

Sukkot Dvar Torah & Halacha Booklet

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Sukkos - Beauty Defined

An interesting custom is mentioned in conjunction with the holiday of Sukkos. In the Sha'arei Teshuva (Orech Chayim 625), we find that "one should increase the giving of charity on the eve of Sukkos." Rabi Yehudah Assad offers an insightful explanation of this custom.

After the nation of Israel was rescued from the pursuing Egyptian nation by the splitting of the Red Sea, they sang a song in praise of Hashem. They uttered the words "This is my G-d, and I will adorn Him" The Talmud (Shabbos 133b) offers two possible meanings for this passage. One is "adorn yourself before Him in the fulfillment of Mitzvos, namely by making a beautiful Sukkah in His honor, acquiring and using a beautiful Lulav, using a beautiful Shofar, etc. Abba Saul, however, interpreted the passage as "This is my G-d and I will be like him," meaning we should be like Hashem: just as He is gracious and compassionate, so too we should be gracious and compassionate.

On Yom Kippur, we spent the entire day fasting, praying that we be forgiven and that we be sealed for a good year. As soon as we conclude Yom Kippur, we immediately begin to involve ourselves in the Mitzvos associated with Sukkos, the holiday that occurs a few days later. We build a Sukkah and decorate it so that it is truly a sight to behold. We spend time selecting a beautiful Esrog, looking for a fruit with a beautiful shade of yellow, with no blemishes, with perfect symmetry. We search through the selection of Lulavim available to us, hoping to find one that is as straight as an arrow, meeting all the Halachik stringencies. We do this all so that we, in accordance with the verse, can adorn, can glorify the name of G-d. We attempt to do these Mitzvos in the finest way possible.

However, there is another way to interpret that verse. In our relationship with Hashem, we not only should perform His Mitzvos in the finest way possible. We also have to act with our fellow man in the finest way possible. And we do that by emulating G-d. Yes, we can have a beautiful Esrog. Yes, we can have a magnificent Sukkah. But if we do not treat our fellow

man in the way the G-d would, we have not fulfilled the entire meaning of the verse "This is my G-d and I will adorn Him," "Zeh Kei'li V'Anvei'hu." We therefore must remember the poor and needy at this time, when they might find they are lacking the resources needed to properly celebrate the holiday. We can have a beautiful esrog, but not at the expense of our brothers and sisters in need.

Reb Mordechi of Nashchiz lived his entire life in penury. His daily diet consisted of only bread and water. For Shabbos, he made sure he was able to purchase of salted fish. Yet, the entire year, he scrimped and saved, putting aside a penny here and penny there, so that he would be able to purchase a beautiful Esrog for Sukkos. One year before Sukkos, he traveled to the city with a sizable sum of money with which to buy his Esrog. He encountered a man on the side of the road weeping bitterly. Rav Mordechai inquired as to what was troubling the man. The man explained that he supplied water to the townsfolk. Every day he would take his horse and wagon out to the well, fill up his jugs, and bring them back to the city where he would sell the water. This daily ritual brought him barely enough money to support his family. On this day, on the way back to town, the horse collapsed and died. The man had absolutely no savings with which to purchase another horse. Yet without a horse, he had no income and his family would starve. Hence, he was sitting on the side of the road, despondent. Rav Mordechai took out his money purse and handed every last cent to the water carrier.

Rav Mordechai came home, and was immediately greeted by his disciples. Noting the pleased look upon his face, they assumed he must have purchased a particularly beautiful Esrog. They asked him about his trip. He responded "Hashem has blessed me this Sukkos with an opportunity to do His Mitzvos in a beautiful fashion. The townsfolk will take out their esrog on Sukkos, make a blessing on it, and with that will have glorified Hashem. I, on the other hand, will be able to have my blessing over a horse, and with that I am extremely pleased."

The holiday after the solemn Yom Kippur, Sukkos, is to be the time when we glorify Hashem by performing all of his dictates, whether they be commandments between Him and us or between our fellow man and us, in the best way possible. By beginning our new year on the right foot, we are setting the course for a year full of spiritual achievement and hopefully for material comfort and achievement as well.

Source: <http://www.torah.org/>

Sukkos - Why Booths?

Guest contributor: R' Mendel Zlotnick

The holiday of Sukkos starts on the 15th day of Tishrei. The holiday of Sukkos is characterized by the unique commandment of dwelling in Sukkos - temporary, hut-like dwellings, as the Torah says in Vayikra (23: 42-43) "In booths you are to dwell for seven days ...so that your generations will know that I caused the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt...."

The Sages in the tractate of Succah (11b) disagree as to what the "booths" that the Israelites dwelt in refer to. Rabi Eliezer says that these booths are a reference to the miraculous "Ananai HaKavod," the "Clouds of Glory," with which G-d surrounded the Israelites

throughout their forty year sojourn in the desert after having left Egypt. These clouds protected the Israelites from the elements and the hot desert floor, kept the Jews' clothing clean, and guided the nation of Israel through the desert. Rabi Akiva maintains, however, that these "booths" refer to the actual booths or huts that the Israelites built while in the desert to serve as their dwellings.

The Aruch HaShulchan (Orech Chayim 625) raises the following question: Whereas Rabi Eliezer's booths were manifestations of a great miracle that G-d performed for the Jews in the desert, and certainly merits a commandment commemorating the infinite kindness and protection of G-d, Rabbi Akiva's interpretation is most puzzling in light of the commandment to dwell in the Sukkah. What is the significance of the huts that the Jews lived in while in the desert?

The Aruch HaShulchan answers his own question. According to Rabi Akiva, the Succah commemorates the greatness of the Jewish people. Their faith in G-d was so complete and so total that they traveled into the uninhabitable desert wasteland at G-d's command. In this wasteland, the Jews did not even have permanent dwellings, but merely booths, trusting in G-d that He would care for their every need in the wilderness, which of course, He did.

Based on what we have seen, both Rabi Eliezer's and Rabi Akiva's interpretation of the Israelite's "booths" in the desert relate our observance of the commandment of Sukkos to G-d's miraculous protection of the Jews during their forty year sojourn through the desert on route to the land of Israel. This protection was not furnished only to the Jewish people while in the desert, but in His infinite kindness, G-d has extended that protection to our people throughout the ages. This special protection, symbolized by the Sukkah, has ensured the continued existence and survival of the Jewish people until this very day.

Source: <http://www.torah.org/>

Sukkos - The Four Species

In the last issue, we discussed a commandment that is unique to Sukkos - the commandment to dwell in the Sukkah. There is another commandment which is also unique to Sukkos - the commandment to take the Four Species. In Vayikra (23:40) the verse says "And you shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of a goodly tree, branches of palm trees, the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d for seven days." The Gemora in the tractate of Sukkah (35a) explains the verse as follows: the "fruit of a goodly tree is an Esrog (citron); the branch of the palm tree is the Lulav; the "boughs of thick trees" are Hadasim (myrtle); and, the "willows of the brook" are Aravos (willow branches).

