

# Sukkot Meditation

## Within the Glorious Clouds of Divine Embrace

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### Introduction

#### Together within Hashem's Clouds of Glory

On Sukkoth we leave our more or less beautiful sturdy permanent houses and take shelter under the wobbly, rickety, flimsy, palm-branches exposed to the elements within boards or curtains that can hardly be called walls. As the halacha teaches the leaves of the Sukkah roof-top must be transparent enough so that the twinkle of sparkling stars will be visible within.<sup>1</sup> Thus on Sukkot we discard the shell of the reliable concrete material wall, now contained within an ethereal substance – the Sukkah which is the embodiment of the Clouds of Glory protecting us in the wilderness. Rich and poor alike we are all in the same boat/Sukkah. We are all together within Hashem's Clouds of Glory. A cloud is a being which floats between existence and non-existence. You see its constantly changing shape moving along the sky. If you try to grab it, or hold on to it, you might walk right through it. Its borders are not defined, yet it is still hovering over us and protecting us at this very moment. These sheer walls and roof of the Sukkah, translucently teach us to see beyond the illusion of our inherent materialism.

#### Everything Eventually Evaporates

How do we feel in awe of the *Shechina* surrounding us through the Clouds of Glory? How do we get in touch with the Divine Presence enveloping us at this very moment? In order to get in touch with the Divine we have to free ourselves from the *מהיצרות* – the barriers which separate us from the essence of life. In reality the barriers of the material are in themselves nothing but cloudlike vapor as King Shlomo teaches: “Vanity of vanities, says Kohelet, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word *הַבָּל* translated as vanity literally means vapor. Thus King Shlomo teaches us that all our material possessions in essence are “*Futility of futilities, breath of breaths; vapor of vapors.*” – Everything will eventually evaporate. The following parable illustrate this concept: A man approached one of the beggars of a group of blind beggars in the street and said: “Take this money and share it with the others.” However, he gave the beggar nothing. The others demanded their share of the money, which they thought he had received. Such is mankind – everyone strives for a share in the worldly pleasures they assume their neighbors have achieved. Yet in reality they achieved nothing – there is no true pleasure in the futilities of this world – “all is futile.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, Siman 626.*

<sup>2</sup> King Shlomo, *Kohelet* 1:2.

<sup>3</sup> Parable of the Maggid of Dubno.

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### Dissolve Negativity

Things don't exist unless we give them existence. They vaporize like the floating cloud, unless our inflexible mindset and words pin them down to a rigid reality. Enemies, sickness, jealousy, hatred, problems, none of them have permanent reality, but will float by us the same way as the cloud dissolves and merges and transforms itself in the everlasting sky. According to Halacha people who are not usual guests in a certain person's home should not visit him the first three days when he is sick, in order not to establish his status as being sick, and thereby make his chances of recovery harder.<sup>4</sup>

### Evaporating Evil by Meditating on the Only One

A story is told by the Debresciner Rav about how the Brisker Rav escaped with his family from Nazi Europe. Two weeks before, they began to prepare by learning the twelfth chapter of *Nefesh Hachaim*.<sup>5</sup> With a car and hired driver they miraculously passed one roadblock after another. At the border crossing, a gestapo peered into the car. "Why, these are Jews! He exclaimed and went to summon his commanding officer. In the meantime, the Brisker Rav gently reprimanded his family, "Who stopped meditating on "אין עוד מלבדו" – "Nothing exists but G-d"? When the commanding officer arrived, he looked in the car and said, "I see no problem here," and motioned them across the border.

### The Human Soul: Hashem's Eternal Breath

In contrast to the transient nature of the material world, only that which is touched by the Divine breath has eternal value. "I realized that whatever G-d does will endure forever: Nothing can be added to it and nothing can be subtracted from it, and G-d has acted so that [man] should stand in awe of Him."<sup>6</sup>

What is transient and trivial is the handiwork of man – His buildings and baubles, his ambition and glory are nothing more than "*Hevel*" futility, substance-less vapor. Yet, the human soul was not fashioned from dust as was his body. "וַיִּפֶּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים – מאן דנפח מתוכיה נפח – "G-d breathed into his nostrils a living soul."<sup>7</sup> Whoever breathes – breathes from within himself. Because G-d is eternal, the human soul is eternal; and it will be called upon to answer for the deeds done while it was clothed in its earthly body. Since the only meaningful, everlasting part of the human's existence is his soul and the spiritual good it brings about, *Kohelet* urges that indulgence in non-essential pleasures is worthless.

The only thing that has everlasting existence is awe of G-d –

יראת אלוקים. The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty.<sup>8</sup> The essentials of Divine existence are eternal and the Creator imparted the human being a vital role in His perpetual master plan.

### Dwelling in the House of G-d

During our forty years wandering in the wilderness Hashem protected us with His Clouds of Glory. There were seven clouds, above, below, at the four sides, and one before them which would kill snakes and scorpions, straighten the mountains and the valleys for them, and burn the thorns. They would bring up smoke, and all the kings of the east and the west would see it, and the nations of the world

<sup>4</sup> *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 193, the laws of visiting the sick.

