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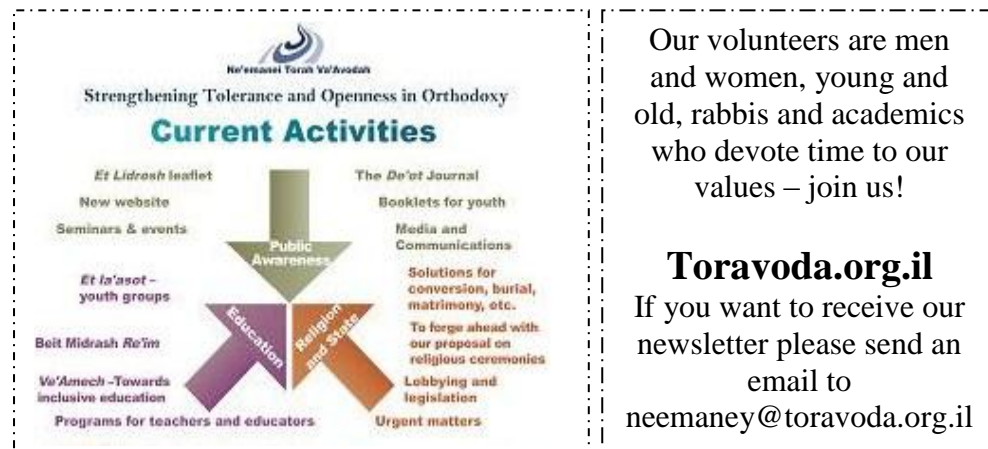
Not all Jews are natural builders and at times, our efforts at Succot feel a little artificial, but the significance of spending a week in a temporary structure of barely four walls was brought home to me when I volunteered with the American Jewish World Service in Ghana this summer. There, we mixed cement, heaved bricks and built classrooms for the local school, but most of our work was left unfinished. Half a wall was sufficient to protect a class of children from the elements, then it was time to move on and construct the next structure.

At first, this seemed odd and frustrating. Why not finish off one building, before starting the next? Gradually it became clear. The people of the village live without toilets or running water and most are illiterate. Children as young as five and six are trafficked and labor as slaves on fishing boats until the lucky ones are rescued and brought to this school. They lack all the supports that we take for granted. For them, half a wall is plenty. It may even be the difference between life and death.

As we sit in our succot, we will remember our history as slaves who left Egypt and lived with Divine protection in primitive desert shelters for forty years in the desert. But succot is not just about the past, its also about the present and future. As we sit in our temporary shelters, we should also spare a thought for those whose talents and intelligence matches our own, but whose fate has been to grow up in a place where disease is rife, food is scarce and a temporary structure with half a wall really does make the difference. We should think about what we can do to help them, so that we will bring about the ultimate redemption when we will sit in the sukkah of the Almighty.

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עַת לִדְרוֹשׁ  
**ET LIDROSH**

## Shabbat Chol Hamoed Succot Succah Walls and Ghana – Rabbi G. Sylvester

"Home is any four walls that enclose the right person", said the American writer Helen Rowland. Home is not about building palaces, it's about living safely with the people we care about. But sometimes, even four walls is a luxury as we discover on Succot.

Constructing and living in the simplest possible structure is one of the themes and challenges of Succot. The Mishna discusses the minimum number of walls and the type of roof necessary to create a succah. The Talmud takes the discussion further, analyzing whether one wall must reach another and whether they have to reach as high as the roof. The rabbis' concern is clear; too few walls and we won't have a stable structure, but too solid a building, and we will have turned the succah into a permanent building. Our succah must be a temporary structure, the Ramban explains that this is important to help us "to know and remember our ancestors, who were in the wilderness and did not live in homes and found no habitation for forty years, but G-d was with them and they lacked nothing".

On Succot, we remember what it is like to be in a wilderness. It's an awesome challenge, underlined by Rav SR Hirsch, who explains that the wilderness is a place "where there is an absence of all the supports usually provided by nature and human ingenuity for man's survival". This, he explains is why the roof of the succah is made from materials which come from nature but are now cut off and uncrafted by human skills.

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IDEAS

Ne'emaney Torah Va'Avodah

## Thoughts for Succot

Dr. John Abernathy was a famed physician in 19th century England. One day, a patient came in complaining that he was not feeling well. Dr. Abernathy gave the man a complete check-up, and then said: "There's nothing physically wrong with you. You're just depressed. I suggest that you go to a performance of the great comedian, Grimaldi. He is wonderful. He will cheer you up and make you laugh. Go see Grimaldi and you will feel much better."

