

# SHABBOS STORIES FOR SUCCOS-SIMCHOS TORAH 5784

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## When General Edmund Allenby Saved Sukkot

By Zack Rothbart



**Gen. Edmund Allenby and Chaim Weizmann**

Chaim Weizmann waited patiently for the one train that could take him to Cairo that day.

As the departure time approached, so too, did two seemingly ancient men. Weizmann estimated that their combined age must have been 180.

The Zionist leader had come to the Land of Israel as head of the Zionist Commission – a delegation of prominent figures tasked with gauging and laying down initial foundations for a Jewish state following the British government's Balfour Declaration the previous autumn.

The First World War was still raging and the Commission, which a few iterations later would become the Jewish Agency, faced a host of problems. The

heterogenous group was ripe for internal division, with members from different countries and ideological persuasions. Its role and authority rather vague, the local British military command was all but unsupportive despite official backing from London. Poverty and disease were rampant and the internal politics of the small local Jewish community needed to be addressed, as did the concerns and opposition of the local Arab population, which the Commission sought to engage in productive dialogue.

All of these issues and many more were on Chaim Weizmann's mind one day in September 1918 as the elderly men approached him.



**An old Jewish man holding myrtle branches, ca. 1920 (Photo: François Scholten). This photo is part of the Israel Archive Network project.**

In his autobiography, *Trial and Error*, Weizmann recalled how besides the men's age, the thing that immediately struck him was that he did not recognize either of them:

“By this time, I was under the impression that I had met every man, woman and child in the Jewish community of fifty thousand, most of them several times.”

They looked closely at Weizmann and his luggage.

“But you are not really going away? You can't go yet. There are still some matters of importance to be settled here.”

The brilliant scientist and statesman knew very well that there were in fact many matters of importance that remained to be settled – some of them for decades to come.

Yet, while poverty, disease and conflict may indeed have troubled the men, those were not the issues about which they had come to talk to Weizmann.

“Do you not know that the Feast of Tabernacles [Sukkot] is almost upon us, and we have no myrtles?,” they asked, referring to one of the “Four Species” required to properly observe the holiday in accordance with Jewish law.

“Though I was familiar enough with the need for myrtles... it had somehow slipped my mind, and it had not occurred to me to include this particular job among the many chores of the Zionist Commission, operating in the midst of a bloody war,” Weizmann recalled in his memoirs.

Not fazed, he responded, “Surely you can get myrtles from Egypt,” to which the old men looked pained:

### **They Wanted Myrtles of the Finest Quality**

“...one must have myrtles of the finest quality. These come from Trieste. In a matter of high religious importance, surely General Allenby will be willing to send instructions to Trieste for the shipment of myrtles.”

Weizmann explained that the world was at war and that Trieste was located in enemy territory.

“But this is a purely religious matter,” one of the men responded, “a matter of peace. Myrtles are, indeed, the very symbol of peace...”

As the time for his train’s departure neared, Weizmann, ever the visionary pragmatist, tried persuading the two men that they would simply have to do with inferior Egyptian myrtles. Though seemingly oblivious to the geopolitical realities of a world war, the ancient men in fact did know something about importation restrictions and pointed out to Chaim Weizmann that myrtles could not be brought from Egypt because a quarantine was in place and the British authorities forbade importation of plants from Egypt to Palestine.

### **Weizmann Promised the Old Religious Men that He Would Try to Get Them the Myrtles**

Somewhat stumped and soon to miss his train, Weizmann promised the men that he would make every possible effort to secure a myrtle supply in time for Sukkot, yet he had no idea how exactly he might do that.

“I travelled down to Egypt genuinely worried over this question of myrtles and the quarantine; and even more worried by the responsibility for some thousands of people living, like these two old gentlemen, in a world of their own so remote from ours that they seemed as unreal to us as the war did to them. By the time I fell

asleep in the train I was no longer sure what was, in fact, real, the war or the Feast of Tabernacles.”

