

R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, was one of the great rabbinic scholars of pre-war Europe. He served as the *Av Beis Din* of Vilna for nearly half a century until his death in 1940. The story is told of a refugee during the war happened to be in Villna on Succot and decided in the spirit of the Chag to try and visit the great Gadol. Already 75 and suffering from cancer R' Chaim was weak, but happy to have a guest. He invited him into his home, and offered refreshments out in the Succah, even though the stairs were too difficult for him to descend.

The young visitor was famished after a long trip and went to the succah on his for a drink, and while he sat there alone, he heard footsteps, R' Chaim Ozer was trudging down the steps. When he reached the Succah and sat down, the young visitor asked him why he came. "Rebbi - isn't a mitztaeir patur min hasuccah - one who is in pain is excused from being here?"

R' Chaim confirmed, "yes, he is puter from succah, but a mitztrair is not excused from the mitzvah of Hachanasat Orchim."

II

Throughout our learning the past few days we've been exploring the concept and parameters of *mitztaeir*, who is excused from using the Succah. In truth, it is quite the perplexing concept. We've all heard stories of Jews who risked their lives in the Ghetto to obtain Matzah or how the Shulchan Aruch describes the need to collect door to door in order to afford oil for ones Menorah. Yet, despite being the central mitzvah of our Yom Tov, any excuse is a good excuse to leave the Succah: too hot, too cold, too wet, too far, and too dangerous. How do we understand the logic of this overarching leniency in this mitzvah?

So long as we look at Succot as the first of the Shalosh Rigalim, the mitzvah of Succah and its exception remain a most lenient outlier. But I think the key to understanding Succah's message is to see it as the final moments of the Yamim Noraim, coming on the heels of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.

Life is full of excuses. We tell ourselves that we would make that hospital visit but work is too busy. When things quiet down I'll go, assuming she's still there. I'd like to make a donation but my earnings this quarter weren't as strong as I hope they will be next year. I was planning on davening in shul last night, but it was just freezing cold. On Yom Kippur we evaluate the things we've done wrong, but also the excuses we told ourselves that kept us from doing something right. Some of those excuses were legitimate (we need to put ourselves first, we need to focus on family...) others less so.

The Rama writes in the end of Hilchot Yom Hakippurim, that when Yom Kippur is over, we don't go daven, learn or preform other mitzvot, we go and build a Succah. We go out into the yard and build a home full of excuses that will now serve as the litmus test for lessons learned. We can think of so many reasons not to enter the Succah, but time will tell if we trudge our way down the stairs, b'simcha!

III

Its interesting to note that there is no b'racha on building a succah, no *shehechyanu* or *l'vnos succah*. That is because the mitzvah is not to build the structure, but the test is whether or not we will enter each and every day.

Teishvu k'ein taduru – the mitzvah of Succah is intended to mimic our real lives. An executive director or a caterer would tell you that Succah is a logistical nightmare – and life is as well. We are always faced with counter pressures and competing values. Nothing we'd like to do, is ever easy to get done. R' Chananya ben Akashya taught that because G-d wanted us to

be meritorious *l'fikach hirba l'ahem mitzvoth* – therefore he provided us with many mitzvoth throughout the year. If we carry the message of Succah with us, we ensure that we'll never let those precious opportunities slip away.