The patient replied: "I am Grimaldi!"

This anecdote reminds us that there are two aspects (at least) to every person. There is the exterior persona that people see, the outward appearance of who we are; and there is the inner person that people do not readily see, the concealed essence of who we are. In the ideal, these two aspects should be in harmony. Our inner life and outer life should reflect a unified personality. In the case of Grimaldi, his external humor and cheerfulness actually concealed an inner sadness and malaise.

When the two aspects are not in harmony, we need to work on ourselves. When we realize there is a dissonance, we can begin to address the situation and work to make ourselves "whole". If we deny or refuse to recognize the dissonance, we live life on a superficial, even hypocritical level. We pretend to be what we are not; we may try to convince ourselves that everything is just fine.

The past holy days of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur focused on our need to unify ourselves, and to overcome any dissonance between our external and internal lives. The mood was solemn and sincere, as befits an honest self-evaluation.

But now we approach Succoth, which is known as Zeman Simhateinu, the time of our happiness. Indeed, the Torah commands us to be happy on the Festival days. Yet, how can we be commanded to be happy, if our interior mood is not happy? The answer is: We have the power to direct our inner thoughts in the direction of happiness. We have the capacity to overcome feelings of distress, by channeling our emotions in constructive ways.

Happiness isn't an end in itself, but is the result of positive thinking and action. Succoth reminds us: we've just been through a very serious holiday period, where we've discovered areas of strength and weakness within ourselves. Now it is time to take our insights from Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, and turn them into positive thinking and action. Let us now rejoice in the festival. Let us re-connect with family and friends. Let us enjoy eating in the Succah, participating in the elaborate synagogue rituals. Let us be grateful to the Almighty for the abundance of the harvest, for the beauties of nature. Let us harmonize our inner lives and our outer lives, so that we reflect a genuine faith and confidence inside and out.

When we greet each other on Succoth (as on other Festival days), some say: Moadim leSimha--may the festivals be for happiness; and some say, Hag Sameah--enjoy a happy Festival. The message is clear: we foster a mood of happiness so that we can carry this spirit of optimism and happiness throughout the year, and throughout our lives.

## Thoughts under the Schach

While you sit in your lovely decorated *succah* why not take a moment to contemplate why you are there?

The *Torah* states "that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel live in *succot*, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God". (Vayikra 23:43)

There is a famous argument between R. Eliezer and R. Akiva regarding the meaning of '*succot*'. R. Eliezer states that the *passuk* refers literally to *succot* whereas R. Akiva explains '*succot*' as the 'clouds of glory'. Both *Rashi* and *Ramban* side with R. Akiva, implying that we must remember all the amazing miracles and actions of Hashem who protected the Children of Israel in the 'clouds of glory'.

Rashbam, disagrees with his grandfather, and interprets the *passuk* according to R. Eliezer - as a literal *succa*. The reason we live in a *succa* is to remind us who is responsible for our material wealth. In today's rat race or in the time of the ancient harvest festival there is a tendency for people to be egocentric and self-laudatory -*Cochi ve'otzem yadi assa li et vachayil Haze* - 'My power and the might of my hand has made me this wealth.' (Devarim 8:18) *Succot* reminds us that Hashem brought us out of Egypt, supported us and protected us from the perils of the desert and brought us to the land flowing with milk and honey. *Succot* reminds us that we owe thanks to Hashem for our material wealth and prosperity. The act of leaving your house is an antidote to pride and leads to humility.

Malbim suggests a more spiritual approach. We are commanded to live in a *succa* to remind us that this is only a temporary world – a corridor to the world to come. Materialism and prosperity may cause us to think that this is the *real* world and the message of *succot* is to remind us that this is simply a portal to the world to come.

Sefer haChinuch offers a more practical approach. There is a connection between remembering the miracles that Hashem performed and accepting the mitzvot. Since Hashem performed miracles for us as we came out of Egypt and protected us with the clouds of glory we should respond by keeping His mitzvot.

R. Yitzchak Arama makes a connection between the laws of *succa* and his life view. The Gemara (Succah 2a/b) defines the size of a *succah* as seven tefachim by seven tefachim by ten. This teaches us that we should live a simple life. If you accustom yourself to a life of simplicity you will not lack anything.

Histapkut bemaat – making do with little was one of the ideals of religious Zionism as the state of Israel was being built. As we sit in our Succot we can contemplate the literal, philosophical or practical reasons that explain why we are there but remember that the real *succot* experience can only take place in Eretz Yisrael, a State built on histapkut bemaat.