The Sefer HaChinuch (324) explains why we have this precept of the taking of the Four Species. As an introduction to the reason, he writes that man is influenced by those actions which he does on a regular basis. His thoughts are drawn to that which he does constantly, whether it be good or bad. This is why Hashem has given us many Mitzvos (commandments).

By increasing the number of Mitzvos which we perform, we will always have opportunity to do Mitzvos, we will always be doing Mitzvos, and therefore have Mitzvos (and Hashem) on our mind. Furthermore, we will also be doing good all day long, for which we will be rewarded. By performing the commandments, we are to constantly focus our thoughts toward the good, and we are to remember and assure that we conduct ourselves in an honest and righteous fashion.

The reason for the taking of the four species is very similar to this reasoning. The holiday of Sukkos has another name besides "Sukkos." The other name is "Chag Ha'Asif," "The Harvest Festival." It has this name because at this time of the year the crops are gathered and fruits are harvested and brought into the house. The harvest is a time of joy and happiness. G-d commanded that we have a festival at this time of happiness, so that we could take this natural reaction and channel it towards Hashem. Hashem, by His command that this happiness should be directed towards Him, provided us with another opportunity to serve Him, thereby surrounding and accustoming ourselves to the performance of Mitzvos, and meriting reward at the same time. By merely being happy, a natural reaction at this time of the year, we are fulfilling a commandment of Hashem thereby immersing ourselves in the performance of a mitzvah and meriting reward.

However, since manifestations of joy and happiness are accomplished largely through physical and material expressions, there is a danger that the manifestations of joy will be in a way that is anything but a channeling of happiness directed towards G-d. A person may come to forget Hashem during this highly emotional time and act in a way that is not in accordance with Hashem's commandments. Therefore Hashem commanded that we should take in our hands objects that will remind us that all the rejoicing of our hearts should be for His sake and for His glory. Hashem also desired that the "reminder" be something that in it of itself causes happiness and joy, as the season is a joyful one. Therefore, the Sefer HaChinuch writes, Hashem commanded that we take the four species because "it is known in the ways of nature that all four species gladden the heart of those who see them."

The Sefer HaChinuch adds that there is another significance to the Four Species, as they resemble certain distinctive organs of a person. The Esrog resembles the heart, which is, as the Sefer HaChinuch notes, "the seat of the intelligence." We take a heart-shaped specie to signify that we should serve Hashem with our intelligence. The Lulav is like the spine, that which is a main element in man. We take the Lulav to signify that one should direct his entire body towards the worship of Hashem. We take the myrtle, whose leaves resemble eyes, to imply that one, on this day of happiness, should not let his eyes lead him astray. We take a willow, whose leaves resemble lips, to signify that one should focus his words and be cautious not to use them improperly at this time of rejoicing.

Sukkos- Zman Simchaseinu, The Time of Our Happiness

Throughout the works of our Sages, we find that the holiday of Sukkos is referred to as "Zman Simchaseinu," "The time of our happiness." While it is true that the other of the Shalosh Regalim (Pilgrimage Festivals) are referred to by similar descriptions, the connection between their common names and the description is more readily apparent than by Sukkos.

Pesach is called "Zman Chayrusainu," "The time of our freedom, as it celebrates our freedom from Egypt. Shavuot is called "Zman Mattan Toraseinu " The time of our receiving the Torah," as it celebrates the day on which the nation of Israel received the Torah. However, what joyous occasion does Sukkos commemorate? What connection is there between happiness and building and dwelling in a Sukkah?

The Vilna Gaon addresses another question. There is an opinion in the Talmud (Sukkah 11b) that the Sukkah we build represents the Clouds of Glory, Ananei HaKavod. These clouds surrounded the entire nation of Israel, and acted as a protective barrier. (See vol. I: 46 for further information.) The nation of Israel first became protected by the Ananei HaKavod, in the month of Nissan. Why then, the Gaon asks, do we commemorate this gift of protection in the month of Tishrei? He answers that when the nation of Israel sinned by constructing the Egel HaZahav, the Golden Calf, the protective clouds were removed. The clouds did not return until after Moshe had secured the complete atonement of the nation of Israel, and the nation began to construct the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. The date Moshe returned to the camp of Israel was Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, and the nation began the construction of the Mishkan on the 15th of Tishrei. For this reason, the Gaon writes, we celebrate Sukkos on the 15th of Tishrei.

From this, we see that we are celebrating not just the gift of the protective clouds, but the return of the clouds after the nation of Israel had sinned. Indeed, one could understand that this would be a joyous time: a miraculous form of protection which had been revoked was now returned. Furthermore, one could understand why we are celebrating the holiday of Sukkos at the time we do: after we have just experienced Yom Kippur, and we have been forgiven for our sins, we celebrate the gift of the protective clouds which were returned to Israel after they sinned. The events concerning the clouds happened at this time of the year, and therefore we celebrate Sukkos at this time of the year. Hence, there is a joy connected with the clouds, and the holiday is aptly named the time of our happiness.

However, this leaves us with another question: If the clouds were taken away from the nation of Israel because they sinned, why then did the clouds not reappear when they were forgiven, on Yom Kippur? Why did the clouds return only five days later?

Rabbeinu Yona, in his work Sha'arei Teshuva, writes that there is more to forgiveness than meets the eye. It is possible that a person may have begged G-d for forgiveness with all of his might, and that G-d forgave that individual. That individual will receive no punishment for his wrongdoing. However, this does not mean that this person has now once again found favor in the eyes of G-d. G-d may not desire the prayers of this person, nor any further gestures of devotion towards Him. In order to reach this next level of forgiveness, a person must continue beseeching G-d's kindness and mercy. He must continue to pray, to perform mitzvos, and increase his devotion to G-d. A person will know that G-d has fully forgiven him when he finds himself presented with the opportunities to do Mitzvos. When a person discovers that Hashem is lending him a hand when it comes to listening the word of G-d, that his urges to do wrong are not as powerful, that his desire to act correctly has increased, he knows that his repentance has been accepted.

After G-d forgave the nation of Israel for the sin of the golden calf, He wanted to finalize the forgiveness. He wanted to give the nation a commandment where they would be able to demonstrate how great their closeness was to Him. He commanded the nation to build the Mishkan. The construction necessitated donations of personal wealth and of manual labor. Everyone was able to contribute in some manner, shape, or form to the cause of the Mishkan. Everyone did contribute, thereby demonstrating their dedication to and love of Hashem. When

the time came to actually construct the Mishkan, one thing was clear: the nation of Israel had truly repented, and had made a great effort to come close to G-d. It was at this point that the final forgiveness came. Hashem returned the protective clouds to the nation, and they began the construction of the Mishkan.

