
❧ SUKKOT II ❧

The Week of Joy that Keeps Us Dancing the Entire Year

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov is famous for having said, “It is a great mitzvah to always be joyous.” That said, there are specific times in the Jewish calendar for focusing on joy. Every festival has its mitzvah of joy, but only Sukkot is designated as “the time of our joy.” In fact the Talmud relates that whoever did not witness the Sukkot *Simchat Beit HaShoevah*, the Water Pouring Ceremony at the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), never experienced true joy! In this second class on Sukkot we will focus on the theme of joy specific to this festival, exploring where that joy comes from and how it is expressed.

See also the Morasha shiur, *The Jewish Vision of Happiness*.

This class will address the following questions:

- ❧ How can the festival of Sukkot teach us to be happy?
- ❧ What is the secret of the joy unique to the festival of Sukkot?
- ❧ What is the Water Pouring Ceremony that is the paradigm of happiness?
- ❧ What does it mean that someone who never witnessed the Simchat Beit HaShoevah never experienced true joy?

Class Outline:

- Section I: The Joy of Sukkot
- Part A. The Mitzvah to Rejoice on Sukkot
 - Part B. Joy of the Harvest Festival
 - Part C. The Spiritual Harvest Following the Yomim Noraim
- Section II: The Sukkot Celebration – The Simchat Beit HaShoevah
- Part A. The Water Pouring Ceremony
 - Part B. The Deeper Meaning of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah
 - Part C. The Symbol of God’s Love
 - Part D. The Joy of Knowing My Potential is Within Reach

In the mid 1800's, not far from Pittsburgh, PA where I live, there was a simple farmer who wanted to better himself. He had heard that oil had been discovered in Canada, and so he sold his farm to seek fortune up north. The new owner looked over the land to arrange for the watering of his cattle, and he found that the previous owner had set things up quite nicely. A small stream ran down a hillside, and the previous owner had placed a plank across the stream at an angle to prevent a black froth from flowing into the water. This makeshift dam kept the water palatable for the cows.

The purchaser soon discovered that the farm's former owner, who sold his land to search for oil in Canada, had for twenty-three years been himself damming back a flow of oil valued at that time at one hundred million dollars. That farm has since become a town, Titusville, Pennsylvania.

It's a famous story. But the story has value only when we realize that the joke is not only on that poor farmer, but also on us, because we do the same, all of us. We look for happiness, and we curse the obstacles, but all the while, the sources of happiness are already here, if we will only take the trouble to discover them. (From Rabbi Yisroel Miller, What's Wrong With Being Happy? ArtScroll Publications, P 178.)

Some people search the world for happiness, only to discover that it's in their backyard. On Sukkot, we find that the gateway to understanding and achieving *simchah*, true happiness, is literally, the sukkah in your backyard.

SECTION I. THE JOY OF SUKKOT

Judaism views happiness, and its expression in the form of joy, to be not merely desirable but mandatory. We are actually commanded to be happy! Sukkot is specifically singled out as a time of joy. But why are we supposed to be so happy on Sukkot?

PART A. THE MITZVAH TO REJOICE ON SUKKOT

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Yom Tov (The Laws of Festivals) 6:17-18 – Giving joy first to one's immediate family members by giving them things they enjoy.**

A person is obligated to be in a state of happiness (*simchah*) and good spirits [during Sukkot]. This includes one's children, one's wife, and anyone who lives in one's house. The source is the verse: "You shall rejoice on your festival – you, your son, your daughter ..." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:14)

How does one do this? One should buy nuts, almonds and treats for one's children. For one's wife one should buy clothes and jewelry, according to his means. Men eat meat and drink wine, for there is no rejoicing without meat and wine.

וחייב אדם להיות בהן שמח וטוב לב, הוא ובניו ואשתו ובני ביתו וכל הנלווים עליו, שנאמר "ושמחת, בחגך ...". (דברים טז, יד)

כיצד הקטנים נותן להם קליות ואגוזים ומגדנות, והנשים קונה להן בגדים ותכשיטין נאים כפי ממונו, והאנשים אוכלין בשר ושותין יין שאין שמחה אלא בבשר ואין שמחה אלא ביין.

Aside from the general obligation to rejoice on the festivals, Sukkot has its own unique mitzvah of joy. The specific mitzvah of rejoicing on Sukkot is written three times in the Torah.

2. Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:39-40; Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:13-15 – There is a specific mitzvah to rejoice at harvest time.

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the harvest of the land you shall celebrate God's festival for a seven-day period. The first day is a rest day and the eighth day is a rest day ... **you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for a seven-day period.**

You shall make the festival of Sukkot for a seven-day period, when you gather in your harvest and your wine. **You shall rejoice on your festival** ... A seven-day period shall you celebrate for the Lord your God, in the place that God will choose because the Lord your God has blessed you in all your crop and in all your endeavors **and you will be completely happy.**

אך בחמשה עשר יום לחדש השביעי באספכם את תבואת הארץ תחגו את חג ה' שבעת ימים ביום הראשון שבתון וביום השמיני שבתון: ... ושמחתם לפני ה' א-להיכם שבעת ימים:

חג הסוכת תעשה לך שבעת ימים באספך מגרנד ומיקבך: ושמחת בחגך... שבעת ימים תחג לה' א-להיך במקום אשר יבחר ה' כי יברכך ה' א-להיך בכל תבואתך ובכל מעשה ידיך והיית אך שמח:

How can we be *commanded* to achieve an emotional state of happiness during Sukkot?