The countless other issues at stake and meetings in Cairo all but drove the myrtle promise from Chaim Weizmann’s mind. Yet then, just before his boat sailed and he took leave of General Allenby, the legendary liberator of Jerusalem (not Trieste) exclaimed:

“By the way, about those myrtles! You know, it is an important business; it’s all in the Bible; I read it up in the Book of Nehemiah last night. Well, you’ll be glad to hear that we have lifted the quarantine, and a consignment of myrtles will get to Palestine in good time for the Feast of Tabernacles!”

*Reprinted from the October 6, 2022 email of the National Library of Israel.*

## **Sukkot in Warsaw in 1939**

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman quotes the Chatam Sofer in his Sukkot booklet of Torah Wellsprings. “Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret are even greater than Yom Kippur,” he teaches, “because during Yom Kippur we love Hashem through affliction, and on Simchat Torah, we love Hashem through joy. The mitzvah and the holiness of the holiday come from the Jewish people’s happiness.

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, in the middle of the month of Elul, Germany attacked Poland. The bombardment continued for three weeks and didn't stop until September 27<sup>th</sup>, Erev Sukkot, when the Polish commander surrendered. As soon as the ceasefire went into effect, an amazing phenomenon happened. Despite their bombed homes and the devastation everywhere, the people began to climb out of their shelters.

### **Grabbing Broken Doors and Smashed Window Frames**

Hundreds of Warsaw’s Jewish survivors leaped from the cellars and rubble, grabbed broken doors and window frames, and pulled them together to construct Sukkot. By the arrival of sunset – 5:40 pm that day – numerous makeshift Sukkot greeted the holiday, and a few hours later was the first night under German occupation. Gratitude to Hashem is not conditional. Just as He was and is there for us, our appreciation of Hashem will always prevail.

May we never hesitate to knock on Hashem’s door, pray, and connect to our Creator. May we all truly appreciate all the good that Hashem has bestowed upon us, our families, and our community. May we have plenty of simcha on these holidays and let it flavor all our days in the future!

Shabbat Shalom and Tizku Leshanim Rabot!

*Reprinted from the Parshat Haazinu/Sukkot 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

# Peaceful Hakafos



The Chofetz Chaim would add additional hakafos on Simchas Torah, up until ten or more, to make sure that each person would have a chance to carry a Sefer Torah, and that there not be any hard feelings. The earlier hakafos would be divided up among the community members, while the Chofetz Chaim saved the final hakafos for his talmidim.

When the Chofetz Chaim's son, R' Yehuda Leib, was a young boy, he would carry a sefer from the Nevi'im or a Megillah, as is the custom amongst the children. Arguments were always inevitable amongst the boys as to whom should carry which sefer of Navi.

The Chofetz Chaim would tell his son that it was not worth fighting about. He would give him a copy of the Sefer Mitzvos HaGadol to carry during the hakafos, stressing that it was most significant as it included both the Written and Oral Torah. (The Chofetz Chaim on the Festivals)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Haazinu/Sukkos 5782 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# Sukkah in the Barracks

By Yechiel Granatstein

During WWII, the Rebbe of Radoshitz was deported to the labor camp of Skarszysko. His barrack became the center of the inmates for learning Torah, davening, and mitzvos. Even in the Gehinnom of Skarszysko, the Rebbe did not deviate from observing any mitzvos.

## **Requested a Hammer and Nails**

Before Sukkos, he asked the Jews working in the construction brigade to please provide him with a hammer and nails, and that every time they returned from work, they bring along pieces of wood and boards. As the materials accumulated, the Rebbe kept measuring the wood until he was satisfied that there were sufficient boards to build a kosher Sukkah.

On Erev Sukkos, one inmate brought a few branches to complete the Sukkah with s'chach. Working swiftly, they set up the walls adjacent to the barrack, until a tiny Sukkah stood, only visible to those who were aware of its existence.

After Maariv, on the first night of Sukkos, the Rebbe made his way, with great difficulty, into the little Sukkah, made kiddush and said the brachos of sitting in the Sukkah and she'he'che'yanu. He quickly ate his crust of bread. The Sukkah was only large enough for one person.

