

CHABAD
DED
RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... שקדש

Wed. evening 12 October 2011 - 14 Tishrei 5772
Succot Festival

57

OPEN HOME

THE PHRASE “THE ENGLISHMAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE” DEFINES A VIEW OF our relationship with our home and also with the outside world. The “castle” is strongly fortified. No-one can enter, unless we raise the portcullis and open the gates. Inside we are comfortable in every respect. The walls are adorned with beautiful tapestries; we sit on exquisitely upholstered chairs. The air is fragrant. Our every want is attended to with alacrity, by devoted servants who have been with the family for generations...

Many of us aspire to and also attain something like this in a modern context. Indeed, through having this kind of stability as a base we can give a good start to our children and can also be of genuine benefit to our community. However, life has many dimensions, and the Succot festival which begins Wednesday evening (12 Oct.) presents us with another mode of thinking.

The Succah in its standard form is a simple booth in the garden with a roof of branches and evergreen leaves. It represents the booths in which the Jewish people dwelled during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, some 3,300 years ago¹. During the festival, ideally, the Jew moves out of his solid castle-like home into the frail booth with its roof of loose branches and leaves. We may not manage

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to “live” in the Succah in actual fact, but we fulfil the basic command by eating in it. Conceptually, one could say, during the Succot festival the Succah becomes our dwelling.

As a result, our view of the world changes. Our home no longer insulates us so fully from the elements, nor from other people. An important aspect of the traditions regarding Succot is that as well as our own family eating in the Succah there are also “guests”. If possible, these are real guests of flesh and blood: the Sages greatly encourage a Jewish family to invite guests to their table on Shabbat and, even more so, on a festival. Yet, in addition, there is a tradition that in every Succah, day by day, there are spiritual guests: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. Abraham is the guest on the first night of the Festival.

In the Torah we see Abraham and his wife Sarah, the first Jewish couple, welcoming guests and preparing a meal for them². Opening one's home to guests is a Jewish ideal, emphasised by the theme of the guests in the Succah.

Yet, taking this idea a little further, in a sense we are all “guests”, wherever we are, even if our home is the most secure of castles. For we, the Jewish people, are in Exile. Our true “home” would be a comfortable, undisputed edifice in the Land of Israel, in an epoch of universal peace and contentment: that means, in the time of the Messiah.

Till then we are guests, often finding ourselves in different parts of the world. The Succah with its frail roof open to the wind and rain reminds us of this we are not in a stone castle, but are very clearly reliant on G-d's mercy.

Yet this very fact encourages us to remember the true and positive purpose of Exile. By living as Jews, wherever we may be round the globe, we are helping to make the whole world into a spiritual “dwelling”. This will be achieved with the rebuilding of the Temple, the ultimate of all castles.

Then, at last, we will truly be home.³

1. See Leviticus 23:39-43. 2. Genesis 18:2 ff. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.29, p.354 ff.

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SUKKOT FESTIVAL

AT SCHOOL AND EVERYWHERE

“Debbi, what are you wearing?” Leah looked in amazement at her sister. “Aren’t those the earrings Miss Wolfson told you not to wear - didn’t she say they’re not the right thing for a Jewish girl to wear, because they’re too flashy?”

Debbi had on a pair of long, fluorescent green skeleton earrings she had bought during the summer holidays. She turned a little red. “Yes, she did say that, so I’m not going to wear them in school anymore. But we’re not in school now, so it’s okay to wear them.”

“But Debbi, I don’t think she meant that just in school it’s wrong to wear them, I think she meant that you shouldn’t wear them at all.”

“Oh, who cares,” Debbi said, wanting to end the conversation. “Let’s go and help Daddy build the Sukkah.”

The two ran out into the garden, where their father was erecting a large wooden frame. Sheets of plywood lay on the lawn, waiting to be fixed to the framework.

“Oh wow!” Debbi exclaimed. “You’re making the Sukkah even bigger than usual this year, Daddy.”

“Yes, we're having lots of guests,” her father explained. “Could you pass me those nails? Thanks.”

Soon the twins were busy fetching tools, holding boards straight and passing things to their father. “I can't wait till it's Sukkot and we'll be eating in here,” Leah said. “Me too,” Debbi agreed. “I just hope it doesn't rain the whole week, like it did last year. Remember how the raindrops kept falling into our chicken soup?” “Yes - and how the candles went out from the rain, and Daddy said we could go inside if we wanted,” Leah said,

“Did you two learn in school why we actually eat in the Sukkah?” their father asked, as he banged in some nails.

“Of course!” Leah said. “Miss Wolfson told us that it's to remind us of the clouds that protected the Jews when they were travelling through the desert. They were special clouds, called the Clouds of Glory, and they surrounded the people on all sides - just like the Sukkah surrounds us on all sides.”

“That's why the Sukkah is a really special Mitzvah, because when we are in it, we are totally surrounded by it so that everything we do in there, even if it's not a mitzvah, but just eating or drinking, becomes holy and connected to Hashem,” Debbi added.

“Yes,” said their father. “We can also learn a lesson for the whole year from that - that being connected with Hashem is not just for the synagogue or school - we're also connected with Hashem at home and at work, and on holiday, and should always act accordingly.”

He didn't notice that as he spoke, Debbi was turning very slightly red, and, not looking at Leah, was taking off her earrings.

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