

Booths in Today's Time

Sukkot – Rabbi Jay Weinstein

When giving us the *mitzva* to sit in the *sukkah*, the Torah explains the goal: "so that your generations will know that I caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:42-43). The Talmudic Sages argue about the exact nature of these "booths" in which the Jewish people dwelled. Rabbi Eliezer says that these booths symbolize "*Ananai haKavod*," the "Clouds of Glory," which God used to protect the Jewish people in the 40 years of traveling in the desert. It was their air conditioning to make sure they weren't affected by the heat of the desert, it protected them from getting dirty, and directed them on the correct path of travel in dessert. However, Rabbi Akiva argues that these "booths" refer to the actual booths or huts that the Israelites built to be their homes during the 40-year sojourn.

At first glance, it seems to me a "no brainer" that Rabbi Eliezer is correct. According to him, we are celebrating a miracle that Hashem performed for us. Why would Rabbi Akiva suggest that we have a holiday simply to remember the structures that the Jews lived in during their travels in the desert?

The Aruch HaShulchan written by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1907), suggests that Rabbi Akiva understands the holiday of Sukkot not as a means by which to remember God's miracle, but rather to remember the greatness of the Jewish people. They had such a deep relationship with Hashem that they trusted God enough to travel into the uninhabitable desert wasteland. Even while traveling in the dessert they didn't build strong and permanent structures, but trusted God so deeply that they we willing to live in huts.

By continuing to live in the *sukka*, we are expressing our continued trust in Hashem. Although our world is full of strong buildings and firm foundations, unless it's coupled with Hashem's protection, it's powerless. We should use these seven days of Sukkot to reflect on this idea and to strengthen and deepen our continued faith in Hashem.

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