## **The Power of Their Love of the Mitzvah Overpowering Their Fear of Being Caught**

Many faithful Jews risked their lives that Sukkos to slip in, one by one, make the brachos, and eat some bread. There was constant danger that the Kapo, or the Nazis y's, would discover the Sukkah and murder them all. But their firm faith and love of the mitzvah was stronger than their fear. Hashem's Hand protected them, just as the Clouds of Glory protected the Jews in the desert.

The Rebbe of Radoshitz ate and drank every morsel and drop in the Sukkah throughout the Yom Tov, as did all of his faithful followers in the barracks of Skarszysko. (One Jew's Power One Jew's Glory)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Haazinu/Sukkos 5782 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# Go Get those Aravos!



One year in the town of Kletzk, it was impossible to obtain the Arba Minim, despite great efforts from the townsfolk and the Yeshivah Bochorim. The only thing available was an old Lulav that was left over from the previous year. Somehow, it had stayed in relatively decent condition, but it surely was not fresh. It was depressing that this would be the only one of the Arba Minim that they would use for Succos.

## **A Question of the Bochorim to Rav Aharon Kotler**

A few days before Yom Tov, a number of Bochorim came to the Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon Kotler, zt”l, with a question. A few of them knew of an Aravos bush several miles away from Kletzk, but they didn’t think it would be worth their trouble to walk all that distance and pick Aravos, since in any case, they would not have all four species. Should they go anyway or not bother?

Rav Aharon answered without hesitating, “You should definitely go and pick as many Aravos as you can, for we must do all that we can do in honor of the coming Yom Tov!”

The Bochorim listened to his words, and set off to pick Aravos. On the day before Succos, a student from another Yeshivah happened to be traveling through Kletzk on his way home for Yom Tov. As his train was in the station, surprisingly, his train became delayed, and eventually, he was informed that the train had broken

down altogether. To the student's dismay, he realized that he would not make it home on time for Succos, and was forced to spend Yom Tov in Kletzk.

Amazingly, he had purchased an Esrog and Hadasim, and he was expecting to use his father's Lulav and Aravos when he arrived home. How surprised he was to learn that in Kletzk, not a single resident had an Esrog or Hadas, but Aravos were in great supply, and the Lulav they had was Kosher!

### **A Person Must Always Do What He Can Do**

Over Yom Tov, Rav Aharon, his Talmidim, and all the townspeople of Kletzk, merited to fulfill the Mitzvah with all four of the Arba Minim, thanks to the Hashgachah Pratis of this Yeshivah student.

At one point, someone asked Rav Aharon how he knew to tell his students to go pick Aravos. Rav Aharon replied, "What I told you to do was a basic principle in Avodas Hashem. A person must always do all that he can do, and Hashem will take care of the rest!"

*Reprinted from the Sukkos 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

## **Where is Rav Mottel's Twersky's Succah?**

About a century ago, on Erev Succos, the people of Yerushalayim were in shock. Yom Tov was fast approaching, and all the final preparations were being made, but the famous Succah of Rav Mottel'e Twersky was not up yet!

The missing Succah became the topic of conversation in every Succah in Yerushalayim, because Rav Mottel'e refused to say a word about what had happened to his most prized possession.

What made his Succah so special was that when Rav Mottel'e decided to make the journey and move from Russia to Eretz Yisroel, he had to part with many of his belongings. But one thing he refused to part with was the Succah that he had inherited from his illustrious ancestors.

The panels of this Succah were made from the finest wood. Their beauty was enhanced by drawings, carvings and inscriptions that were said to be filled with the deep secrets of Kabbalah. People said that they could feel the aura of Kedushah that surrounded the Succah just by passing by it. It was said that even Rav Shmuel Salant,



the chief Rav of Yerushalayim, had once passed by the Succah and commented, “I can smell the fragrance of Gan Eden in this spot!”

