



Renewing our Faith

Sukkot is the festival of faith, and by leaving our homes and dwelling in a *sukkah* under the natural *s'chach*, we demonstrate our faith in G-d. In fact, the Zohar (Emor 103a) actually refers to the *s'chach*'s shade as *צילא דמיהימנותא* – the protective shade of faith. With this in mind, I would like to explore one of the *halachot* of the *s'chach*, and thereby consider how we should relate to our faith.

The Mishna (Sukkot 1:1, 9a) presents a disagreement regarding the halachic validity of a *sukkah yeshana* (literally, an old *sukkah*) – a *sukkah* on which *s'chach* has sat for over 30 days and which had not expressly been placed there for the sake of the upcoming Sukkot festival. According to Beit Shammai, this 'old' *s'chach* is invalid and must be renewed, while Beit Hillel permits the use of 'old' *s'chach*.

However, while we follow the position of Beit Hillel, the Yerushalmi (Sukkah 1:2, 4b) stipulates that some minor act of *התחדשות* (renewal) must still be performed on a small section of the 'old' *s'chach*.

Admittedly, this requirement is not evident from the conclusion in the Gemara, and hence the Rambam and the Rif make no reference to performing any renewal act on 'old' *s'chach*. However, there are other authorities¹ who state that the Yerushalmi's demand *לחדש בה דבר* – to renew an element of [the *s'chach*] – is an absolute requirement.

Finally, there is an opinion² that while a renewal act should, *lechatchila*, be performed on 'old' *s'chach* to demonstrate the intentionality of using it

for the *mitzvah*, this is not an absolute requirement. In light of this debate, common practice is to shake or momentarily lift a small section of 'old' *s'chach* as an act of renewal.

While *s'chach* – which reminds us of how G-d protected *Bnei Yisrael* as they journeyed through the wilderness, and whose shade represents the protective shade of faith – can technically fulfill its function as a reminder of faith even if it has been sitting on a *sukkah* for more than 30 days, its long-term presence can often mean we forget its core message. Consequently, we are required (according to some), and strongly encouraged (according to others), to perform a renewal act on the *s'chach* to ensure we haven't forgotten what the *s'chach* is meant to teach us spiritually.

Just as 'old' *s'chach* needs a renewal act to help us remember its function and message, so people of faith can at times forget what it means to have faith, because anything perpetually present in our lives runs the risk of us taking it for granted and forgetting its core message.

So, while we shake or momentarily lift up a small part of the *s'chach* as an act of renewal, what sort of renewal act should we be performing on our own faith?

Faith, like *s'chach*, is often fragile. Faith, like *s'chach*, is always porous. The mistake we sometimes make is viewing faith as if it was a solid concrete building with a watertight roof. But this is a misnomer. Faith is not comparable to a solid house, and faith is not 'watertight.' Instead, faith is

like a *sukkah* whose test of strength is whether it can stay standing in response to a *רוח מצויקה* (literally, 'a typical wind,' but which also translates as 'the current spirit of the times'),³ and whose roof – which represents the protective shade of faith – can protect its inhabitants notwithstanding the fact it is both fragile and porous to the elements.

Just like the *s'chach* is shaken or momentarily lifted as an act of renewal, our faith can be renewed either when we have undergone a challenging experience that has 'shaken' us, or been through an experience that has 'lifted' us. And why? Because by having either of these experiences, we are reminded that faith is not something that is fixed but is, instead, something that can be moved and renewed.

And this is why, if your *sukkah* has had *s'chach* on its roof for over 30 days, you need to move it. By doing so, it will remind you that true faith must be something that moves you too.

1 Rav Yehudai Gaon (as cited in the *Shibolei HaLeket* Ch. 337), *Tosfot* (Sukkah 9a), *Rosh* (Sukkah 1:13), *Tur* (Orach Chaim 636), *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chaim 636:1).

2 Meiri (on Sukkah 9a), Ran (on Sukkah 9a), Ritva (Sukkah 2a), Magen Avraham (OC 636:1), Mishna Berura (OC 636:4).

3 Sukkah 24b.

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