The joy that the nation of Israel experienced at this time was overwhelming. They knew that their repentance had been completely accepted. They were presented with an opportunity to serve G-d, to build the Mishkan. They had the protective clouds back. They knew that they had again found favor in the eyes of G-d. When we celebrate Sukkos, we are not merely commemorating the joy experienced by our forefathers upon the return of the protective clouds. We are in a time of joy ourselves! We have just gone through a repentance process, and hope that we have found favor in G-d's eyes. Soon after the holiest day of the year, G-d gives us an opportunity to perform many mitzvos: to take the Lulav, to sit in the Sukkah, and to sanctify the holiday. We ourselves should be overjoyed to find ourselves presented with all these opportunities - it indicates that G-d has found favor with us!

For this reason, the Talmud in the tractate of Sukkah (28b) compares the situation of rain during Sukkos to a servant who comes to pour a drink for his master, and the master throws the water in the servant's face. Why is this situation when we are unable to perform a Mitzvah different than any other time when we are unable to perform a Mitzvah, to the extent that rain during Sukkos is called a curse? It is precisely because of the fact that if we are not presented with the opportunity to do this Mitzvah right after Yom Kippur, it means that G-d is not happy with us. We have yet to find favor in the eyes of G-d, and we therefore need to increase our prayers and repentance efforts. We are not able to experience the same joy that our forefathers did.

Sukkos, as we know, is called the time of our happiness. This happiness is one that our forefathers were privileged to experience. It is a time for us to experience this same happiness. It is a time when we all can feel assured that our prayers on Yom Kippur were fully accepted. It is a time when we can rejoice as we perform the many Mitzvos associated with the holiday. We should all take this opportunity to rejoice, to serve G-d with great happiness and merriment. Sukkos should truly be the time of happiness for each and every one of us.

Source: <http://www.torah.org/>

A Reality Check

By Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Sukkos is marked by a unique command to "live" in the Sukkah, a hut-like structure built outdoors. We eat our meals in the Sukkah, and many sleep in the Sukkah as well. The Sukkah is meant to be our dwelling place for the duration of the holiday.

Sukkos also marks a change in the mood of the holidays we have during Tishrei. After completing the High Holidays, holidays of solemnity, we have Sukkos, a holiday on which we are commanded to rejoice. The Chida, R' Chaim Yosef David Azulay writes that there is significance to the juxtaposition of the holidays. During Sukkos, we move to a temporary dwelling outdoors. The Chida says this move sends a message to us. We have just

celebrated the holidays of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. On these days, we have spoken about how spiritual matters should be primary in our lives. We have dedicated ourselves to serving G-d instead of our passions. We have asked forgiveness for our pursuit of earthly pleasures. The Sukkah highlights what we have just experienced. It reminds us that our life in this world is temporary, just as is our dwelling in the Sukkah. G-d is giving us a booster shot so that after the serious times have slipped away, the Sukkah reminds us still about our decision to pursue the spiritual. When we sit in the Sukkah, we are to strengthen our resolve to do that which is right, by reminding ourselves that our goal is to accomplish for life in the World To Come.

The Sukkah has further significance. The Torah writes (Devarim 16:13) "You shall observe the Feast of Sukkos seven days, after you have gathered in your grain and your wine." Why do we observe Sukkos at this harvest time? The Rashbam explains that the key to the answer is another reason the Torah gives for celebrating Sukkos (Vayikra 23:43): "That your generations may know that I made the people of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." When we sit in the Sukkah, the Torah tells us, we should remember how G-d provided shelter for the nation of Israel for 40 years after they left Egypt. The nation had no land to call their own. They had to wander and be sheltered by G-d. When we harvest our crops, we may tend to lose sight of how lucky we are that G-d provided for us. The Torah warns us of this danger. It says (Devarim 12:) Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and lived there; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the L-rd your G- d, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, where were venomous serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought you water out of the rock of flint, who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that he might humble you, and that he might test you, to do you good in the end, and you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth." To make sure that we do not come to the point of denying G-d's providence, we go out into the Sukkah. We remind ourselves that just as G-d provided for those who lived in the desert with Sukkos to live in, so too did He provide for us, as our harvest. It is time to take a step back and remember who really provides for us. So we not lose sight of the source of our livelihood, G-d gave us the holiday of Sukkos at the time when we are most likely to be blinded: harvest time.

Lodging in the Sukkah is intended to assist us in clarifying our outlook on life. We remember that life on this world is temporary. We remember that we can't take it with us. We remember that what we have we got from G- d. The Sukkah is a sanctuary of spirituality. However, the Sukkah, as we know, is a temporary structure. We must make sure that the message the Sukkah imparts remains with us during the long winter months, so that the type of year we asked for on the High Holidays is the one we merit to live.

Source: <http://www.torah.org/>

Simchas Bais HaShoeva - A Happiness of Oneness

During the time of the Temple, a unique form of offering was brought on the Mizbe'ach, the Altar during Sukkos. Each morning of Sukkos, a water libation was poured on the Mizbe'ach when the daily morning sacrifice (Tamid shel Shachar) was brought. The pouring of the water, "Nisuch HaMayim" was celebrated with much fanfare. From the evening before, masses of people would congregate on the Temple mount to watch the great sages of the generation dance, perform, and sing in celebration of the special event. Special mammoth lamps were lit, whose lights illuminated the entire Jerusalem. This occurred every single night of Sukkos, except for Shabbos and the first night. Our sages wrote (Sukkah 51a) "Whoever did not see this celebration never saw a celebration in his days." The celebration was known as Simchas Bais HaSho'eva - The Rejoicing of the House of the Drawing (sho'ev meaning to draw water).

Why was a special offering of water brought on Sukkos? The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 16a) writes that as the world is judged for water on Sukkos, we bring a water offering so that the rains for the coming year should be blessed. Another reason for why Sukkos is the holiday on which we have the Simchas Bais HaShoeva is related to that which we discussed in the last post - Sukkos occurs right after Yom Kippur in the harvest season. During the harvest season, a person may become haughty and forget Hashem. This haughtiness affects not only farmers, of course. The wise may take credit for their knowledge and those of fine character may take credit for their graces. The bottom line is that all we get, whether it be money, wisdom, or respect comes from G-d. When people forget this, problems begin. One starts to think that he is superior to another. A person may begin to form castes in his mind, separating the population into categories of worth. All this does is create strife and tension, and unity in Israel can not and will not exist when people think this way.

