



The Sukkah of Fire
Sukkos Special

The Gotlieb family in Jerusalem was in great distress. Ten-year-old Shlomo's fever was running high. A storm was raging the streets. A doctor alerted to the house ordered that hot water be boiled for him and that the house be heated. He was suffering from the cold and his life was in danger.

In those years lacking was felt in every home in Israel, and all suffered from hunger. Families with many children were hit even harder.

The father, a great rabbi, was deeply upset; he had no money in his pocket and could not afford to buy wood for heating. Seeking help, he went to the Rachmastrivka Rebbe, Rabbi Mordechai Twersky. The Rebbe listened, and understood that an important Mitzvah had fallen into his hands. He called his Gabai, sexton, and ordered him to take his wooden sukkah walls and give them to the family to use as fire wood.

The rebbe's sukkah was famous in Jerusalem, with many coming to gaze at it during the holiday. It had inner beauty and external splendor. The walls were engraved with shapes of fruits and verses from the Torah written in exquisite calligraphy, several by the rebbe himself.

The sukkah was an inheritance from his holy forefathers, and its construction was inspired by the mystical teachings of the Kaballah and the invocation of the Holy Names of G-d. The rebbe himself would supervise the sukkah's dismantling every end of the holiday.

For this reason, many greats came to visit the sukkah. The rebbe would sit in it and rarely left it during the holiday. Jerusalemites sensed its holiness and did not speak profane words near it. They would say that the name of Heaven dwelt in the sukkah.

We were given the commandment to sit in the sukkah in the desert in commemoration of the *Ananei Hakavod*, the clouds of glory, which surrounded the Israelites in the desert, as the Torah tells us: "For seven days you shall live in Sukkos [booths]. Every resident among the Israelites shall live in Sukkos, in order that your generations should know that I had the children of Israel live in Sukkos when I took them out of the land of Egypt."¹

A close look shows us that our sukkos are similar to those in the desert.

The Midrash² teaches us that the clouds of glory protected the Israelites in the desert. While being chased by the Egyptians, the Israelites sat in peace while the Egyptians were cast in darkness. They pelted rocks and arrows at the Israelites, which were absorbed by the cloud.

The Midrash³ also tells us that there were seven clouds, four from each side, one from above and one from below, and one that moved ahead and smoothed the path for the Israelites and removed all obstacles.

While sitting in the clouds the Israelites sensed G-d's presence in a complete fashion and had full faith in Him.

In our days, we sit in temporary huts, which have a power to protect those who dwell in them. How so? Through the unity of the Jewish People.

The clouds were given to the Israelites on the merit of the Aharon the Cohen Gadol, who worked tirelessly to bring unity to the Jewish nation. The huts are called Sukkat Shalom, for they protect the Jews as one.

The Midrash⁴ tells us that the four species taken during the holiday symbolize the Jews' unity. The Esrog, with a scent and taste, represents Jews who learn Torah and do good deeds. The Lulav has only a taste, the Hadas has only a scent, and the Arava has neither, but they are all held together during the prayers and festivities, symbolizing the unity and peace of the holiday, the shared caring for every Jew.

The sexton turned pale after hearing the rebbe's offer to use his sukkah as fire wood.

"Well, a Jew is waiting, give it to him," the rebbe urged him.

The sukkah was used as fire wood, and every part added to the blaze hastened the boy's recovery, who subsequently grew to become a Torah scholar and a communal leader.

The rebbe's new sukkah was much less splendid, but the rebbe was just as joyous, and maybe even more.

Two years later, as the rebbe was on his way to pray at the Kotel, he was ambushed and murdered by an Arab mob. He was buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

His chasids would say that it was not the heat of the fire but the warmth of the rebbe's mitzvahs that cured the boy. He gave away the holy sukkah which he had inherited from generations passed to save a Jewish soul, and in merit of this the boy was saved quickly cured.

¹ Vayikra 23:42.

² Mechiltah Shmot 14:20.

³ Tachumah, Beshalach.

⁴ Vayikra Raba 30:12.