So, when Rav Mottel’e constructed a Succah made from ordinary planks of wood for that Succos of 5676, people were curious to know what had happened to the Succah that was filled with so much Kedushah. However, the answer was not revealed until many months later.

A grandson of another resident of Yerushalayim, Rav Yisroel Meir Gottlieb, had become seriously ill. The doctors had only one remedy to recommend, to bathe the child in hot water several times a day. It sounded simple enough, except for one thing. During those days, there wasn’t an abundance of anything, and even just a drop of kerosene or some firewood was hard to find anywhere in the city.

“I was in despair,” Rav Yisroel Meir recalled, “and I turned to my good friend, Rav Mottel’e, knowing that he would listen to me and comfort me. I never dreamed that he would do what he did!” When he heard that the life of his friend’s grandson was in danger, Rav Mottel’e leaped up from his chair and ran to where his Succah was stored.

He told Rav Yisroel Meir, “You must take these boards and use them for firewood.”

Rav Yisroel Meir protested, “But this is your Succah! There isn’t another one like it in Yerushalayim. These boards are filled with Kedushah!”

Rav Mottel’e responded, “I am a Rav and I rule that your grandson’s life takes precedence.” Having no argument to make against that ruling, Rav Yisroel Meir took the boards. They were burned and used to heat up water for the child’s baths, and thanks to Hashem’s great mercy, the child’s life was saved.

When another resident of Yerushalayim, Rav Shaul Yitzchak Freund, heard this story, he recalled another incident concerning Rav Mottel’e’s Succah. A few years earlier, a wealthy Jew who was an avid collector of rare and valuable Judaica, had visited Yerushalayim. He asked to be directed to Rav Mottel’e’s home, because he wanted to see the legendary Succah.

The collector was so impressed by it that he offered Rav Mottel’e a very large sum of money to buy his Succah. However, even though Rav Mottel’e and his family could have lived off this money for the rest of their lives, Rav Mottel’e refused to sell his precious Succah.

“Rav Mottel’e wouldn’t sell his Succah for any amount of money in the world,” Rav Shaul Yitzchak commented. “But to perform the Mitzvah of saving the life of another Jew, he was ready to give it up in an instant. In both cases, we see his great love for performing a Mitzvah!”

*Reprinted from the Sukkos 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah*

# “Lernen Torah Noch un Noch un Noch un Noch...”



**Rav Yisroel Belsky**

The following story was related by Rav Yisroel Reisman, at the Hespel of Rav Yisroel Belsky, zt”l, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah V’Daas: One year on Simchas Torah in the Yeshivah, Rav Belsky, who had recently undergone back surgery, had limited mobility. During the first Hakafah, he stood in the center holding a Sefer Torah while standing in one place and swaying from side to side, as the Talmidim danced around him with great energy and excitement.

They began singing a well-known song with Yiddish words, “Olam Haba iz a gutte zach (Olam Haba is a good thing), Lernen Torah iz a beser’e zach (But learning Torah is a better thing), Varf avek yeden yoch (Cast away every yoke), Lernen Torah noch un noch (Learn Torah more and more), Olam Haba iz a gutte zach (Olam Haba is a good thing).”

In their desire to express their love of Torah on that joyous night of Simchas Torah, the Bachurim changed the end of the song, omitting the last phrase, and instead singing, “Lernen Torah noch un noch un noch un noch...”

Suddenly, Rav Belsky lifted his hand as a signal for silence. In his inimitable manner, the Rosh Yeshivah proceeded to relate an amazing story about the song's origin:

### **A Debate of the Students of Rav Chaim Volozhiner**

It is known that the Vilna Gaon, zt"l, passed away in 1797, during Chol HaMoeid Succos. A few days later, on Simchas Torah, the Talmidim of the Gaon's famous Talmid, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, zt"l, told their Rebbe that they had no desire to dance that year. The Gaon, whose greatness was similar to that of earlier generations, had taken leave of this world. How could they rejoice? With a loss of such massive proportions just a few days earlier, singing and dancing was the last thing on their minds.