On Yom Kippur, we all stand together and are judged. We ask G-d for forgiveness. We beg for mercy. We affirm that we will not do those evil deeds again. On Yom Kippur, I am no better than the next guy. I might be rich, but maybe he is a better person...I am smart, but maybe she is more righteous than I. The divisions which we may have created in our mind crumble. We realize that all anyone has is from G-d, and that we are truly all the same. The barrier to unity that our evil inclination erected comes down. On Yom Kippur, we are one united people, and united we want to stay. On Sukkos, both rich and poor move outdoors to temporary dwellings. We are all protected only by G-d. Our unity is reinforced. We are one nation, all celebrating the holiday of Sukkos together in glee.

G-d reminds us that He loves each and every one of us, regardless of what our status appears to be on earth. Usually, wine is poured on the altar. Fine wine is used. The vines are carefully nurtured, the grapes tenderly picked, the wine masterfully squeezed and thoroughly filtered. It is the product of toil and energy. On Sukkos, water is poured on the altar as well. Water is plain. What you see is what you get. No work went into producing this water. Yet, water is accepted upon the altar as is the wine. Plain water is on the same standing as fine wine. The common denominator between these two is that they must remain pure and adulterated. We may be like fine wine, the product of much blood, sweat, and tears. We may

be like water, simple and straightforward. However, this classification, G-d is telling us, is irrelevant, as long as we remain pure in thought and committed to His service. If we remember that this is what is important, and that the trappings are just that, it helps us realize that G-d is the one who gave us the trappings in the first place. If this is our focus, unity is sure to stay.

Why is this a time to rejoice? When the water is poured on the altar, we all see that Hashem accepts all of our service to Him, as long as it is done with a pureness of heart. We can take solace in the fact that Hashem sees that we do want to serve Him, and that the mitzvos we do are performed with that in mind. Although our prayers might not be perfect and our observance sub-par, if we tried with all our might to serve Hashem properly, our service is readily accepted. The fact that Hashem sends us this message right after Yom Kippur is cause for celebration.

Sukkos is a time to inculcate within ourselves the experience of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, we all stood together as equals, and asked Hashem for a good year. We outwardly demonstrated that we know Hashem bestows upon us all the good we get. This acknowledgment is also an affirmation of our belief that we are truly one people, united in service of G-d. If we all reinforce these lessons on Sukkos as G-d wants us to, we can be sure that this will indeed be a good year for our brothers and sisters.

(Based on Sefer HaToda'ah)

"Leishev baSukkah," To Sit in the Sukkah -

A Halachic Discussion

By: Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel

As mentioned in other posts, during Sukkos there is a commandment to sit in the Sukkah. Our Sages have written that sit means we should sit in the Sukkah as we would dwell in our homes. Just as we eat in our homes, so too should we eat in the Sukkah. However, this rough guideline is just that. There are many laws concerning how we are to properly discharge the mitzvah (commandment) of sitting in the Sukkah. Some of these laws unfortunately are unknown, yet fundamental to the correct performance of the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah.

As a preface it is important to know that not saying the bracha (blessing) before the performance of a mitzvah in no way hinders or obviates the fulfillment of that mitzvah. That is the reason that we make the bracha on the Lulav and Esrog (the Four Species - see vol I:47) with the Esrog upside down. One can not fulfill the mitzvah of Lulav if any of the Four Species is upside down. The species must be held in the way that they grow in order to properly fulfill the commandment. By holding the esrog upside down before we recite the blessing, we insure that the bracha is said first. If the mitzvah would not be done this way it is conceivable that one might take the Lulav and Esrog with the intention to fulfill the mitzvah and thereby lose the opportunity to make the bracha. (A bracha generally can not be said after the

fulfillment of a mitzvah - only before.)

Another factor to be known is that when there is a question, in law, as to the need to say a bracha (a blessing) one is **not** said. The Torah requires all males over thirteen years old to leave their permanent dwelling and take up a temporary dwelling for seven days beginning with the fifteenth day of the Jewish month of Tishrei. In the case of Sukkah, a biblical requirement prevents the eating of a minimum volume of certain foods outside the Sukkah. There is unanimity concerning some items but there are differing opinions concerning others.

The following are some of the practical rulings that result in making the recitation of the following blessing : *Baruch Ata Ad-noi El-heinu Melech HaOlam Asher Kidishanu B'Mitzvosav V'Tzivanu Leishev baSukkah," Blessed are you Hashem our G-d, King of the World, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to sit in the Sukkah:*

1. Even if one is sleeping or doing other activities in the sukkah the bracha of "leishev baSukkah"(the blessing for sitting in the sukkah) is NOT said. It is only said before (or during) eating. [Shulchan Aruch Code of Jewish Law) O.Ch. 639:8.]
2. For one to be permitted to say the bracha of "leishev baSukkah" a minimum of a kibeitza (the volume of an egg calculated by the displacement of water. This volume equals to double that of a kizayis; the volume of an olive) must be eaten in the sukkah. [O.Ch. 639:2]
3. The bracha of "leishev baSukkah" would therefore be is said only when one is eating a minimum of the above amount of **bread**.
4. This bracha would be said when one is eating a minimum of the above amount of non-bread products made from food of the five grains (wheat, barley, rye oats, spelt) according to Aruch HaShulchan 639:27.

According to Mishnah Brura 639:13,15-16 and Kaf HaChaim 639:33 the following applies for the five grains:

The bracha is said only if a) one establishes his meal on these items by eating an amount three or four times the normal kibeitza b)one normally eats a kibeitza or more of cake for breakfast (with coffee, etc.) c)on Shabbos (Sabbath) or Yomtov (holidays) when one may eat a kibeitza or more of cake after reciting the Kiddush on wine before the meal. (One would not make the blessing during the Chol HaMoed [intermediate] days even though the prevalent custom is to make the bracha.[See Aruch haShulchan above.] If one does make the bracha on a weekday then one should sit awhile in the sukkah after eating in order to do some other activity.)

5. One does not make the bracha of "leishev baSukkah" when making Havdalah (the blessing marking the separating of Shabbos and Yomtov from weekday) upon conclusion of the festival days. [O.Ch. 369:2 MB.#13.]

This in no way should be construed as limitations to the requirement of eating in the sukkah. That is a totally different discussion and in very many cases one would still be obligated to eat in the sukkah while being exempt from the bracha. As mentioned above, the recitation of the bracha does not affect performance of the mitzva. Rather, it is an added layer which carries with it its own set of laws. Being that we are to live in the Sukkah while the opportunity presents itself, any time in the Sukkah is time well spent. While according to most authorities, drinking coffee alone would not necessitate the recitation of the bracha on the Sukkah, it is still worthwhile and praiseworthy to drink the coffee in the Sukkah. Many of the

great sages spent much time in the Sukkah. They ate, drank, slept, and studied in the Sukkah. We as well want to gain the most from the Sukkah experience, and that is why we are to spend time in the Sukkah.