3. Morasha – An appreciation of the mitzvot surrounding the festival of Sukkot naturally inspires a person to rejoice.

How can we have a mitzvah, i.e., be commanded, to be happy? It's one thing to have a mitzvah for an "action" like eating matzah or giving *tzedakah* (charity), but how can we be commanded to reach an emotional state of joy? The answer is that by engaging in, and understanding the wonderful mitzvot surrounding the Sukkot festival – dwelling in the sukkah, waving the Four Species, eating the festival meals – a person is naturally brought to a state of happiness!

Sukkot has the power to arouse extra joy if we understand the mitzvot surrounding the festival and engage in them whole-heartedly. Therefore, appreciating and integrating the lessons of Sukkot and the Four Species discussed in the Sukkot I Morasha shiur: celebrating our positive judgment on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur; appreciating the power and unity of the Jewish people; the beauty of using our body and mind for a higher purpose; the comfort from recognizing that God sustains, protects, and guides us; the understanding that this world is a means to the World to Come; and appreciating that the sukkah instills a feeling of peace can all bring us great joy!

In the next two parts, we will discuss two other major components of Sukkot that bring us happiness: (1) joy from the harvest, and (2) happiness from harnessing the spiritual energy from the High Holy Days.

PART B. JOY OF THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

On Sukkot the extra mitzvah to rejoice is linked to the special time of year in which it occurs.

The three major holidays in the Torah are described in terms of the agricultural seasons in which they occur:

1. Pesach is referred to as "*Chag HaKatzir*," since it commemorates the cutting of the wheat crops.
2. Shavuot is referred to as "*Chag HaBikkurim*," since it marks the offering of the first ripened fruits.
3. Sukkot is referred to as "*Chag Ha'Asif*," as it celebrates the harvest of the wheat crops.

1. **Shemot (Exodus) 23:16 – Sukkot is the harvest festival.**

You shall celebrate the festival of ingathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in your work from the field.

וחג הקציר בכורי מעשיך אשר תזרע בשדה וחג האסף
בצאת השנה באסף את מעשיך מן השדה:

2. **Rashi, ibid. – The harvest is celebrated at the time of ingathering.**

“The festival of the ingathering” – refers to Sukkot. “When you gather in your work” – during all the summer months the produce dries out in the fields. At the time of this holiday it is gathered into the house before the rains come.

וחג האסיף - הוא חג הסוכות: באסף את מעשיך -
שכל ימות החמה התבואה מתיבשת בשדות ובחג
אוספים אותה אל הבית מפני הגשמים:

3. **Tosefot, Devarim 16:14 – Since the harvest is completed at Sukkot time, the Torah tells us to rejoice then.**

The Torah speaks of happiness three times regarding the holiday of Sukkot ... Regarding Shavuot it only states once that “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God.” Rejoicing is not mentioned at all regarding Pesach, since the grains and fruit have not yet been harvested or picked at that time of year ... But on the holiday of Sukkot, when the wheat crops and fruit have already been gathered into the house, one’s joy is complete; this is why the Torah mentions rejoicing three times.

אתה מוצא כתיב שלש שמחות בחג הסוכות... וגבי
שבועות לא כתיב אלא חדא ושמחת לפני ה' אלקיך,
וגבי פסח לא כתיב שמחה כלל לפי שפסח עדיין לא
נלקטו תבואות ולא פירות האילן ... אבל בחג הסוכות
שלקטו התבואות ופירות האילן וגם הכל נאסף לתוך
הבית אז השמחה היא שלימה לכך כתיב ביה שלש
שמחות.

There is a deeper reason why the joy of gathering the harvest is associated with Sukkot:

4. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, pp. 145-6 – The Torah wants us to celebrate and be happy, and to channel that joy toward our relationship with the Creator and with other human beings.**

Sukkot is also known in the Torah as *Chag HaAsif*, the Festival of Gathering, because it is celebrated at the time of year when the harvested produce is brought from the fields into storehouses and homes. When a person gathers in the bounty of his land, he is naturally filled with tremendous joy and happiness.

This happiness could easily turn into self-aggrandizement: it could make a person full of himself and his accomplishments, distancing him from God (as described in Devarim 8:12-18).

We might think that the appropriate antidote would be a period of fasting and repentance. However, Judaism does not deny or suppress human nature and instinct; rather, it seeks to utilize them in positive ways. The Torah wants us to celebrate and be happy, but to channel that joy toward our relationship with the Creator and with other human beings (Gur Aryeh, Bereishit/Genesis 45:29). We should use this opportunity to appreciate God’s benevolence as well as to share our good fortune with others ... Thus we neither deny the physical nor wallow in it; rather we elevate it to a higher purpose (R’ Hirsch, Horeb 2:31:223).

