



THE SAFE SPACE FOR SERIOUS TALKING

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The term “safe space” on university campuses generally refers to an autonomous place created for students who feel marginalised by society. Students who feel alienated gather together to communicate regarding their experiences and feelings of being excluded. These little rooms come with soft music, fluffy toys and an atmosphere that promises not to be confrontational nor challenging. It sounds so gentle and yes, safe, but such spaces can be counterproductive in that it just serves to confirm its denizens of whatever misconceptions they may harbour.

The Jewish Nation has a different sort of “safe place”, it is called the succah, and within its confines one finds a different sort of safety. The succah definitely is a separate space wherein we go to find strength and encouragement. It is that little area wherein we gather to think about what the Rosh Hashonoh-Yom Kippur experience really meant for us and how we can implement our commitments for a positive future. The unique days of the hielige tag have filled us with so much constructive hope, and in the succah we can share with loved ones and generate the needed energy to go forward. The succah is a minimalist abode, with what at best can be termed a dodgy roof, yet in just such a place we feel a unique closeness to Hashem that has been wrought through the determined prayers that we all shared during Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur.

Chazal tell us that the spirituality of our holy ancestors’ hovers over our succahs and each night we highlight this aspect by inviting them into our humble setting. We should use this kedusha-filled safe space for real purpose, to talk of holiness, and aspire to greater reality than just the mundane. Turn off the phones, close down the Wi-Fi, let the soft breeze of nature bring us closer. Before we re-enter the world of the everyday let us incorporate the Yom Tov lessons and bolster ourselves for the future.

In the shadows of the schach let us talk to one another about the safety of our kedusha and the brokenness of brethren for whom this message has somehow gone awry. There are problems that can’t stand the light of day; they fester yet are never mentioned, the glare of their pain being too much for us to accept or even give a name to. Gutta Yidden were want to say that the succah is the one mitzvah one can do wherein our entirety is immersed in its being, even our very shoes. There is no better place where we can quietly discuss

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
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matters of great importance that are left unsaid during the rest of the year.

Our world is complicated, our challenges enormous. When I was a youngster, things seemed simpler, stress was not yet the greatest illness that plagues society, and we lived with a freshness that was borne out of the tragedies our elders endured. They were determined to bring us a Yiddishkiet that was alive and warm, one that sparkled with a fire of devotion. The years have been good to us; we have rebuilt, whole communities have been reborn, all created on the building blocks of those dedicated pioneers. Their bravery, despite all hindrance, made what we have today possible. Now we have new tasks, tests that need us to summon up new talents.

There are youngsters slipping away into the shadows of our lives, hurt, in pain, with no feeling of belonging. There is an expression: A Yuven in Succah, which literally means a Greek in the Succah. It intimates a gentle nuance that outsiders can never really fathom the secret of the succah. How can we explain to a world that is intoxicated by the liberal notions of what passes for non-judgmental chaos? Others won't understand the pain of Klal Yisroel when even one soul is lost to the fire of secular materialism run rampant.

We must devise new strategies and look within for new answers. We can't go on living in ignorance when untold numbers of young Yiddisha neshomos have tragically died from drug overdoses and worse in Heimishe communities.

No one is immune. These problems are growing and are the direct result of a rapidly changing world that seeks to engulf our vulnerable youngsters and serve them up as sacrifices to their material gods.

The succah has always symbolized a safe space, a refuge from the stormy winds that blow from without. In this sanctuary we should all articulate truths, and bring hope where there would otherwise be darkness.

Allow me to end with something I heard from the Bobover Rebbe Rav Shlomo Ztl. When the Yidden were in the ghetto in Lemberg there were obviously no Succos allowed to be built. The Rebbe was ingenious when it came to holding fast to our mitzvahs. He took a table and stood it on end so that the legs were set at an angle to the ground. He then draped some old bed sheets forming two makeshift "walls". On top they threw some broken branches from a tree, and voila, An instant succah! The Rav told me that all day long Yidden would sidle up to this overturned table, glance both ways, and then step into its confines and make a quick brocha over the mitzvah of being in a succah. Whenever I heard this story from the Tzadik I caught my breath. The Rebbe's eyes were on fire with the remembrance of how all those Yidden overcame the horrors of the day just to feel the security of the 'Succahla'. Sweet Yidden, we are so gifted with this safety place, let us not ignore its gifts.

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