement that the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos are a particularly auspicious time for a wedding (*Imrei Pinchas*, 7:91). We are Hashem's pure, radiant kallah, walking toward the *chuppah*, where we will circle Him with *hakafos* of joy, remove our veil and see each other face to face.

There is much we can learn from the Ba'al Shem Tov's *sukkah*. In cultivating and creating *yichud*, in building a shared dwelling place together, we are called to focus on the *tov*, the good that is there, not what is lacking. Yiddishkeit provides the tools to construct

a life of holiness and joy and a home that is suffused with love, firm on the foundations of *ayin tovah*, inclusivity and Ahavas Yisrael. Such a home is surrounded by *ananei haKavod* all year 'round, and filled with mutual respect and peace.

It is indeed "fitting for all of Israel to sit in one *sukkah*"; there is nothing more beautiful — and precious to Hashem — than individuals uniting, coming together in love and friendship. May we all merit to celebrate together during these auspicious days, to give ourselves over to the purity of Yom Kippur and the intimacy of the *sukkah*. May all be blessed to build homes filled with אהבה ואחווה, שלום ורעות.

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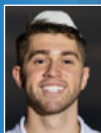
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