PART C. THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST FOLLOWING THE YOMIM NORAIM

We could canvass Gore, Rubin, Gilbert, the Dalai Lama and the many authors on the happier.com Web site and produce the Fundamentally Sound, Sure-Fire, Top Five Components of Happiness: (1) Be in possession of the basics — food, shelter, good health, safety. (2) Get enough sleep. (3) Have relationships that matter to you. (4) Take compassionate care of others and of yourself. (5) Have work or an interest that engages you.

I don't see how even the most high-minded, cynical or curmudgeonly person could argue with that.

The real problem with happiness is neither its pursuers nor their books; it's happiness itself. Happiness is like beauty: part of its glory lies in its transience. It is deep but often brief (as Frost would have it), and much great prose and poetry make note of this. Frank Kermode wrote, "It seems there is a sort of calamity built into the texture of life." To hold happiness is to hold the understanding that the world passes away from us, that the petals fall and the beloved dies. No amount of mockery, no amount of fashionable scowling will keep any of us from knowing and savoring the pleasure of the sun on our faces or save us from the adult understanding that it cannot last forever. (From Amy Bloom, The Rap on Happiness. www.nytimes.com, January 29, 2010.)

Is happiness the product of a specific formula, or can we only appreciate it in its absence? As Dennis Prager has said, happiness is a serious problem. We all want it, but we're unsure how to go about getting it. Sukkot teaches us that happiness is related to our connection with God.

This is apparent on Sukkot when "gathering in the harvest" also takes on a spiritual dimension. The Jewish people have just been through an intense period of introspection, *teshuvah* (return to God), and prayer during the month of Elul, followed by Rosh HaShanah (the Day of Judgment) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). During this time we labor in the fields of spiritual growth. On Sukkot, we harvest the inspiration, the joy, and the closeness to God that is produced during this period of *teshuvah*.

1. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 451 (quoting Hilchot Lulav 8:12) – Joy on Sukkot comes from the atonement on Yom Kippur.

Although there is a mitzvah to be joyous on all holidays, there was an extra level of joy in the Temple on Sukkot, as it says, "And you shall rejoice before God for seven days."

The extra joy of Sukkot comes on the heels of the days of judgment and forgiveness of sins ... The greatest joy is to become pure from transgression!

אע"פ שכל המועדות מצוה לשמוח בהן, בחג הסוכות היתה במקדש יום שמחה יתירה שנאמר ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם שבעת ימים [ויקרא כג:מ].

השמחה היתירה של סוכות באה בעקבות ימי הדין ומחילת העוונות... הרי עיקר השמחה היא להטהר מחטא!

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p. 348 – The process of *teshuvah* removes the barriers that separate us from God. This is the real source of joy on Sukkot.

Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret are "the time of our joy" [as described in the festival prayers]. This is a joy which comes from closeness to God after the days of judgment and atonement, as it says, "But your wrongdoings have separated between you and your God" (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 59:2). Transgressions separate us from God, and through atonement this barrier is removed and we attain closeness to God. It is because of this newfound closeness that we rejoice.

סוכות ושמיני עצרת הם זמן שמחתנו, שמחה הנובעת מתוך קירבה אל השי"ת לאחר ימי הדין והכפרה, "כי אם עוונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלוהיכם" (ישעי' נט, ב). העוונות הם מחיצה בין הקב"ה לישראל, וע"י כפרת העוונות מתבטלת מחיצה זו ומתקרבים אל הקב"ה, קירבה זו מביאה לזמן שמחתנו.

The closeness to God achieved through teshuvah on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur enables us to move into God's home, so to speak, symbolized by the sukkah:

3. **Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus, Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus: Sukkot, p. 32 – The closeness and intimacy with God is such that we can dwell with Him in the sukkah.**

The nature of a person depends to a large degree on his neighbors ... As Rambam has written (Hilchot De'ot 6:1), a person is influenced by the people surrounding him. ... When the festival of Sukkot arrives, God brings us, as it were, into His home. This is a state of living in the shadow of God ... that gives us an inkling of living a true life with the Creator. This is the purpose of the festival of Sukkot.

The spiritual work to be done in the sukkah is to be in state of joy (simchah). This joy can only be achieved when we are aware that the only atmosphere fitting for us is that of the sukkah [in the Presence of God]. This is the company that we desire and the one that most befits us. There is no happiness comparable to life with God.

כידוע צורת החיים של האדם תלויה בסביבה שלו, בשכנים שלו ... כמוש"כ הרמב"ם (הל' דעות פ"ה א) שאדם נמשך אחרי אנשי סביבתו. ... כשמוגיע חג הסוכות הקב"ה מכניס אותנו כביכול לביתו לסוכה, צורת חיים כזו בצלו של הקב"ה ... בונה בתוכנו מצב של חיים אמיתיים עם בורא העולם. זוהי עיקר המטרה של חג הסוכות.

העבודה המוטלת עלינו בהיותנו בתוך הסוכה היא השמחה. אל השמחה ניתן להגיע אך ורק מתוך הכרה פנימית שרק אוירה זו שבתוך הסוכה היא האוירה הנעימה לנו, זו החברה המתאימה לנו והמוצאת חן בעינינו. עבורנו חיים עם קודשא בריך הוא מהווים אושר שאין כמוהו.

