



THE CHALLENGE OF THE WEEK (TRANSLATED FROM VEHA'AREV NA 3)

BUT I'M NOT AFRAID OF THE SNAKE!

THE CHALLENGE: During Sukkot, religious soldiers at an army base in Israel built a *Sukkah* where they ate and slept throughout the holiday. One night, they discovered that a poisonous snake was in the courtyard near the *Sukkah*. Despite their efforts, they were unable to capture or remove it. Concerned for their safety, the soldiers decided that they would no longer eat or sleep in the *Sukkah* and would instead remain inside the base.

One soldier, however, objected. He was considered one of the strongest soldiers in the unit and had immigrated to Israel from Russia. After becoming religious and doing *Teshuva*, he argued that there was no reason for them to be afraid.

"While I served in the Russian army," he explained, "we were trained to function under all kinds of dangerous conditions. We were stationed in places where snakes were common, and we were taught not to be frightened by them. I personally slept in areas where snakes lived and learned not to fear them. Why, then, should I suddenly be afraid when it comes to performing a *Mitzvah*? After all, *Chazal* teach, 'שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע' – one who observes a *Mitzvah* will not experience evil!"

The soldier therefore wanted to remain in the *Sukkah*.

Was the soldier correct? May he remain in the *Sukkah* despite the presence of a poisonous snake, or must he leave the *Sukkah* because of the danger?

THE SOLUTION: Rav Zilberstein addressed this question based on an important principle found in the *Gemara*.

The *Gemara* (*Yevamot* 112b) discusses why *Chazal* permitted two deaf-mutes to marry, despite their lacking the *Halachic* capacity required for marriage on a biblical level, while they did not permit two mentally incapacitated individuals to marry.

The *Gemara* explains that two deaf-mutes are capable of living peacefully together and maintaining a household. Two

mentally incapacitated individuals, however, cannot reliably sustain a marriage. The *Gemara* illustrates this with the expression: "A person cannot live in a basket with a snake." When a situation makes ordinary living together impossible, it cannot be considered a viable dwelling.

Rav Zilberstein applies this principle to the *Sukkah*. Although the soldier had been trained to remain calm around snakes and personally did not feel frightened, a person cannot realistically be expected to live in a place where a poisonous snake is present. The Torah commands us to "dwell" in the *Sukkah*, and *Chazal* explain that one must treat the *Sukkah* as his primary residence. A place containing a dangerous snake cannot be considered a normal living environment.

Therefore, the soldier may not remain in the *Sukkah*. Since it is not a place in which a person can safely live, remaining there would not constitute the proper fulfillment of the *Mitzvah* of *Sukkah*.

What about his argument that "שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע" – one who observes a *Mitzvah* will not experience evil?

This principle does not mean that a person may deliberately place himself in a clearly dangerous situation because he is performing a *Mitzvah*. When there is a genuine and recognizable danger, we do not rely on this principle to disregard the danger.

Furthermore, the Torah commands us, "וזהי בהם" – "You shall live by them" (*Vayikra* 18:5), which *Chazal* understand to mean that the *Mitzvot* were given so that we should live through them, not die because of them.

Thus, in this case, the soldier is exempt from the *Mitzvah* of *Sukkah* because of the danger. His bravery and military training do not change the *Halachic* reality: a poisonous snake has no place in one's living quarters – even when those quarters happen to be a *Sukkah*.

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DVAR TORAH – Why Is Sukkot Seven Days?

There are three major *Yamim Tovim* in the Torah: Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Pesach and Sukkot are each celebrated for seven days, while Shavuot is celebrated for only one day. The reason for Pesach is understandable: the Exodus from Egypt unfolded over a period of seven days, culminating in the splitting of the *Yam Suf* and the final destruction of the Egyptian threat. Shavuot, on the other hand, commemorates the Giving of the Torah, which took place on a single day.

But why is Sukkot celebrated for seven days?

According to the Vilna Ga'on, the 15th of Tishrei was chosen for Sukkot because this was the day the *Ananei Hakavod*, the Clouds of Glory, returned to *Klal Yisrael* after having departed following the sin of the Golden Calf. If so, why do we need seven days to commemorate their return? Wouldn't one day be sufficient?

The *Chizkuni* and *Ba'al Haturim* explain that the seven days of Sukkot correspond to the seven *Ananei Hakavod* that returned to accompany and protect *Klal Yisrael*. Each day of Sukkot therefore represents another cloud that Hashem restored to His people.

This may also explain a difference between Sukkot and Pesach. On Pesach, we recite the complete *Hallel* only on the first day, whereas on Sukkot we recite the complete *Hallel* every day. On Pesach, we commemorate one extended miracle – the Exodus from Egypt – which reached its ultimate completion with the destruction of the Egyptians at the *Yam Suf*. On Sukkot, however, each day represents another manifestation of Hashem's protection through the Clouds of Glory. Therefore, each day warrants its own

expression of Hallel and gratitude.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a broader perspective. In addition to the three *Regalim*, there are two other major days of the year: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Their central theme is *Yirah* – standing before Hashem with awe, humility, and complete submission. These experiences are intentionally concentrated into a single day.

Sukkot, however, represents something different. After the awe and introspection of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we enter a period of *Simcha*, celebrating the privilege of living under Hashem's protection and dedicating ourselves to His service. This joy is not meant to be a fleeting experience. We spend seven days immersed in it so that the inspiration of Sukkot can remain with us long after the holiday ends.

The Torah does not want the inspiration of the Yamim Nora'im to disappear when Yom Kippur ends. Sukkot teaches us how to carry that inspiration forward. We leave our permanent homes and enter the Sukkah, reminding ourselves that our true security comes from Hashem. We then spend seven days surrounded by Simcha, Hallel, and the awareness of His protection.

The goal of Sukkot is therefore not simply to experience seven days of joy, but to take that joy and connection with Hashem with us when the seven days are over. The holiday ends, but its message is meant to accompany us throughout the entire year.

DVAR TORAH – Why Is Sukkot Called “Chag”?

Sukkot is known by several names, including *Chag HaSukkot* and *Chag HaAsif*. Yet throughout Shas, we often find Sukkot referred to simply as “*Chag*” – “the Holiday.” This raises an interesting question: Why is Sukkot singled out to be called *Chag* more than any other *Yom Tov*?

The *S'deh Tzofim* (*Ta'anit* 2a) quotes the *Tosafot Yom Tov* and explains that the word *Chag* is related to the word *Chugah*, which means to dance in a circle. This is especially appropriate for Sukkot because it is the one *Yom Tov* on which we have a special *Mitzvah* of rejoicing through dancing, particularly during the *Simchat Bet HaSho'evah*.

There is another reason why Sukkot is referred to simply as *Chag*. The Torah places a special emphasis on *Simcha* during Sukkot. The joy of Sukkot is so central to the holiday that the name *Chag* itself reflects its unique character as a time of celebration and happiness.

Sukkot teaches us that true Simcha is not merely a feeling – it is something we actively create. We celebrate, sing, dance, and rejoice with our families and community. The Torah therefore calls Sukkot simply “Chag”, reminding us that a Yom Tov should be more than a date on the calendar; it should be a time when we consciously bring joy into our lives and share that joy with others.

SHABBAT SHALOM & CHAG SAME'ACH!