

Which Sukkos?

The Torah (Vayikra 23:43) teaches that we live in *sukkos* “so that the generations will know that Hashem caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in *sukkos* when He took them out from the Land of Egypt.” While *sukkos* literally means huts (or booths), the Torah never tells us about huts in the desert. As such, the gemara in Sukkah 11b discusses which *sukkos* the *passuk* is referring to - in other words, what *sukkos* are we trying to remember when we live in *sukkos*? Rabbi Eliezer says the *ananei kavod* - the miraculous Clouds of Glory with which Hashem protected the Jews from the elements. Rabbi Akiva argues that the *passuk* is literal - we live in huts to remind us of the actual huts that the Jews made in the desert (Rashi in Sukkah 11b says these huts were made for protection from the sun).

On the surface, both of these positions seem difficult to understand. If *sukkos* means the miraculous clouds, as Rabbi Eliezer maintains, why doesn't the Torah just say that? Why does it say “so that generations will know that Hashem caused us to dwell in huts” when it really means that Hashem caused us to dwell under the protection of miraculous clouds? Furthermore, how does our dwelling in huts remind us of Hashem's miraculous clouds? While Rabbi Akiva's position - that it means literal huts - fits better with the plain reading of the *passuk*, his position leaves us wondering why it's important to remember the actual huts - a seemingly trivial detail of our stay in the desert.

To explain both positions, we can suggest that Hashem's protection of the Jews in the desert had two facets. First was the miraculous protection. He gave us clouds to shelter and guide us, He prevented our clothing from wearing out, He fed us *mahn* from heaven, etc. Alongside the miraculous protection was Hashem's “natural,” hidden protection. For forty years, we lived in a hot desert along with snakes, scorpions, and other wild animals. While there weren't open miracles to protect us from these dangers, Hashem organized the laws of nature in a way that accomplished this objective. Against all natural odds, Hashem made sure that our tents kept us cool and protected us from the creatures of the desert.

Which of these forms of Divine protection is Sukkos trying to commemorate? Rabbi Eliezer maintains: the miraculous protection. Perhaps he would argue that the miracles provide greater expressions of Hashem's special *hashgacha* to the Jewish nation. Just as Pesach and Shavuous remind us of the open miracles of the *yitzias Mitzrayim* and *matan Torah*, so too Sukkos reminds us of the open miracles in the desert.

Rabbi Akiva argues that Sukkos is different from Pesach and Shavuous. While those holidays commemorate one-time miraculous events, Sukkos, the holiday that corresponds to our forty-year stay in the desert, isn't limited to isolated miraculous events but extends to the continual and everlasting Divine protection of the Jewish nation. More specifically, Sukkos commemorates Hashem's manipulation of the laws of nature to protect the Jewish nation. Every year, at the time when Jewish farmers gather their produce and amass their annual income, they must remember that even though their success may appear entirely natural, it isn't. Rather, Hashem controls the natural law behind the scenes to give us rain, to heal us, to assist us in

war, etc. Since the expressions of Hashgacha that are woven into the natural law are better reflected by the actual huts than miraculous clouds, Rabbi Akiva argues that our *sukkos* are designed to remind the generations of the actual huts.

While Rabbi Akiva's argument is intriguing, Rashi and Onkelos both explain the passuk like Rabbi Eliezer. While they explicitly connect the Sukkos to the miraculous Clouds of Glory, perhaps we can suggest that the passuk described the clouds with the vague term *sukkos* because they agree that Sukkos provides a lesson about Hashem's hidden protection as well.

This lesson is based on the last Ramban in Bo who says that from the open miracles that Hashem did in Egypt, a person can also come to acknowledge the hidden miracles which Hashem uses to implement reward and punishment. While the Ramban doesn't fully explain the connection, perhaps he means as follows. The open miracles in Egypt demonstrated that Hashem created the laws of nature and that He has both the ability and the will to manipulate these laws for the sake of rewarding the righteous, punishing evildoers, and teaching vital lessons. So too, Hashem has the ongoing ability and will to subtly manipulate the laws of nature to implement His system of reward and punishment and further His plan in this world.

Following the Ramban's lead, we can suggest that while living in Sukkos explicitly reminds us of Hashem's miraculous protection in the desert, it implicitly reminds us that our homes' year-round protection is ultimately rooted in Hashem's hidden direction of the laws of nature. We can now understand how living in *sukkos* reminds us of the Clouds of Glory. By leaving the security of our homes and living in (naturally) insecure *sukkos*, we are forced to remember the lesson of the Clouds of Glory - that our ultimate security isn't to be found in our physical homes but in our relationship with Hashem.