

Light Insight

The Roof of the World

The roof of a succah cannot be higher than 20 *amot* (about 35 feet). The Talmud gives three views as to why a height greater than this renders the succah invalid.

Rabba says that because the eye does not normally travel so high, a person sitting in such a succah doesn't have the feeling of being in a succah, and thus such a succah is invalid.

Rabbi Zeira says that the essence of the succah is that its roof should give shade, and in such a high succah the vast majority of the shade would come from the walls and not from the roof.

Yet a third opinion is that of Rava who says that a succah must be a temporary building, and such a large succah comes into the category of a permanent structure.

There is a deeper message beneath the surface of this seemingly technical dispute: These three views hint to the three pillars on which a righteous person must build himself.

The first pillar is the pillar of fearing G-d.

The essence of fearing G-d is to imagine that we are in His presence at all times, that there is never a moment, a deed or a thought which G-d doesn't perceive. The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of the word "succah" is 91. The *gematria* of the Name of G-d which we say as "Adonai" is 65. That Name, which we do not pronounce the way it is written, consists of the letters "yud" and "heh" and "vav" and "heh," which add up to 26. Adding this Name the way it is spoken to the way it is written, comes to 91.

In other words, the succah is a combination of G-d's Names. It represents the Divine Presence. Thus, if the succah is so high that the eye doesn't normally look up there, then it's as though G-d is not "in front of my eyes." If so, then I am lacking in the fear of G-d.

The second pillar is the pillar of trust in G-d.

If I say, "I need to do such and such to get out of the spot I'm in, and through that action G-d is going to save me," it's as if I'm narrowing G-d's ability to save me to the scope of my own actions. The correct mode of trust

in G-d is to act, but not to assume that my action in any way limits G-d's options. I may do one thing, and my rescue may come from an entirely different source.

Rabbi Zeira hints that the first attitude is invalid. The shade of the succah roof represents the Heavenly "shade" of G-d's protection. The four walls symbolize the physical world extending to the four directions of the compass. By making a succah so high that all of its shade comes from the walls, it is as though I'm saying that G-d's "shade" and protection (the succah roof) needs to be supported by my actions in this world (the four walls).

The third pillar is the pillar of humility.

Wealth and success in this world can inflate a person's ego. But when a person realizes how temporary his stay is here, it's hard for him to get a big head. The succah hints to us that this world is but a brief stay in a temporary dwelling, that life is but a passing shadow. This is the third reason that such a high succah should be invalid, for the essence of humility is to make this world into one's temporary dwelling, and concentrate on fitting out our permanent residence in the future world.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

If his friends had judged favorably, the fellow in the following incident wouldn't be saying....

Call Me Mr. Cats

Recently we have had serious cat problems in my neighborhood. So much so that people have joked about actually going out and killing them. Anyway, one night about a month ago I was bringing the trash cans up to the front of my house when I noticed that there was a cat inside. I yelled "Go away cat," and chased it out of the can. The cat jumped up, screamed, and in the process of running away it squeezed an open ketchup bottle at me, staining me from head to toe with red gook! Some neighbors, hearing the commotion, came to check if everything was all right; embarrassed, I nod-

ded politely.

The next day, my co-worker, who also lives in the neighborhood, commented how he was grateful that someone had finally taken some serious initiative in destroying the cats. Turns out one of the neighbors had spread a nasty rumor that I had violently bashed a cat's head in. Even though I have repeatedly denied this and explained the situation several times, some people in my neighborhood still insist on calling me "Cat-the-Ripper," which not only does not make sense but has made this awkward incident all the more uncomfortable. If only they would have assumed correctly that the red gook on me was ketchup. Please inform your readers of how to properly judge people.

If you know negative information about someone, you are not allowed to "let the cat out of the bag" except under the strict conditions set forth in the halachic works of the Chafetz Chaim. All the more so when your information is based on mere hearsay or circumstantial evidence.

Response Line

Lien on His Car

Alan Shear wrote:

If one purchases a car, which will belong to him in a few years time (since actually the bank owns it until the owner can pay back fully for it) but does not currently belong to him, may he make a Shehecheyanu blessing on it — or should he wait until the car is fully paid for, and actually belongs to him, and then say the blessing?

Dear Alan,

I asked this question to Rabbi Shalom Yoseph Elyashiv, *shlita*. He rules that provided one is capa-

ble of making the monthly payments, he should say *shehecheyanu* at the time of purchase.

Since the *shehecheyanu* blessing is for 'simchat halev' — happiness of the heart — one should say it as soon as possible, while he still feels the simcha at his new acquisition.

Speaking of the bank owning something — or having a 'lien' on it:

A king once wanted his vassals to pay higher taxes.

"But what if they don't pay?" asked the king's advisor.

"We'll slap a lien on their property," said the king.

"What shall we call this 'lein' imposed upon the vassals?" he asked.

"Please," said the king. "Don't try to force me into making a bad pun."