Our desire to spend time in the Sukkah, however, may be challenged. Inclement weather is not particularly conducive to staying outdoors in a dwelling with holes in the roof. We are only commanded to live in the Sukkah as we would in our homes. Would we stay in our homes if there was water dripping through the roof? This presents us with another issue: What do you do if it rains on the first night (or second night, in the Diaspora) of Sukkos (when we have a positive commandment to eat in the Sukkah)?

While it is not within the scope of this article to deal with all the philosophical implications of rain on Sukkos, suffice it to say that our sages have told us that it is not a sign of blessing to be forced out of the Sukkah. (See vol. II:20) We pray, therefore, that this question remains in the field of the theoretical.

To properly understand the following answer, a number of fundamental points must be prefaced.

1. To say Birkas haMazon (Grace After Meals, recited after any meal at which bread is consumed) at any time, a minimum of a kizayis (the volume of flour equal to the volume of an olive) must be eaten within approximately four minutes.
2. For one to be permitted to say the bracha of "leishev baSukkah," a minimum of a kibeitza (the volume equals to double that of a kizayis) of bread or cake must be eaten in the sukkah.
3. The bracha of "Shehechyanu" (Who has Renewed Us and Sustained us and Brought us to this time, recited upon the first performance of each mitzva on the holiday) relates also to the Sukkah; but only on the first night of Sukkos.
4. There is disagreement as to the requirements of eating in the sukkah on the first two nights of Sukkos if it is raining. The opinion of the Rama is that there is a requirement to eat a minimum of a kizayis in the sukkah, even in the rain, on the first two nights. Others are of the opinion that the exemption of eating in the sukkah in the rain applies equally to all the days of Sukkos.
5. As we said above, the inability to make a bracha on a mitzvah does not affect the fulfillment of that mitzvah.
6. We are strict whenever we have a doubt concerning the fulfillment of a biblical law (such as eating in the Sukkah on the first night of Sukkos).
7. We do not make a bracha whenever we have a doubt concerning the correctness of that bracha.

On the first night of Sukkos a married man or one eating with female family members or young children should wait approximately one hour to see if the rain will stop. If the rain continues he should go into the Sukkah; say the Kiddush with the "Shehechyanu" blessing, wash as one usually does before the consumption of bread and eat at least a kizayis of bread in the rain. He should **not** say the blessing of "leishev baSukkah." He may then complete his meal in the house. After the meal, he should wait until slightly before the Halachik midnight to see if the rain will stop. If the rain stops, he then washes, enters the Sukkah again, says the brocho "leishev baSukkah," eats at least a kibeitza of bread and then says Birkas haMazon.

On the second night, if it rains, one need not wait at all and he may begin his meal immediately in the house. Kiddush with "shehechyanu" is made in the house. This would even apply to a single person. At the end of the meal, before saying the Grace After Meals,

even if it is still raining, he should eat a kizayis of bread in the Sukkah in the rain. Again, a bracha of "leishev baSukkah" is not said. A bracha of "shehechyanu" is not needed for the sukkah on the second night. One may then go back into the house to say the Grace After Meals. According to many opinions, even on the second night, one should wait again until slightly before the Halachik midnight to see if the rain stops. If the rain does stop then the procedure is the same as the first night. On all other days or nights of Sukkos, if the rain is so strong in the Sukkah that if it was raining in the house a person would be driven out of his home to find other shelter, or if the rain is ruining his food, preventing him from eating, he need not eat in the Sukkah. If one has already started his meal inside, and the rain stops, he may complete his meal in the house.

Huts or Houses? Yaakov's Sukkos Lesson

The Tur Shulchan Aruch writes (Orech Chayim 417) that the three pilgrimage festivals, the "Shalosh Regalim," correspond to our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The festival Sukkos, the Tur writes, corresponds specifically to Yaakov. What is the connection?

In Bereshis, we read of the events surrounding Yaakov's encounter with his brother Esav. Although Esav had sold his birthright to his younger brother, Yaakov, Esav was angered when Yitzchak, their father, gave Yaakov the blessings due to the first born. Before this meeting, Yaakov, while on a trip to retrieve some belongings he left at a camp site, had a struggle with the "guardian angel" of Esav. Yaakov, although slightly injured by the angel, came out of the meeting with a blessing. Yaakov then, with trepidation, met with Esav. He emerged from this encounter unscathed, and the two brothers went their separate ways. The Torah then tells us (Bereishis 33:17): "And Yaakov journeyed to Sukkos, and built himself a house, and made booths (sukkos) for his cattle; therefore the name of the place is called Sukkos." Yaakov's construction of "sukkos," booths, for his cattle is the link with the holiday which bears the same name.

Clearly, there must be more of a link between the holiday and Yaakov than just the word "sukkos."

Yaakov, as just mentioned, was on a mission when he had his run-in with Esav's angel. The Talmud (Chullin 91a) explains how Yaakov came to be alone when he met the angel. "Said R. Eleazar: He (Yaakov) remained behind for the sake of some small jars. Hence [it is learnt] that to the righteous their money is dearer than their body; and why is this? Because they do not stretch out their hands to robbery." Yaakov went to fetch some small utensils left behind because he valued these possessions. Why did Yaakov, and according to R' Eleazar, do all the righteous, treasure possessions? Wouldn't we think that the righteous would value the spiritual more than the physical?

The answer lies with the conclusion of R' Eleazar's statement: "They do not stretch out their hand to robbery."

There was a poor man who was scrupulous in his observance of all of the Mitzvos. However, he was so poor that he did not possess a decent cup and basin with which he could

wash his hands when it was called for. One night, he dreamt that G-d saw the extent of his penury, his lack of cup and basin, and desire to own one, and G-d then gave him the cup and basin. Upon arising in the morning, lying on the floor next him was the exact same basin and cup which he saw in his dream. This was clearly a gift from G-d, and he treasured it greatly.

The man's fortune changed. He became wealthy, and soon undertook refurbishing his house. Upon the completion of the work, the man made one final inspection of the house. He noticed that his cup and basin were missing. He ordered the workers to search through everything until it was found. They were successful, but perplexed. They had assumed this must be a precious cup and basin, fashioned from silver or the like, and that is why the man was worried about its loss. The cup they found, however, was tin and dented, and they could not fathom why the man was so distressed about the loss. After being questioned about this by the workers, the man had one response: "If G-d Himself had given you something, wouldn't that be the most precious item you possess?!"