Ultimately, it is dwelling in the sukkah itself that enables us to focus on the true priorities in life. This paradigm shift itself brings us to happiness:

4. **Rabbi Yaakov Neiman, Darchei Mussar, pp. 283-4 – Happiness comes from recognizing that this world is ultimately temporary while a relationship with God is eternal.**

The Talmud states that on Sukkot one must leave his permanent dwelling and settle in a temporary dwelling. This ruling seems to be inconsistent with the theme of the holiday, as Sukkot is distinguished as the time of our rejoicing ... If in fact Sukkot is a time to rejoice, how can the Torah command us to depart from our homes and live in booths which at first glance would seem to disturb our happiness?

However, upon reflection we can appreciate that one can only truly rejoice when he comes to the recognition that this world is temporary. One who believes that man's ultimate purpose is in this world and thus makes this world his "permanent dwelling" will never be able to achieve inner happiness. For generally speaking one who is sunk in the vanities of this world is lacking joy, since joy is a spiritual matter that is only achieved when one comes close to God.

אמרין במס' סוכה, צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת עראי, לכאורה לפי השקפה ראשונה קשה להבין הלא חג הסוכות הוא זמן שמחתנו... ואם מצוה להרבות בשמחה זו מדוע צוה התורה לצאת מדירת קבע ולשבת בדירת עראי הלא זה מפריע לשמחה?

אמנם אם נתבונן בזה נראה כי שמחה אמיתית לא יכולים להשיג אלא כשבאים לידי הכרה כי העולם הזה הוא רק ישיבת עראי, כי מי שחושב כי תכלית האדם הוא בעולם הזה ועושה כאן ישיבת קבע א"א לו להגיע לידי שמחה פנימית. כי בדרך כלל מי שהוא משוקע בהבלי העולם הזה חסר לו שמחה כי שמחה היא דבר רוחני ומגיעים לשמחה רק אלו שמתקרבים אל ה' ית"ש.

Two additional reasons for our joy on Sukkot come from the recognition that (1) our future is dependent on our own decisions, and (2) Judaism has an anchored ancestry.

5. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Aishaudio.com, A Focus on Security – Sukkot brings us happiness because we recognize we are in control of our destiny and we have a tradition anchored in the past.**

Who really runs the world? God? No. We do. [Of course God oversees and directs the world, however] we are in control of our destinies by making decisions. Who dictates our future? We do. We've got free will. We can choose to do the right thing. It may not always be comfortable, but life is going to be very meaningful. Therefore, life will be enjoyable. If we choose not to change our character, then life will be miserable. We will remain infantile. So who decides what life will be like? We do. If you want meaning, you will have a pleasurable stay. You want comfort, it will not be enjoyable. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we learned that it's all up to us. There is no one to fear other than ourselves. We do not believe that "God saves." Moving into the sukkah teaches me that I don't have to be afraid of anything external. I can be at peace with both myself and my environment. It is feeling at peace with whatever is around me, inside or out. It is ultimately my mistakes and wrongdoings which cause my problems. We need to use our brains.

The second part of our security is knowing we have an ancestry. Each day of Sukkot we invite guests – one of the Jewish leaders – to join us. We are anchored to a tradition.

Now there is a problem. The generation of the desert who we are commemorating, although they were protected by snakes and scorpions, ended up digging their own graves because of mistakes they made. Therefore, what we learn is that we should not be afraid of anything except for ourselves.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⌘ While it is always incumbent upon us to rejoice at the times of the Biblical festivals, Sukkot enjoys its own unique mitzvah to rejoice.
- ⌘ The mitzvah to be happy on Sukkot is connected with the natural feelings of happiness experienced at harvest time. The Torah wants us to connect our feelings of joy to our appreciation of the blessings we have received from God.
- ⌘ Coming on the heels of the High Holidays, Sukkot is also a time of spiritual ingathering when we can rejoice in our new-found purity and revitalized relationship with God.
- ⌘ Happiness is attained upon internalizing the message of Sukkot: the world is only temporary but our connection to God is real and eternal.

SECTION II: THE SUKKOT CELEBRATION – THE SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVAH

PART A. THE WATER POURING CEREMONY

The joy of Sukkot was most palpable at the site of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A celebration took place there during the intermediate days of the festival called the Simchat Beit HaShoevah, "The joy of the House

of (Water) Drawing.” All the people who had come to Jerusalem for Sukkot, a pilgrimage festival, would gather at the Temple. Torches were lit, music played, and the great Sages would dance, juggle, and sing while thousands joyously watched on (Mishnah, Sukkah 5:1-4). This was a truly joyous occasion.

1. **Mishnah, Sukkah 5:1-4 – No joy parallels that of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah.**

One who has not seen the joy of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah has never seen joy in his life ... There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the place of the water drawing. Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with lighted torches in their hands, and sing songs and praises. And Levites without number with harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments were there upon the fifteen steps leading down from the Courtyard of the Israelites to the Courtyard of the Women ...