Rav Chaim replied, "True, the loss is great, but the Gaon is now in Olam Haba, which is truly a good place to be. So, at the very least, with that knowledge, we can rejoice."

"But Rebbe," the Talmidim countered, they were not yet convinced. "Olam Haba may be a good place, but learning Torah is better, and we will never again hear the Gaon's Torah! How can we rejoice?"

"Nevertheless," said Rav Chaim, "with the knowledge that the Gaon is resting in Gan Eden, which is a good place to be, we can, and we should, rejoice."

### **"You Are Changing the Meaning of the Song"**

Rav Belsky said, "The song you were just singing originated from this exchange between Rav Chaim Volozhiner and his Talmidim. However, if you change the words, you are changing the meaning of the song."

Rav Belsky paused for a moment and then said to the group of Bachurim around him, "Don't change the words."

In his Hespel, Rav Reisman continued, "Rav Belsky is now in a good place, he is surely in Gan Eden. But we miss him. We miss his wide-ranging, all-encompassing knowledge. We miss the vitality with which he learned Torah. We have to become inspired to emulate him.

"This does not mean that we should try to match his breadth of Torah knowledge, because we are unable to do so. Rather, it means that we should become filled with a desire to know as much Torah as we can, and to put our effort towards acquiring Torah knowledge in the many different areas of learning Torah!"

*Reprinted from the Shemini Atzeres – Simchas Torah 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah*

## Story # 1241

# A Refined Thief in the Sukkah?

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

It was before **Rabbi Natan Shapira** became known as the author of the book "Magaleh Amukot". At the time he was a young man of about 30 years old, whose life was dedicated to learning Torah and serving G-d. He tried to hide his saintly lifestyle from the eyes of others and even asked his wife not to divulge his deeds to anyone.

### **His Wife Brags to Her Sisters of Her Husband's Spiritual Refinement**

She was the daughter of a highly respected citizen of Krakow. One day in discussion with her sisters she couldn't resist. She told them of the special qualities of her husband: "Do you know? My husband prays every night *tikun chatzot* (the midnight prayer mourning the destruction of the Temple) and angels come to listen to his prayer. He told me that the door of his room has to stay closed at that time and that no one should enter, because it would be dangerous."

Her sisters told their husbands, who smiled dismissively. One day they decided to prove that the warning of their brother-in-law was meaningless. That night, when Rabbi Natan went to immerse himself in the river as was his habit, his brothers-in-law slipped into his room and hid under the bed.

On his return from the river, Rabbi Natan prepared himself for *tikunchatzot* without sensing the presence of his brothers-in-law. After he finished lamenting the destruction of the Temple, he sat at the table and started to learn Torah.

### **A Very Terrible Catastrophe**

The next morning a terrible catastrophe was discovered. The men who disparaged the warning of Rabbi Natan were found lifeless under the bed.

Rabbi Natan was devastated by the tragedy. He decided to judge himself as one who murders another unintentionally, and decreed upon himself to go into a long exile. He made his wife swear not to tell anyone why he went. "How long will this exile be?" she asked.

"Until from Heaven I will be shown that my sin has been forgiven." he said.

When his father-in-law heard of the mysterious disappearance of his son-in-law, he was beside himself with anguish. He just lost two of his sons-in-law and now the third one is not to be found! He tried to convince his daughter to tell him details that might help him to discover where her husband had gone, but she pretended not to know

anything. In despair he sent letters to the Rabbis of different cities describing his son-in-law's appearance and requesting their assistance in finding him.

In the meantime Rabbi Natan was far away. He joined a group of paupers who went from town to town and from Jewish house to Jewish house to beg for alms. At night he slept in the *hekdesh* (the community shelter for paupers). His clothes were tattered and his whole appearance bespoke of poverty and wretchedness.