It is this attitude, Rav Chaim Vital says, Yaakov and all righteous people share. They appreciate that every item in their possession, all money that comes their way, is theirs because G-d gave it them, to enable them to better serve Him. It is dear, beloved, cherished, and carefully protected. The righteous do not steal. They do not take that which G-d did not give them. They only have that which G-d blessed them with. They know that G-d gave them this gift to enable them to fulfil the precepts contained in His Torah. They therefore value their possessions as one should value a gift from G-d. This is why Yaakov returned to retrieve his small vessels.

Sukkos is a time when we leave our homes and venture outside, into a temporary dwelling, the Sukkah. The Sukkah should remind us that our life in this world is temporary, just as is our dwelling in the Sukkah. Furthermore, the Sukkah should serve to remind us that just as G-d provided for those who lived in the desert with Sukkos to live in, so too does He provide for us. (See YomTov III:20) Yaakov, the Torah tells us, made "sukkos," "huts," for his possessions. For himself, however, he built a home. The Targum Yonasan interprets this not as a literal house, but rather as a House of Study, a "Bais Medrash." Yaakov had his priorities straight. Yaakov valued his possessions for the right reasons. He invested his money in that which has permanence, a house for Torah study. He provided only a temporary shelter for his "temporary" possessions. This temporary shelter is called a Sukkah. Our Sukkah should teach us the same lesson. We must appreciate, right after the conclusion of the High Holidays, our purpose on this earth. We must value our possessions for the same reasons Yaakov did. We must ensure that we understand what the priorities are in our lives. Our Sukkah should remind us of Yaakov's sukkah. Hence, the holiday of Sukkos and Yaakov are indeed inextricably tied, as the Tur stated.

(from Matnas Chaim)

Eating Some Humble Pie... In the Sukkah

By Rabbi Naphtali Hoff

Why do we make the sukkah (shortly) after Yom Kippur? Since we find the Holy One,

blessed be He, sitting (in judgment) on Rosh Hashana before the entire world, and on Yom Kippur He signs the judgment, perhaps the Jews' judgment that year was to be exiled. Therefore, we ... "exile ourselves" from our homes into the sukkah, and the Holy One, blessed be He, considers it as if we were exiled to Babylon. (Yalkut Shimoni, Emor)

The above reason given to explain the close proximity between Yom Kippur and Succos is perplexing on a number of counts. First, of all possible punishments which Hashem could inflict upon us for past misdeeds, why should we specifically concern ourselves with exile? Why should we not worry about more likely events such as famine, disease, or persecution at the hands of our gentile neighbors? Second, even if exile was in fact ordered, how can we assume that the relatively benign act of entering a sukkah would satisfy such a decree? Certainly, we would expect exile to be a much harsher experience than this!

In reality, there is a particular motivation to specifically fear a decree of exile, than other punishments. Exile serves two primary functions. The first purpose is for the land, to remove from it the presence of a sinful nation which fails to keep Hashem's precepts.

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations... For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled. The land should not vomit you out also, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. (Vayikra 18:26-28)

The second purpose, more significant says Rav Chaim Freidlander (Sifsei Chaim, Vol. 1, p. 228ff), is to instill within a complacent, arrogant nation a strong sense of humility.

Yeshurun became fat, and kicked. You have become fat, thick, and gross. Then he forsook Hashem who made him, and spurned the Rock of his salvation... They sacrificed to powerless spirits, not to Hashem... You ignored the Mighty One that fathered you, and have forgotten Hashem who formed you. (Devarim 32:15, 17-18)

It was largely because of their arrogance that the Jewish people acted with such indifference towards Hashem. They did not need Him - or so they thought - so they did not heed him. Instead they looked to pagan deities to help unburden themselves of the shackles of Judaism. Eventually, their wanton sinfulness could no longer be tolerated, and the Jewish nation suffered the fate of exile.

How does this idea of exile tie specifically into this time of year? If anything, one would assume that we would be far removed from any concern over exile following the Yomim Noraim, in which we spend countless hours engaged in personal introspection while also working to come to the complete awareness that Hashem is our King and Judge. Arrogance at this time would not appear to be a major concern.

Still, our worries are fully justified. As we transition out of the seriousness of the Yomim Noraim, our thoughts quickly move to the festive days of Succos, the chag ha'asif (festival of the harvest), in which we celebrate the new harvest. Because of our great sense of happiness, celebrating the fruits of our hard labor, we are prone to feelings of arrogance and self-reliance. "And you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'." (Devarim 8:17)

The enormous sense of accomplishment which accompanies the harvest is likely to awaken a strong degree of pride, which, the Torah tells us, is a primary factor in loosening our sense of dependence and allegiance towards Hashem.

It is for this reason that we are commanded at this time to leave our comfortable, secure surroundings and enter a sukkah. There we are to remain for seven days, living directly under Hashem's protection.

So long as a person remains in his regular domain, it is difficult for him to feel a sense of humility and submission. These feelings come much more readily when one is forced from his home. As Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva, 2:4) writes, "Exile atones because it causes man to become more humble and subdued."

Instead of channeling our joy back within ourselves, as a means of taking excessive pride for our accomplishments, we are reminded to focus on Hashem, our true provider. "And you shall remember the Lord your G-d; for He is who gives you power to get wealth." (Devarim 8:18) Such remembrance will not only keep us humble, but will allow us to achieve the highest degrees of happiness.

In the words of the *Sefer HaChinuch*:

The days of the festival (of Succos) are days of great joy, since it is the time when the grains and fruit are harvested. Therefore, people celebrate to great degrees. That is why the festival is called "the harvesting festival". Hashem commanded that we make a holiday at this time so as to give (the Jewish people) merit that the primary joy should be directed towards Him. (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 324)

It is only by focusing our happiness on Hashem, the true provider of our material bounty, that we can achieve the true degree of joy which was intended on this special chag simchaseinu.

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Sh'mini Atzeres: Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow

In issue #47, we mentioned that we were given the commandment to take the Lulav and Esrog so that we would have a reminder during Sukkos that the happiness we feel on the holiday is to be directed towards Hashem. The Sefer HaChinuch explains that on other holidays, we do not need such a reminder because of the various commandments associated with the day. One example is by Passover, because we have the commandments to eat Matzo and Maror, no further commandment is needed to assure that the focus of our happiness on the day is directed towards Hashem. The Sefer HaChinuch adds that by the holiday of Shmini Atzeres (which is the eighth day of Sukkos), although we have no special commandment on the day, we do not need anything to focus our happiness on Hashem. Why is this the case?

In Vayikra 23:36, the Torah tells us "...on the eighth day, you will have a holy day...it is a day of detention ("Atzeres")...." The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the Sages have told us that in reality, Shmini Atzeres is not the eighth day of Sukkos, but rather a separate holiday, which occurs at the end of the Sukkos holiday. What was the reason why Hashem commanded us to observe this day as a holiday? The Sefer HaChinuch explains that Sukkos is the last

holiday of the Jewish calendar (if we consider the month of Nissan as the beginning of the year, and Pesach the first holiday). By giving us this holiday of Shmini Atzeres, its as if Hashem was telling us "Please, stay with me one more day, as it is difficult for me to part with you." Hashem, out of his great love for the nation of Israel, finds it hard to "leave" his children at the end of the holidays. Therefore, He added on one more day, so we, the nation of Israel, can spend one more day with Hashem before our "departure."