כל מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו... ולא היה חצר בירושלים שאינה מאירה מאור בית השואבה. חסידים ואנשי מעשה היו מרקדים לפנייהם באבוקות של אור שבידיהן ואומרים לפנייהן דברי שירות ותושבחות והללים בכנורות ובנבלים ובמצלתים ובחצוצרות ובכלי שיר בלא מספר על חמש עשרה מעלות היורדות מעזרת ישראל לעזרת נשים...

“Water drawing” refers to the water that the Kohanim would bring from a nearby spring (Sukkah 4:9) and then pour on the Temple Altar accompanied by prayers for rain.

2. **Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 1:2 – On Sukkot the world is judged regarding rainfall for the coming year.**

Four times during the year the world is judged. On Passover for the crops; on Shavuot for the fruits; and on Rosh HaShanah all individuals pass before God like sheep, as it says (Tehillim/Psalms 33), “He fashions their hearts all together, He comprehends all their deeds;” and on Sukkot we are judged regarding water [rainfall].

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון בפסח על התבואה בעצרת על פירות האילן בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברים לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר (תהילים ל"ג) היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם ובחג נידון על המים.

3. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 16a – Pouring the water on the Altar for a favorable blessing of rainfall.**

Why does the Torah tell us to do the “water pouring” on Sukkot? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “Pour water before me on Sukkot so that your year’s rainfall shall be blessed.”

ומפני מה אמרה תורה נסכו מים בחג - אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא נסכו לפני מים בחג כדי שיתברכו לכם גשמי שנה.

The water that gives its name to these festivities refers to water drawn from a spring and poured on the Altar. One might have expected the celebration to be named after the pouring rather than the drawing of the water. The seemingly inappropriate name sheds light on the true nature of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah.

4. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Sukkah 5:1 – The drawing of the water is a metaphor for the drawing down of Divine Inspiration that can only be achieved when one is in a state of happiness.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Why is it [the Temple in Jerusalem] called ‘The House of Drawing’? Because from there is drawn Divine Inspiration.”

Rabbi Yonah said, “[The prophet] Yonah ben Amitai [Jonah] went to Jerusalem for the festival, and he went to the joyous Water Drawing Ceremony [at Sukkot], and Divine Inspiration rested upon him. This teaches us that Divine Inspiration only rests on someone whose heart is happy.”

א"ר יהושע בן לוי למה נקרא שמה בית השואבה
שמשם שואבים רוח הקודש...

אמר רבי יונה, יונה בן אמיטי מעולי רגלים היה ונכנס
לשמחת בית השואבה ושרת עליו רוח הקודש, ללמדך
שאין רוח הקדש שורה אלא על לב שמח.

Today, synagogues and yeshivot around the world celebrate their own Simchat Beit HaShoevah commemorations with music, dancing, food, and discussion of Torah insights.

5. **Mishnah Berurah 661:20, citing Yesod V'Shoresh Ha'Avodah – The joyous celebration continues to this day.**

The pious ones and men of great deeds make a remembrance of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah by staying up at night on the intermediate days of the festival to sing many songs and praises to God ... In many synagogues the custom is to light extra candles for the evening service.

חסידים ואנשי מעשה עושים לזכר שמחת בית
השואבה להיות נעורים בלילות של חוה"מ סוכות
ולהרבות בזמירות ושבחים... גם בהרבה בתי מדרשות
נהגו להרבות בנרות בתפילת ערבית דחוה"מ בחג הזה.

PART B. THE DEEPER MEANING OF THE SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVAH

A deeper understanding of the joy of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah is based on the Creation of the universe when God separated between the “upper waters” and the “lower waters.” According to Ramban (Nachmanides), this stage in the formation of Creation is among the “secrets of the Torah” that we cannot understand on a simplistic level. But without getting into the Kabbalistic understanding, we can still appreciate very important lessons that the Midrash wishes to derive from it.

The Midrash records that the earthly waters protested that they too wanted to be close to God. To comfort them, God made a covenant that water would be placed on the Altar every Sukkot. Based on this Midrash, the pouring of the water is viewed as a metaphor for the Jewish people, who may have become distanced from God during the year, but now have the opportunity to reconnect with their Source.

1. **Vayikra 2:13 with commentary of Rashi – The water libation was a “promise” since the beginning of Creation.**

And you shall salt every one of your meal offering sacrifices with salt, and you shall not omit the salt of your God's covenant from [being placed] upon your meal offerings. You shall offer salt on all your sacrifices.

וכל קרבן מנחתך במלח תמלח ולא תשבית מלח ברית
אלהיך מעל מנחתך על כל קרבנך תקריב מלח:

Rashi

A covenant was made with salt during the Six Days of Creation – the lower waters were promised that they would be offered on the Altar, both as salt [which comes from water,] and in the water libations on the festival [of Sukkot].

רש"י :

שהברית כרותה למלח מששת ימי בראשית, שהובטחו המים התחתונים ליקרב במזבח במלח, וניסוך המים בחג.

2. Bereishit 1:6-7 – The separation of the upper waters from the lower waters occurred on the second day of Creation.

God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate between water and water."

So God made the firmament, and separated between the waters that were beneath the firmament and the waters that were above the firmaments. And it was so.

