



Out of the Darkness

A modern-day miracle BY RABBI Y.Y. RUBINSTEIN

Everyone knows that one of the reasons we sit in a *sukkah* is to recall the miraculous clouds that surrounded and protected the Jews in the desert after leaving Egypt. So why don't we celebrate it as part of Passover?

The answer is that many people in the Middle East sit in *sukkos* to keep cool from spring through summer. They don't sit in them when the weather changes as it does in Tishrei. Placing the festival in Tishrei shows that we remember how Hashem surrounded and protected us on our journey. It should also remind us how Hashem surrounds and protects us now.

Ten years ago, I got myself lost in a forest in Switzerland as nightfall approached. With darkness, you simply have to stop, sit down, and wait for the dawn. You could easily trip over fallen branches and hurt yourself. The worst part was feeling completely alone.

I have had the same feeling at times, since then. Most of us do. Life grows dark; we feel we can't move forward. We wrongly feel Hashem has left us alone.

I felt like that not too long ago. Then I remembered my oldest son's story.

He is a professional photographer living in Yerushalayim. Today, his work is photographing unpublished manuscripts of *gedolim* before the paper they are written on deteriorates and they are lost forever.

Three years ago, he called with bad news. His doctor told him he would be completely blind by the age of 40.

My son is no stranger to life's dark times when we feel alone, but he is brave and has always found his way out of his particular forests. This news threatened to overwhelm him. It certainly overwhelmed me.

Shortly after hearing this prognosis, he was flying home to Israel from Manchester, England. His flight, via Germany on Lufthansa, was cancelled and his only other choice was a no-frills airline. He decided to pay another £50 and moved to an extra-legroom seat.

There, he found himself sitting next to someone who greeted him warmly. My son returned the greeting and was asked whether he lived in Israel, or in the UK. He answered that he lived in Yerushalayim.

His new neighbor noted that they shared the same accent and said, "But you were brought up in Manchester, right?"

"Yes!" my son replied, then added, "but I was actually born in Gateshead."

"Oh!" said his new friend, "I studied medicine at Newcastle University, across the river from Gateshead. When I was there I used to learn with a well-known rabbi. Have you ever heard of Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein?"

My son told him he had, explaining that I am his father.

Hearing that he was sitting beside a doctor, he decided to tell him of his recent terrible diagnosis, and that he would be blind within ten years.

This doctor replied, "Actually, I am an eye specialist. You are quite wrong. We have developed a procedure to stop this condition in its tracks. I will perform it for you."

He did.

That doctor lives in Ra'anana, and I had first met him 34 years ago. Project SEED had just come to the UK from the States. It took root in Gateshead. With 20 *bnai Torah* I crossed the river Tyne once a week, to teach college students and members of the Newcastle community who are eager to learn.

I have taught many, many thousands of *talmidim* and *talmidos* all over the world since then. That doctor was my first-ever *talmid*.

Dr. Fink performed the procedure on my son, whose sight now will never fall into darkness. Nor will mine.

Hashem Yisbarach was watching over me and taking care of me then. Recalling that story reminded me that He is watching over me and taking care of watching over me and my son now.

We sit in the *sukkah* and remind ourselves that no matter how dark life seems, and no matter how much we fear we might feel, when we recall that we are never alone, a light shines, showing us that Hashem surrounds and protects us now, as He always has. ■

Rabbi Y.Y. Rubinstein is a regular broadcaster on BBC TV and radio, and director of education for Ohr Naava. He is also the author of six books.