<sup>5</sup> By Rav Chaim of Volozhin (1759-1829), top student of the Gaon of Vilna and founder of the Volozhin Yeshiva.

<sup>6</sup> *Kohelet* 3:14.

<sup>7</sup> *Bereishit* 2:7.

<sup>8</sup> *Kohelet* 12:13.



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would say “Who is this coming out of the wilderness like columns of smoke...”<sup>9</sup> These same protective glorious clouds are still with us today in the Sukkah – the house of Hashem. Through developing *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem and meditating on experiencing His protecting Clouds we will come close to dwelling in His palace. The Midrash teaches that “His left hand below my head”<sup>10</sup> refers to both the Clouds of Glory which surrounded Israel from above and from below<sup>11</sup> and to the Sukkah.<sup>12</sup> “...And his right hand embraces me”<sup>13</sup> refers to the Cloud of the *Shechina* in the future.<sup>14</sup> The Sukkah is likened to the Divine embrace. According to Halacha, in order for the Sukkah to be kosher, it must have at least two walls and a *tefach* – a handbreadth of a third wall. The “two walls” and a “handbreadth” are likened to an arm providing a great loving hug. These three walls also form the shape of the letter *heh* – ה.

## Sukkah Meditation

1. Make yourself comfortable in the Sukkah, and take in its marvels with all of your senses.
2. Allow your eyes to glide and gaze upon the beauty of the walls, and the *sechach* (Sukkah roof). Keep in mind that the word Sukkah means to see.<sup>15</sup>
3. Listen to the sounds you hear in the Sukkah, and let them pass by you. Tune in to the songs of the birds or the wind rustling in the leaves above.
4. Open yourself to smell the heavenly scents of the Sukkah, perhaps the foliage in the Sukkah gives off a scent, and perhaps you can sense a scent of beyond.
5. Take a deep breath in as you turn your head upwards and raise your eyes to look at the *sechach*. Breathe out as you lower your head and your eyes to an inward gaze. Repeat this rhythmical breathing. The word Sukkah and *sechach* are related. The Sukkah is named in the name of its roof which completes it.<sup>16</sup> When you gaze upon the *sechach* you are taking in the entire Sukkah.
6. Continue breathing in while turning your head upwards and raising your eyes, and breathing out while lowering your head and eyes. Now add the silent sound of Sukkah to your breathing. Inhale טו – *Su*, exhale טז – *Kah*. As you inhale feel the security of Hashem’s protection surrounding you like the circular shape of the Hebrew letter *samech*, and as you exhale visualize the *samech* open up into the Hebrew letter טז – *kaf* – your personal vessel to hold Hashem’s inner lights, and then the letter טז – *heh* – the shape of the three required walls of the Sukkah. Repeat this rhythmical breathing and visualization seven times.

<sup>9</sup> *Shir Hashirim* 3:6, *Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar*, Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Shir Hashirim* 2:6.

<sup>11</sup> *Midrash Zuta Shir Hashirim* 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Midrash Rabah Shir Hashirim* 2:19.

<sup>13</sup> *Shir Hashirim* 2:6.

<sup>14</sup> *Midrash Rabah Shir Hashirim* 2:19.

<sup>15</sup> Rashi, *Bereishit* 11:29.

<sup>16</sup> *Tur, Orach Chaim, Siman* 635.



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7. Close your eyes and imagine the walls of your home expanding and opening up, and then as you go through these walls, additional walls appear of stone and wood and or any material you can think of. As you inhale you imagine a new wall appearing, as you exhale you imagine breaking through the wall. Repeat this rhythmical breathing and visualization until you break through seven walls.

8. Sense a very soothing warming light surrounding you. Feel the presence of Hashem's light below you head and around your shoulders. Relax into a very soothing Divine embrace. Feel very safe and supported, resting in yourself, floating within the Clouds of Hashem's soothing Glory. Enjoy feeling loved and protected. Feel how all your needs are taken care of. Delight in Hashem's Divine presence. Experience the moment right now! You are dwelling in the house of Hashem!

## Notes

New needs arise at different times for every person such as the need for healing, for financial security, to be saved from enemies etc. King David declared: "אָהַת שְׁאַלְתִּי" – "I asked for only one thing"<sup>17</sup> – "I do not ask for many things. I only asked one request in the past, this request I will always ask in the future; for in this request all requests are included. This request is "to dwell in the house of Hashem" כָּל יְמֵי חַיִּי – "all the days of my life."<sup>18</sup> By means of this sole request, I will achieve all the particular needs...<sup>19</sup> When we dwell in Hashem's Sukkah, under His Clouds of Glory, and learn to understand the transient nature of everything connected to this world and its temporary pleasures, then we realize that all that matters is to cleave to Hashem and pray that we may dwell in His house forever.

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<sup>17</sup> Tehillim 27:4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Malbim, Tehillim 27:6.



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# About Us



## **Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum**

*Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean*

*Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.*

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

*Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.*

*If you are interested in:*

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*or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>*

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