



## Hiding in the Sukkah

For the last month, since the beginning of Elul, we have been reciting Psalm 27 – לְדָוִד ה' אֹרֵי – on a daily basis. We will continue to do so until Shemini Atzeret the very end of the Sukkot holiday. The practice first appeared in the prayer book of Rabbi Marskov, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov and in *halachic* works such as the *Mateh Ephraim* by Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margulies (1762-1828).

Elements of this psalm are reminiscent of the themes of this time of the year. For example, the Midrash (Tehillim 27:4) writes: “Our Sages have explained the verse as related to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. אֹרֵי (my light) – on Rosh Hashanah which is the Day of Judgement as it states “and let your justice and judgment shine forth like the midday sun” (Psalms 37:6), that He will save us and forgive us, and יִשְׁעֵי (my salvation) on Yom Kippur, that He will save us and forgive all our sins.

Yet another hint is found in the mention of “*sukkah*” in verse five: “For on the day of trouble He will conceal me in His *sukkah*; He will hide me in the shelter of His tent and set me high upon a rock.”

Let us look at this verse in greater detail. First of all, what is this *sukkah*?

The Ibn Ezra states it is Jerusalem, based on the verse “and His *sukkah* will be in Shalem (one of the names of Jerusalem) and His dwelling in Zion” (Psalms 76:3). Rashi narrows the area down specifically to the Beit HaMikdash. He ties it to a historical event, where Yoash, the son of Achaziah, was in fact hidden in the Temple for six years to save him from the wrath of Atalia, the queen who succeeded in killing the remaining royal children. Other commentaries look at the phrase as a more general one referring to G-d’s protection, similar to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer (Sukkah 11b and codified in the Shulchan Aruch) as to why we sit in *sukkot*, i.e. to remind us of G-d’s protection via the “clouds of glory” (*ananei haKavod*).

When does G-d conceal us in His *sukkah*? בְּיוֹם רָעָה. A simple translation would be “on a bad day,” but it can also mean a day of bad as in a “day of trouble.” I feel it is likely that over the last six months, people have felt it is one יוֹם רָעָה after another in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. However, in Yirmiyahu (17:17–18, 51:2), the phrase has a positive connotation. It is when punishment will be brought down on evildoers and thus it is actually a good day if you are righteous.

Hiding and concealing are also concepts with dual meaning. Both sins such as idol worship (see Devarim 13:7 and 27:15) and actions of which one is ashamed are associated with hiding (see Devarim 27:24). On the other hand, a hidden place is described as the dwelling place of *Hashem* (Psalms 91:1).

Such double meaning is appropriate for such confusing times. Perhaps we can learn from them that all things that seem bad may, perhaps, have a good side to them. Alongside the damage of this pandemic to lives and livelihoods, there have been areas of growth as well. And even if the situation is truly bad, G-d is there to protect us from it being even worse. Therefore, the image of G-d protecting us during such troubling times is one worth repeating twice daily as we approach the holiday of Sukkot. If this Sukkot we will be “hiding” in our *sukkah* with just our immediate family, may we hope that next year we can all celebrate in G-d’s Sukkah of Jerusalem and the Beit HaMikdash.

**Dr. Deena Zimmerman** is a pediatrician and Director of [yoatzot.org](http://yoatzot.org), a website for women’s health and halacha.