Now that we understand the spirit behind Shmini Atzeres, we can also understand why we need no added commandment to assure that our joy stays properly focused. As the whole essence of the holiday is that we are spending a little more time with Hashem before we "leave" (as we will not be "returning" until Pesach), our mind will be focused on Hashem throughout the holiday. No added reminder is necessary, as there is nothing to distract us from remembering our close binds to Hashem on this day.

Simchas Torah - Rejoicing With the Torah

Guest contributor: R' Yoel Pomerantz

What appears to be the last day of Sukkos, and what in the Diaspora is the "second" day of Shmini Atzeres, is called Simchas Torah, literally "the joy of/over Torah." On every Shabbos during the year we read a portion of the Torah (The Pentateuch), called a "Parsha." Simchas Torah is the day we complete the cycle by reading the final Parsha in the Torah, which is known as "V'zos HaBracha." Additionally, Simchas Torah marks the renewal of the cycle as we begin again with the first Parsha in the Torah, which is known as "B'raishis."

The central theme of this holiday is our rejoicing over the Torah and our completion of the Torah. There are several unique customs on this day. Firstly, in contrast to Shabbos and regular holidays when one or two Torah scrolls are removed from the ark, on this day, most congregations have the custom to take out all of the scrolls. After the scrolls are removed, we are told in Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chayim 669) that they are carried round and around the "Bimah," the special "table" located in the center of the sanctuary upon which the Torah is read. These circlings are called "Hakafos." This is done for the purpose of rejoicing over the scrolls. The Siddur of the Ba'al HaTanya adds that the custom is to make seven of these joyous Hakafos and to sing and dance before the scrolls with great joy and exultation.

Immediately following the Hakafos we begin the Torah reading. Typically, on most holidays and on the Shabbos, between five and seven people are called to the Torah to follow with the leader. (These are called "Aliyos.") On Simchas Torah, however, the accepted custom is to include everyone present in the reading. The Mishna Berura writes that even the children (who normally are not called to the Torah until they are thirteen) are all collectively given an Aliya in order to educate them in the reading of the Torah. After the final Aliya (called the Chassan Torah, literally the "Bridegroom of the Torah") has been called and the final section of the Torah has been completed, we immediately begin the cycle over again by reading the first portion of B'raishis which describes the creation of the universe and the first Shabbos. In many congregations, the custom is that everybody reads aloud the verse that concludes each day of creation as well as the verses which talk about Shabbos. One of the reasons for this custom, according to the Ta'amei HaMinhagim, is to demonstrate that besides

the joy we feel because we have the beautiful gift of Torah, we also feel privileged to be believers in the creation.

The Gemora in the tractate of B'rachos tells us that "from the day of the destruction of the Temple and henceforth, the only thing remaining for G-d is the Halacha - the law of the Torah." At first glance, this statement seems puzzling: Who could take away any part of the world from G-d, the Creator of everything? The Sefer HaToda'ah takes up this question. He writes that the answer is that the Divine Presence of G-d can only manifest itself in a place where there is joy and completeness (without any destruction). From the time of the destruction of the Temple, the entire world was considered incomplete and in a state of destruction. Even the Mitzvos lack their full potency. The only thing that remains unaffected by the destruction of the Temple was the Law of the Torah - Halacha. It is only through Torah study that we can achieve true joy. Thus, when we rejoice over the Torah on Simchas Torah, the Divine Presence of G-d rejoices with us.

May we merit this Simchas Torah to truly rejoice over the Torah and grow in our appreciation of Torah so that the Divine Presence may once again dwell in our midst.

Stories that Teach - Shemini Atzeres / Simchas Torah

Throughout Sukkos, special offerings were brought on the Altar in the Temple. Our Sages have taught us that the 70 special bull sacrifices brought on Sukkos were for the benefit of the 70 nations of the world. On Shemini Atzeres, the holiday that appears to be the eighth day of Sukkos, only one bull sacrifice was brought. Shemini Atzeres is a holiday that G-d gave the Jewish people as a send-off of sorts. It is one last time for the Jewish nation to rejoice with G-d before the long stretch until Pesach, the next holiday (see vol. I:48). The Maggid of Dubno explains by means of a parable why one special offering was brought on this day which is dedicated to the Jewish nation.

A wealthy man went on a long journey. While on his trip, he purchased many gifts for his family back home. Upon his return, he gave out the presents. He showered the children of his wife (his stepchildren) with many gifts, while to each of his children he gave a few small presents. He did such based upon the following rationale. My stepchildren will be happy now only with presents. However, my children should be happy because I have returned. Although I want them to have gifts, I do not want the joy of receiving the presents to overshadow the joy they should feel upon my return. Therefore, I will give them some small gifts.

In order to bring joy to the nations of the world, G-d felt it was necessary to command the offering of a large amount of sacrifices. As it is the offerings on their behalf alone that bring them joy, the nations were given 70 sacrifices. However, the Jewish people experience great joy just knowing that they are in the company of G-d. On Shemini Atzeres, when G-d wants to rejoice with us one last time, all we need is one sacrifice to compliment the joy that already exists.

This joy extends to Simchas Torah, the day that follows Shemini Atzeres in the Diaspora (see vol. I:49). (Simchas Torah begins at nightfall on Thursday, October 23, 1997) Reb Naftoli from Ropshitz once told of a man he met who taught him what he considered an

amazing lesson about joy. On Simchas Torah one year, he saw a man who looked like he was thoroughly enjoying the day's celebration. His mouth did not stop singing and his legs would not stop dancing. He was totally immersed in the joy of the celebration of completing the Torah. What Reb Naftoli thought was unusual was that this individual was a simple porter, who knew little of Torah and its study. Reb Naftoli called him over and asked him how come he was celebrating with such fervor. Did he learn so much this year that his celebration should be so enthusiastic? The porter's answer was what impressed Reb Naftoli. He said "Rebbe - how can my brother make a simcha - a celebration - and I not be happy?!"

Hopefully we will all celebrate Simchas Torah as a celebration of our own accomplishments. Even if that is not the case, we should celebrate together with our brothers and sisters, and hope that next year the joy will be personal as well. However, although we celebrate, there is still not total joy, as we are in exile.

