

As I was contemplating the myriad of ways that I could write a *d'var Torah* on things I have studied this week, I found a line from a Matisyahu song, which gave me the direction I needed.

Sometimes I lay under the moon
And thank God I'm breathin'
Then I pray, "Don't take me soon
'Cause I am here for a reason."
Sometimes in my tears I drown
But I never let it get me down
So when negativity surrounds
I know some day it'll all turn around...
Matisyahu "One Day"

As we study Tractate Sukka, I have been fascinated with the details the sages obsess about regarding the what makes a sukkah kosher—the dimensions, the shape, the building materials, and the intention of materials used in its construction and also regarding the *schach*. If some certain materials, such as a mat, are to be used as *schach*, the intention is for them to have to be designated for the purpose of roofing, not for use first as a mat that would be used for sitting or sleeping (Sukka 20a). Posts used in the construction have to be able to stand on the ground, and not be supported by a bed, lest it become susceptible to ritual impurity or that it might collapse (Sukka 2b).

For several days, we studied what makes *schach* able to be used and how it should be placed on top of a Sukkah. According to the Star-K kashrut website, “How much *schach* should be used to cover the *sukkah*? The amount required is determined by the amount necessary to shade the *sukkah*. The *schach* must be dense enough so that there should not be more sunlight than shade. However, it cannot be so dense that the rain would not be able to fall into the *sukkah*.” There is also a tradition that when in a *sukkah*, we should be able to see stars through the roof.

This made me begin to think of the *Hashkiveinu*:

Hashkiveinu adokai elokeinu l'shalom,
Lay us down to sleep, Lord our G-d, in peace,
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu l'chayim,
raise us erect, our King, to life;
ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha,
spread over us the shelter of Your peace.
v'tak'neinu b'eitzah tovah mil'fanecha,
Set us aright with good counsel from before Your Presence,
v'hoshieinu l'ma'an sh'mecha.
and save us for Your Name's sake.

V'hagein ba'adeinu, v'haseir mei'aleinu
 Shield us, remove from us
oyeiv, dever v'cherev v'ra'av v'yagon,
 foe, plague, sword, famine, and woe;
v'haseir satan mil'faneinu umei'achareinu,
 and remove spiritual impediment from before us and behind us
uv'tzeil k'nafecha tastireinu,
 and shelter us in the shadow of Your wings –
ki kel shom'reinu umatzileinu atah,
 for G-d who protects and rescues us are You;
ki kel melech chanun v'rachum atah
 for G-d, the Gracious and Compassionate King, are You.
Us'hmor tzeiteinu uvoeinu, l'chayim ul'shalom mei'atah v'ad olam.
 Safeguard our going and coming – for life and for peace from now to eternity.
Baruch atah Adokai, shomeir amo yisraeil l'ad.
 Blessed are You, Lord, Guardian of Israel for always.

A year and a half ago, because the world as I knew it had been shut down, I was in a dark place, as were most people I know. We weren't able to spend time visiting with friends and family, jobs had all been forever changed, and everyone struggled to find some sort of normalcy in the unsteady world. As I studied Torah more and more, I found peace, hope, and light. We still live in tumultuous times. Violent crimes are happening every day, with mass shootings sadly becoming commonplace, Covid is on the rise again, and vaccinated people are getting sick. The US is polarized in every possible way, however, when I think about Sukkot, which is my favorite holiday, I am grateful that we have been given these guidelines in order to have peace and stability. We need to remember that the *sukkah* is our *shalom* and that we must spread that *shalom* throughout the world. During the holiday, we welcome guests or strangers into our *sukkah*. The intentionality of our actions is what will bring peace by spreading a tiny bit of light into a dark world.

It brings me hope to know that I can dwell in *sukkat shalom* and while things might look dim now, the light that shines in through the *schach* can make a big impact. As Matisyahu says, "I am here for a reason" and I know that the more I study Torah that I am intentionally going to be a small beam of light sharing Torah with the world and I encourage everyone else to do the same, so that we can spread *shalom*.

-Aharon Zamir (Monty) Bennett