### **Invited to the Sukka of a Rich Person**

On the eve of the holiday of *Sukkot* the group of beggars arrived in Lublin. Rabbi Natan had not accepted any invitation to be a guest at someone's house since he began his self-imposed exile. He did accept this time though, because he wanted to have the opportunity to make the blessing over the *etrog* (the citrus fruit in the Four Species that are bundled together on Sukkot) of his host. It was his luck to be invited to the house of one of the rich people in town.

On returning from synagogue, they entered the beautiful *sukka*. Rabbi Natan's feelings were so uplifted by this that for a moment he forgot his state of exile. Loudly and with great devotion he began to sing "Enter Heavenly Guests" (traditional song for Sukkot). His host paid close attention to his guest and concluded that his was no regular person.

Rabbi Natan immediately composed himself. During the meal he didn't say a word. The repeated request of his host that he share a Torah thought didn't change his mind. He tried as hard as he could to continue his anonymity. In spite of this, the way he ate and his general comportment strengthened the conviction of his host that this was a great man.

### **Asked to Sleep in the Sukka**

After the meal Rabbi Natan asked permission to sleep in the *sukka*, which was granted. Because the host trusted his guest he didn't take into the house the beautiful silverware that was on the table in the *sukka*.

Rabbi Natan was soon immersed in the study of the book of Kabbalah that he had with him, he was completely oblivious of his surroundings. That is how he was unaware of the thief who entered the *sukka* and was putting all the expensive vessels into his sack.

When the host returned to the *sukka* he was shocked to see it empty of the exquisite silverware. His suspicion immediately fell on the "imposter," the guest who obviously must have hidden the silverware, and then returned to the *sukka* pretending to be absorbed in learning. He started shouting and yelling. Soon all the neighbors came running.

All the shouting and even the beatings couldn't make Rabbi Natan admit to a crime he didn't commit. When it became obvious that nothing would help, they took him to the *hekdesh* and locked him in till he would "confess".

Rabbi Natan was worried only about one thing - where would he get *arba minim* ("Four Species": 1 the etrog (citon), 1 palm branch, 3 leafy myrtle twigs and 2 leafy willow branches used on Sukkot) to make a blessing over! Beaten and humiliated he sat down next to the window, while begging the passersby to bring him *arba minim*. They laughed at the thief who all of a sudden wants to excel in *mitzvot*.

### **The Rabbi and the “Thief”**

When the Rabbi of Lublin arrived in shul for the morning prayers he was told what occurred. He asked to speak to the thief. As soon as he looked at him he recognized him as the young man whose father-in-law had written him. He instructed Rabbi Natan to be brought to a separate room and there ordered him to tell him his identity.

Left no choice, Rabbi Natan admitted that he was the lost son-in-law. He told the Rabbi the reason for his self-imposed exile. Immediately the Rabbi left the room to announce that he had questioned the prisoner and was satisfied that he was not the thief.

After the holiday Rabbi Natan told the Rabbi of Lublin that the fact he had to disclose his identity was for him a sign from Heaven that his sin was forgiven. He would now return home, to Krakow. The Rabbi decided to accompany him.

On the way the word reached them that the rabbi of Krakow had passed away. The rabbi of Lublin advised the community of Krakow to make Rabbi Natan their rabbi. And so it was. At the age of 31 Rabbi Natan Spira became the rabbi of Krakow.

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*Source:* Translated from Sichat Hashavua #508 by C.R. Benami, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com. Edited and supplemented by R. Yerachmiel Tilles.

*Biographical*

*note:*

**Rabbi Natan-Nota Shapira** [5345 - 13 Menachem-Av 5393 (1585-July 20,1633)] was a noted rabbinical authority and kabbalist, who at a young age became the Chief Rabbi of Krakow in 1617. He was a main figure in the dissemination of the Kabbalah teachings of "the Holy Ari" of Safed throughout Poland. He is often referred to by the title of his most important book, the "*Megaleh Amukot*," an astonishing work containing 252 explanations of Moses' prayer in the first verse of *parashat Va'et'chanan*.

*Connection* -- Seasonal: the festival of SUKKOT

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