ויאמר א-להים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים:

ויעש א-להים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן:

3. Bereishit Rabbah 5 – The lower waters were saddened by the split.

Rabbi Berachiyah said: The lower waters only split from the upper waters with crying, as the verse says, "He bound up the cry of the rivers" (Iyov/ Job 28:11).

אמר רבי ברכיה לא פירשו המים התחתונים מן העליונים אלא בבכיה הה"ד (איוב כח) מבכי נהרות חבש.

4. Rabbeinu Bachaya to Vayikra 2:13, citing Midrash Aseret HaDibrot 1 – God compensated the lower waters by giving them a chance to rise up by means of the water libation.

The lower waters are called the "crying waters." Why are they called the crying waters? Because when God split the waters, and placed these above (in the heavens) and these below (on earth), those that went down began to cry, as hinted to in the verse, "He bound up the cry of the rivers" (Iyov 28:11).

Rabbi Abba said: With tears did the lower waters separate from the upper waters. They said, "Woe to us who did not merit to rise up to our Creator!" What did they do? They acted brazenly, breaking forth from the depths and trying to rise up until God scolded them, as it says, "[So said the Lord,] Who made a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters" (Yeshayahu/ Isaiah 43:16) and "He rebukes the sea and dries it up" (Nachum/Nahum 1:4). God said to them, "Because you went to such lengths on My account, I will not let the upper waters sing

מים התחתונים נקראו מים בוכים, ולמה נקראו מים בוכים, כי בשעה שחלק הקב"ה את המים נתן אלו למעלה ואלו למטה התחילו מים התחתונים בוכים וזהו שכתוב (איוב כח) מבכי נהרות חבש.

אמר רבי אבא בבכי נתפרשו המים התחתונים מן העליונים, אמרו אוי לנו שלא זכינו לעלות למעלה להיות קרובים ליוצרנו, מה עשו העיזו פניהם ובקעו תהומות ובקשו לעלות, עד שגער בהן הקב"ה שנאמר (ישעיה מז) הנותן בים דרך ובמים עזים נתיבה, (נחום א) גוער בים ויבשהו, אמר להם הקב"ה הואיל ולכבודי עשיתן כל כך אין להן רשות למים העליונים לומר שירה עד שיטלו רשות מכם, שנאמר (תהלים צג) מקולות מים רבים אדירים משברי ים, ומה הם אומרים אדיר במרום ה', ולא עוד אלא שעתידין אתם ליקרב על גבי המזבח במלח וניסוך המים.

their song until you give them permission to do so,” as the verse says, “From the voices of great waters and the mightiest breakers of the sea...” (Tehillim/Psalms 93:4). And what do they say? “...The Lord is mighty on high” (ibid.). Not only that but in the future you are to be offered on the Altar in salt and water libation.

5. **Tikunei Zohar 5, 19b – The lower waters just wanted to be close to God.**

The lower waters cried and said, “We want to be close to the King!”

מים תתאין אינון בוכין ואמרין אנן בעיין למהוי קדם מלכא.

6. **Rabbi Eliyahu Shlezinger, Eleh Hem Moadai, p. 445 – The pouring of the water on the Altar is a joyous reunification of the Creation with its Creator, and the symbolism is felt by all those who wish to return to the King.**

We can thus have some idea of the great rejoicing associated with the pouring of the water on Sukkot. On Sukkot there is a great rectification for the “lower waters,” who cried at having been distanced from God, as they are poured on the Altar and brought closer to God. On Sukkot the crying of the “lower waters” thus turns into joy and delight.

Therefore, we too – the people of Israel – join the joy of the lower waters, in order to learn their lesson of intense desire for closeness to God, to cry bitter tears over our wrongdoings and for having distanced ourselves from Him. Just like the waters, we will cry out to God from the depths of our heart: “We wish to be close to the King!”

This is the reason for which our Sages bring a proof to the water libations from the verse, “You will draw water in joy, from the wellsprings of salvation” (Yeshayahu 12:3). This instructs us to join the elation and joy of the lower waters who merited closeness to God in order that we too should feel distress when distanced from God and feel joy at closeness to Him.

מעתיא יש לנו כבר קצת מושג על גודל הפלגת השמחה על ניסוך המים בחג, כי היות שבחג הסוכות יש תיקון גדול למים התחתונים הבוכים על שנתרחקו מאת ה', וזה ע"י כך שמנסכים אותם על המזבח והם מתקרבים לה'. נמצא שבחג הסוכות הופכת הבכיה של המים התחתונים לששון ולשמחה.

ולכן גם אננו בני ישראל מצטרפים לאותה שמחה של מים התחתונים, כדי שנקח מהם מוסר השכל לשאוף ולהשתוקק להתקרב לה', ולבכות בדמעות שליש מאין הפוגות על שמפני חטאינו נתרחקנו מה', וכמו המים נצטק מעומק הלב אל הקב"ה: "אנן בעיין למהוי קדם מלכא".

