

CERTAINTY FROM UNCERTAINTY

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"In order that your generations know that I caused the Children of Israel to live in Succos when I brought them out from the land of Egypt." (Leviticus 23:43)

It will soon be the holiday of Succos (Tabernacles). The commandment is to live in a room with a roof made from "sechach." Sechach is any unprocessed plant growth which has been cut from the ground, and arranged as the roof of the Succah. Generally we build a small hut in the back yard, and cover it with sechach, and decorate it, and it becomes our living quarters for seven days. Why? The reason is given in the passage quoted above. It gives us the knowledge that the Children of Israel lived in Succos when G-d brought them out from Egypt.

What exactly does it mean that our generations should "know" that the Children of Israel dwelled in Succos when they left Egypt, and what knowledge do we gain from **living** in the Succah that we don't get from reading about it?

The Holiday of Succos occurs in the fall, at the time that the crops which were harvested (in Israel) at the beginning of the summer and were drying are gathered in to the storehouses. The cycle of the hard work of farming has (hopefully) borne fruit, and we are set for the year to come. At this point there is a very great concern that we not attribute our success and security to the "edifices" of our own efforts alone.

"Be carefully that you not forget G-d...You may eat and be satisfied, building fine houses and living in them...Your herds and flocks may increase...But your heart may then grow haughty and you may forget G-d...and you may say 'it was my own strength and personal power that brought me all of this prosperity'. " (Deuteronomy 8:11-17)

*"You shall make the Festival of Succos for yourself when you gather in (the products) of your threshing floor and wine vat, for seven days" (Deuteronomy "16:15). Our sages comment on this passage "from the **leftovers** of your threshing floor and your wine vat, you shall make the Festival of Succos." This refers to the roof of the Succah which is made from plant growth.*

The message of the roof being made from the byproduct of crops is important. It is easy to come to believe that our security (our roof over our heads) is the result of our material wealth, and the product of our personal efforts. In order to internalize the fact that our security is from G-d alone we live in a Succah, with a roof made not from the edible part of our crops, but from the refuse. It is G-d and our relationship to Him represented by our following His commandments (in this case living in

the Succah with its flimsy roof)) which brings us true security.

Just as G-d miraculously provided for our forefather's needs when they traversed the wilderness for forty years after they left Egypt, the same is true now. We are exactly the same as they were. Civilization has the ability of creating an illusion that we are safe and secure, but that in itself is a kindness from G-d. We are all more keenly aware of this point now. Our safety and security or G-d forbid vice-versa completely depends on G-d.

The Commandment of living in the Succah for seven days is meant to foster this realization in our psyches so we will live with this attitude for the whole year in all of our endeavors. This point is so much more poignant at this juncture in time when there is so much uncertainty in the current events of the world, when the "edifices" of materialism we have relied upon have been toppled. Even more so do we need to instill in ourselves that G-d is still alive and well, and fully capable of providing for us even when the world economy has received such a blow as it has recently.

We are not just commemorating a great juncture of Jewish History when we enter our Succah for seven days. We are reminding ourselves that in a real way we are there in that same great juncture in our point in history with G-d providing for our every need as well. We are coming to know - to connect - to the inner reality - the soul and essence of our existence.

Chag Somayach!

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