

But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month...you shall celebrate Hashem's festival for a seven-day period. (23:39)

The Festival of *Succos*, as is the case with all the other festivals, is replete with deep esoteric meaning far beyond the grasp of the average Jew who observes it simply because it is a G-d-given *mitzvah*. A *mitzvah*, regardless of the level with which one observes it, and his understanding of its various spiritual facets, have enormous power and incredible influence. Just executing the decree of Hashem, simply because this is the way of a Jew, is powerful, as the following story related by the *Tolner Rebbe, Shlita*, illustrates.

A *baal teshuvah*, penitent, who had come to the *Rebbe* for advice regarding a specific problem, told the following story. This man's grandfather lived in a small American town, distant from mainstream America and even more distant from mainstream Judaism. Nonetheless, he observed one *mitzvah* religiously – to the point of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice: *Succah*. He was steadfast in its observance, unswerving in his commitment to the *mitzvah*, despite the fact that he observed absolutely nothing else. Every year when *Succos* arrived, he built a *succah* in the courtyard of his house and dwelled in it 24/7 for seven days. Prior to leaving this world, he wrote a will bequeathing all of his assets to the one descendant who would observe *Succos* as he did: build a *succah* and live in it for seven days, day and night.

His children and grandchildren were certain that he had lost his mind. Thus, they were unprepared to accept his will. They were not going to dwell in a *succah* for seven days. It was meaningless to them, because they were quite distant from religious observance. They did not even visit their temple on *Yom Kippur*, as other pseudo-religious/secular oriented Jews do. They knew nothing, and, as a result, kept nothing. Indeed, they were clueless concerning why their father/grandfather was so committed to this weird practice. Furthermore, to the best of their knowledge, their father/grandfather's estate was not worth much. He was not known to have had any money to speak of.

One grandson, a sensitive soul, was upset that not a single member of the family was willing to honor the memory of his grandfather. He decided that he would do it. He met with the lawyer who was executor of the estate and informed him of his decision. The lawyer was pleased, but he first wanted the rest of the family to sign off on the will. They all signed that as far as they were concerned, the entire estate could go directly to the grandson who had acquiesced to his grandfather's request.

After the grandson received the will, he discovered a reality (to which the lawyer had been privy the entire time) that his grandfather was quite wealthy. He had made investments that paid off handsomely, and he owned a number of parcels of real estate which, although when originally purchased were not worth much, had increased exponentially in value over the years. Not one to create jealousy and discord within the family, he kept his newly-found wealth a secret. He had

made a lucrative decision.

Succos came along, and he carried out his end of the deal, sequestering himself for seven full days in his grandfather's *succah*. During these seven days, in order to overcome the feelings of loneliness, he would think. He first tried to learn the significance of *Succos* and what it meant to the Jewish people. He could not do it on his own. He searched for a rabbi who could answer his questions. A few days passed, and he was given the name of an Orthodox rabbi who lived a few hundred miles away, a four-hour drive from his town. His curiosity overwhelmed him. He called the rabbi, told him the story and asked him to explain the meaning and significance of the *succah*.

The rabbi understood that he was referring to the *mitzvah* of *Succah*, so he explained its meaning and religious significance. He asked the rabbi if he could impose upon him to visit and look at the *succah* and validate it as kosher for festival use. He offered to reimburse the rabbi for his time and expenses. The rabbi agreed and made the trip. How shocked he was to discover that the "*succah*" was nothing more than metal bars attached together by plastic sheeting wrapped around them. There was no *schach* whatsoever covering the *succah*. It was totally *pasul*, invalid. The rabbi attempted to explain the meaning and difference between kosher and non-kosher with regard to *succah*, and, for that matter, everything else about Judaism.

The grandson was relentless and refused to be pushed off, until the rabbi agreed to tutor him in the basics of Judaism. This is how it all began. A *mitzvah pesulah*, invalid performance of a *mitzvah*, with good intentions, but a lack of knowledge, had the awesome power to catalyze the alteration of this man's life. This is the extraordinary power of a *mitzvah*!