זהו הענין שחכמינו ז"ל מביאים ראיה לשמחת בית השואבה מפסוק "ושאבתם מים מששון ממעיני הישועה", כלומר, שתצטרפו לששון ולשמחה של המים התחתונים על שזכו להתקרב לפני ה', כדי שמוזה תלמדו גם אתם להצטער על הריחוק מה' ולהיות בשמחה על ההתקרבות לפני ה'.

7. **Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus, Sichot Rav Shimshon Pinkus: Sukkot, p. 51 – The pouring of the water is a reference to the abundant water at Creation, which symbolizes God's abundant loving kindness for His creatures.**

How was the mitzvah of the pouring of the water fulfilled? There were two "*shittin*," holes that reached to the depths of the earth, at the sides of the Altar and water would be poured into them. These *shittin* were created during the Six Days of Creation, which is hinted at in the first word of the Torah: "*Bereishit – bara shitt* [– God created the holes]." From here we understand the great importance of the *shittin* ...

On the first day of Creation everything was filled with water, as it says, "And the Spirit of God hovered over the waters" (Bereishit 1:2). And what is water? The most basic necessity for life. The abundance of water thus represents God's never-ending kindness. God created the original water during the Six Days of Creation, in which the potential for all life lay hidden. And all of creation was filled with water, which hints to God's all-pervasive kindness.

כיצד היו מקיימים את מצות ניסוך המים? בצד המזבח היו שני "שיתין", נקבים עמוקים עד התהום והיו מנסכים את המים לתוך הנקב. שיתין אלו נבראו בששת ימי בראשית, וזה מרומז במלה הראשונה בתורה בראשית "ברא-שית", מכאן אנו מבינים את גודל חשיבותם של השיתין. ...

ביום הראשון של הבריאה, היה כל היקום מלא במים כלשון הכתוב (בראשית א,ב): "ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים". מה הם מים? חיים! המים מרמזים על חסדיו האין סופיים של הקב"ה. בששת ימי בראשית ברא ה' את המים הראשונים ששם היו טמונים כל החיים. כל הבריאה היתה מלאה מים, שהם מרמזים על חסדיו של השם יתברך.

PART C. THE SYMBOL OF GOD'S LOVE

In addition to celebrating the tremendous chesed of God, the Simchat Beit HaShoevah is a manifestation of God's love for the Jewish people.

1. **Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Vol. II, p. 190 – Whoever did not witness the Simchat Beit HaShoevah never saw the unparalleled love of God for the Jewish people.**

Sukkot is the time of our joy, it is a time when the Jewish people rejoice with the revelation of the extraordinary bond of love between God and Israel that is revealed during the festival of Sukkot. This is the time when God Himself invites us to dwell with Him like a groom bringing his bride home...

This is also the idea behind the Water Pouring Ceremony, for water demonstrates the love between God and the Jewish people. The Water Pouring was the most holy offering, an outpouring of love between God and Israel. And this is the reason why so much joy is associated with the pouring of the water – in fact, the Mishnah writes one who did not see the Simchat Beit HaShoevah never saw joy in his life. The

חג הסוכות הוא זמן שמחתנו, שישראל שמחים עם גילוי האהבה העלאית בין קוב"ה וישראל המתגלה בחג הסוכות אשר בו הביאני המלך חדריו בבחי' הבאה לביתו...

וזה הוא ענין ניסוך המים, דמים מורה על מדת אהבה, וניסוך המים ה' גילוי האהבה בין הקב"ה וישראל. וניסוך המים ה' הקרבן הקדוש ביותר, בין קוב"ה וישראל. וזה טעם השמחה הגדולה היתירה שהיתה בניסוך המים עד שכל מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו, כי בקרבן זה מתגלה האהבה שבין הקב"ה וישראל בהפלגה יתירה למעלה מכל הקרבנות...

reason why the joy was so great is because this offering revealed the tremendous love between God and the Jewish people ...

This is also found in the siddur, "The Lord our God has given us *with love* festivals upon which to rejoice, etc. " The source of joy at these times is always the revelation of love.

וכמד"א ותתן לנו ד' אלקיננו באהבה מועדים לשמחה
וכו', וזה שורש השמחה בימים טובים מחמת גילוי
האהבה.

PART D. THE JOY OF KNOWING MY POTENTIAL IS WITHIN REACH

On Yom Kippur, we focused an entire day on honing a strategy to achieve one's mission in life. The Simchat Beit HaShoevah teaches that we can attain our goals independent of our financial resources.

1. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Drash Moshe, Essay 23 – Each person has the potential to achieve his mission in life independent of financial limitations.

The commandment of the pouring of the water shows that everyone, even the most impoverished person [who can certainly still find water], has the ability to request and receive from God a good, blessed, and bountiful year, even though he is unable to buy many offerings or donate much charity. For the principle is: whether one does a lot or a little, what matters is that whatever he does is done for the sake of Heaven (Berachot 5b).

A person can learn from this mitzvah that any action done for God's sake will help actualize his potential as a human being, whose actions are pleasing to God and for whose sake the world was created ... This is the reason why the joy of observing the pouring of the water is greater than the joy derived from any other mitzvah in the Torah. It strengthens a person and teaches him that he can achieve [spiritual] completion with the attributes and talents that God has granted him, independent of his financial means.

