

Good Yom Tov Everyone. Wednesday night begins one of the most joyous times in the Jewish Calendar with the Yom Tov of Sukkos. Sukkos is referred to as the "time of our rejoicing." One of the reasons that we have to rejoice is that we live in countries where we can celebrate our Jewish heritage openly. As we know, unfortunately, during the generations, Jews have not always been able to celebrate Sukkos in freedom.

In the last twenty or so years, Judaism has come to life across Russia--and when it comes to the festival of Sukkos it is really a open miracle, since this holiday was almost completely forgotten because of the dangers and risks of attempting to put up a sukkah or obtain a lulav and esrog. The following touching true story illustrates one Jew's self sacrifice and pure intent in wanting to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah.

"I want to share with you a story I heard a few weeks ago, while I visited Kazan, Russia, a city in the largely Muslim Tatarstan region. After a beautiful morning prayer service in synagogue led by the Chief Rabbi of Kazan, Yitzchok Garelik, I was introduced to Moshe Adinov, a 65-year-old local dentist and a regular participant in the daily minyan (prayer quorum). I asked him how it came to be that he comes to synagogue every day. He told me the following remarkable Sukkos story that I must pass on to you here, as I remember him telling it to me:

'My father was R' Nachum Eliyahu Adinov. He was a sofer (Torah scribe) in Kazan before World War II. He kept the traditions in our home, but of course there was no Jewish school. I went to public school even on Shabbos. A lot of tradition was weakened. Nevertheless, I remember growing up with as many Jewish traditions and holidays as were possible. My father was afraid for my future. He always warned me not to repeat to others what we did at home. 'Be a Jew at home and a Russian in the street,' he said.

I would have never been accepted at university had I been a practicing Jew. We lived in a small wooden home--not in an apartment building like most people. We had a besedka, basically a porch, in the back of our home. Every year we'd celebrate Sukkos. My father would cover the roof with leaves and foliage. We'd invite over many Jewish friends. The secret was that the only sukkah in town was in our house. My father would make kiddush on wine, tell stories and gently speak to us, and this memory of Sukkos always stayed with me.

My father died in 1965, and I inherited the house. I wanted to keep that Sukkos tradition alive, to continue the tradition for my children. I thought that, due to his limited means, all my father was able to do was put up trees and foliage. I wanted to do better than him! I had friends in the steel industry, and every year since 1965, I put up a sturdy aluminum roof on the besedka. I was proud that I continued my father's tradition.

In 1998, Chabad-Lubavitch sent Rabbi Yitzchok Garelik and his wife Chana here. It was so beautiful to have a young Jewish family celebrating in public what I always did secretly. It was incredible for me. That year, Rabbi Garelik said to me, 'Reb Moshe, tomorrow night is Sukkos--I want you to come to the beautiful sukkah we built.'

When I walked into the sukkah, I saw Rabbi Garelik in his holiday finest, holding an overflowing glass of wine, candles shining in his face--and foliage, branches and trees above his head! I couldn't contain my emotions. I began to cry. I suddenly realized that what my father did was the way it's supposed to be, and for the last 30 years, by placing an aluminum roof, I wasn't doing it the right way. I had only meant to make the sukkah more beautiful!

Rabbi Garelik asked me to tell my story, and then he said to me: 'Your father is looking down from Heaven with all the great Jews of the past and smiling--and I promise you, Hashem had the utmost pleasure from the beauty of your sukkah with the aluminum roof more than any sukkah in the world with the appropriate foliage, because you did it with such love and sincerity.'

Since then, I have continued to learn and understand our traditions. Since then, I and my family are involved as part of the community and today celebrate all the holidays with their rich fullness.

In Russia today, sukkahs are mostly built at the synagogues, since it is very difficult to build near apartment buildings. So Sukkos in Russia becomes an incredible community event. Despite the cold, everyone comes out--with so many people all singing, spending family time, laughing and talking, and enjoying words of Torah, the holiness of the sukkah keeps us all warm. This is the true story of Sukkos in Russia--how, like the spark of Jewishness itself, Communism never was able to truly stamp Sukkos out!

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