שענין מצות ניסוך המים הוא גם להראות שכל אחד
אף עני שבעניים יכול לזכות ולבקש מהקב"ה גשמי
שנה, פי' שיתן לו שנה טובה וברכה מרובה, אף שאינו
יכול להרבות בקרבנות ולא בצדקה, משום שאחד
המרבה ואחד הממעיט ורחמנא ליבא בעי שכל מעשי
האדם יהי' לשם שמים.

... וילמד מזה האדם שבכל דבר ודבר אם יעשה
לש"ש הוא אדם השלם שמעשיו רצויין ובשבילו נברא
העולם... וזהו טעם השמחה בניסוך המים יותר מכל
מצות שבתורה, שזה מחזק כל אדם ומלמדו שיכול
להשיג השלימות במה שזיכהו השי"ת שהן בכל מעשיו
אף בלא חסרון כים.

Therefore, just as water is easily accessible to each person, everyone has the ability to achieve his mission in life independent of financial resources.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ∞ The unique role of water as a libation on Sukkot was "promised" by God since the dawn of Creation.

- ✧ In the course of Creation, God split “lower waters” from “upper waters.” The Midrash describes how these lower waters, in a personification of all physical reality, regretted their distance from God and expressed an intense desire to close the gap between heaven and earth.
- ✧ God put the waters in their place, so to speak, but He also made a concession: the waters of this world would be used for a purely spiritual purpose once a year, on Sukkot.
- ✧ The water libation, representing the unification of the lower waters with the upper, is a metaphor for our desire to draw closer to God, to close the gap between ourselves and Him.
- ✧ The pouring of the water is a reference to the abundant water at Creation, which symbolizes God’s abundant loving kindness for His creatures.
- ✧ From the ubiquitous availability of water, which represents Torah, one learns that he can achieve spiritual completion with the attributes and talents that God has granted him, independent of his financial means.

CLASS SUMMARY:

HOW CAN THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOT TEACH US TO BE HAPPY?

- ✧ Everyone is looking to be happy. Unfortunately a person can search outside of himself to find happiness when he is the real reservoir of joy, like the farmer who sold his farm to find oil in Canada. Sukkot teaches us about joy because of the wealth of themes that infuse the festival that naturally bring a person happiness.

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE JOY UNIQUE TO THE SUKKOT FESTIVAL?

- ✧ Dwelling in a sukkah and waving the Four Species on the heels of the High Holy Days inspires great joy from the rich combination of lessons we derive and internalize from their observance: celebrating our positive judgment on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur; appreciating the power and unity of the Jewish people; the beauty of using our body and mind for a higher purpose; the comfort from recognizing that God sustains, protects, and guides us; the understanding that this world is a means to the World to Come; and the appreciation that the sukkah instills a feeling of peace.
- ✧ In an agricultural society, Sukkot would have been a natural time to feel joy as it marks the end of the harvest cycle. It is a time when people can take stock and appreciate their blessings. Sukkot arrives at this time to focus us on the fact that God is the source of our physical bounty.
- ✧ Sukkot is also a time of spiritual harvest after the Rosh HaShanah/Yom Kippur period. At this time we can also rejoice in our spiritual accomplishments because nothing brings as much delight as a clean slate and a second chance. The process of teshuvah removes the barriers that separate us from God.
- ✧ Happiness comes from recognizing that this world is ultimately temporary while a relationship with God is eternal.
- ✧ Sukkot brings us joy because we recognize we are in control of our destiny and we have a tradition anchored in the past.

WHAT IS THE FESTIVAL OF THE WATER POURING THAT IS THE PARADIGM OF HAPPINESS?

- ✧ During Sukkot, the Kohanim in the Holy Temple brought a libation of water rather than wine. The water was drawn from a place near the Temple and the pouring of it on the Altar was accompanied by music and dancing from afternoon until the next morning. This celebration, considered to be the zenith of joy, took place each day of the intermediate days of the Sukkot festival. Nowadays, we recall this celebration by singing and dancing to music in synagogues and study halls around the world.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT SOMEONE WHO NEVER WITNESSED THE SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVAH NEVER EXPERIENCED TRUE JOY?

- ✧ By understanding the profound ideas behind the Simchat Beit HaShoevah, one attains a true sense of happiness. There is much Kabbalistic symbolism inherent in the Water Drawing Ceremony related to the initial waters created by God during the first Six Days of Creation. Bringing the water on the Altar is a reunification of the upper and lower waters, of this world and the spiritual world, in an expression of our innermost desire to bridge the gap between ourselves and God.
- ✧ The Simchat Beit HaShoevah is a metaphor for the drawing down of Divine Inspiration that can only be achieved when one is in a state of happiness.
- ✧ The Water Pouring was the most holy offering, an outpouring of love between God and Israel.
- ✧ The Water Pouring is a reference to the abundant water at Creation, which symbolizes God's abundant loving kindness for His creatures.
- ✧ On Yom Kippur, we focused an entire day on honing a strategy to achieve one's mission in life. The Simchat Beit HaShoevah teaches that we can attain our goals independent of our financial resources; just as water is easily accessible to each person, everyone has the ability to achieve his mission in life independent of finances.