The Prince of Mannheim once approached the Netziv, Rabbi Naftoli Berlin, with the following question: Every year at the Seder on Pesach, Jewish children ask their father "Mah Nishtana...", "Why is this night different from all other nights...." Pesach is not the only time Jews perform unusual commandments. On Sukkos, the Jews move out of their comfortable homes and dwell outdoors in a hut. Shouldn't this cause a child to ask Mah Nishtana on Sukkos as well?

The Netziv answered that the observances on Pesach are truly different. A child sees actions that are not in accordance with Jewish life. The whole family sits and reclines together at the table with tranquillity and perform actions of truly free people. All actions are performed deliberately and with precision and order. This causes a child to wonder what is going on. How is it possible that Jews can live with order, peace, and tranquillity? However, on Sukkos, the child sees the family exit their house and take shelter in the Sukkah. For a Jewish child, this is not a strange sight. He knows that the Jews are treated as a lowly nation by others. He knows that the Jews have been forced to constantly wander in exile. He knows that the Jews have never considered their house their permanent home because they may have to move in a moments notice to flee persecution. For the child, leaving the home is not a strange sight. Therefore, the child does not ask Mah Nishtana on Sukkos.

May it be G-d's will that come next Sukkos, asking Mah Nishtana will be totally appropriate for the occasion.

May I Have This Dance?

The what appears to be the final day of the Sukkos holiday is, outside of Israel, called Simchas Torah (and in Israel, is Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah). On this day, we read the last portion of the Torah, V'zos HaB'racha. We celebrate this completion of the past year's cycle of Torah reading and the beginning of this year's Torah reading cycle. We sing, dance and express our joy over having the Torah and being able to learn the Torah. We dance seven circuits around the Bimah, from where we read the Torah. Traditionally, all are given an opportunity to dance with the Torah during the festivities. There is a firm basis for this custom.

The Mishkan, the Tabernacle, was the center of spiritual life before the Bais

HaMikdosh, the Holy Temple was constructed in Yerushalayim. Hashem gave Moshe the instructions on how the Mishkon and the vessels used within were to be constructed. Among these instructions, we find a change in language in one instance. By the construction of the Shulchan (Shmos 25:23), we find the following: "_You_ shall also make a table." By the Menorah, we find (Shmos 25:31) "And _you_ shall make a Menorah of pure gold." However, but by the Aron, the ark, we find a change (Shmos 25:10): "And _they_ shall make an ark." The command for the ark was directed towards the entire nation of Israel, as opposed to the commands for the other vessels, which were directed at Moshe. Why was the instruction for the ark specifically given to the nation?

The Medrash Rabbah (Shmos 34:2) states: "AND THEY SHALL MAKE AN ARK." Why is it that in reference to all the other vessels we read 'And you shall make', but in reference to the Ark it says, AND THEY SHALL MAKE? Said R. Yehudah ben R. Shalom: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let all come and occupy themselves with the Ark in order that they may all merit the Torah."

What makes the Aron so special, that those who "occupy themselves with the Ark . . . may all merit the Torah?" In general, the large vessels used in the Mishkan were constructed with rings attached. In these rings, poles were placed, so that when the Mishkan had to be moved and therefore the vessels had to be moved as well, they could be carried with the poles. When the vessels were at rest, the poles were removed. This, however, was not the case with the Aron. The Torah writes (Shmos 25:15) "In the rings of the ark shall be the poles, they should not be removed from it." Even when the Aron was at rest, the poles had to stay within the rings.

The Sefer HaChinuch (96) writes that at the root of this commandment is the fact that the Aron, which contains the original Luchos, the tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed, is the dwelling place, the sanctuary of the Torah. The Torah, embodied by the Aron, is at our core, it is our glory. We must treat it with every form of respect and honor that is within our ability. We therefore were commanded not to remove the poles, for fear that we might need to move the Aron quickly, and in our haste we will not check to see that the poles will support the weight of the Aron, and it could fall. Because we must show the utmost respect for the Aron, we must make sure that it never falls, and we therefore keep the poles affixed at all times.

The construction of the Aron, the object which symbolizes the holy Torah, was given to the entire nation of Israel. Because the entire nation would be occupied with the construction of the Aron, they would all have a part in the Aron, and in turn, the Torah. Hence, the nation would all have a stake in the Torah, and would merit to delve into it and study it. However, this gift which we all have a part of must be respected and revered. We must be able to take it with us where ever we may go, without any fear that our travel will cause the Torah any disrespect. We must ensure that the Torah is always cherished and protected, no matter where we are or what we do. On Simchas Torah, everyone gets an opportunity to dance with the Torah scroll. Everyone gets an opportunity to be occupied with the Torah, just as the entire nation was occupied with the construction of the Aron. All are given the opportunity to embrace the Torah, to hold it dearly and tightly, to take it with them on a dance, in a fitting display of love and respect for the Torah. It is a dance for eternity.

Have a joyous Simchas Torah!

(based on Hegyonai Halacha)

Four Species: All for One; One for All

The Mitzvah: There is a Biblical commandment to take Arbah Minim, Four Species on the first day of Succos, Tabernacles. There are two Hadassim twigs (myrtle), three Aravos (willows) are tied to the Lulav (palm branch) and grasped together with a Estrog (citron). The Four Species are also taken on the other days of the festivals with the exclusion of the Sabbath. Although a time-bound commandment that women are generally exempted, it has become customary for them to also observe this law.

In the Jewish calendar, Succos falls at the end of the agricultural season: "when you gather in the crop of the land"(Leviticus 23:39). Not only is the field's produce joyously "gathered" into his warehouse by the farmer, but the mitzvah of Arbah Minim, Four Species fascinatingly involves "bringing together" different plants.

But what are we to make of this mitzvah? What is the symbolism of the straight long backbone of the lulav; the different shaped leaves of the aravos and hadassim; and of course, the exquisite and spotless surface of the beautiful estrog?

The underlying theme of this festival is that of unity.

A unique, indispensable individual, the Jew has a distinct mission in life, exclusively tailored to his personality and circumstances. Yet, at the same time, he is part of a whole. His point of reference is as a member of his family, a member of his community, and as part of the Jewish nation. The human body functions by unifying different organs. Only by operating together, will the heart pump blood around the body, will the eyes see, the mouth speak and the frame of the body stand. No component can work in isolation; each is essential and indispensable.

The Jewish nation is, similarly, one unified organism. Composed of different groups - Kohen, Levi and Israelite - the chosen people can only function where there is unity in their ranks. Only by "assembling" all parts of the people in a joyous harmonious unit, a "family reunion", can the Jewish nation fulfil its national role and achieve the ultimate level of unity: becoming one with G-d. Both are symbolized in the assembly of the Four Species.

Their shape famously depicts the four main organs collectively responsible for the essential activities of human life. The lulav resembles the human spine; the estrog parallels the human heart; the hadasim shaped leaves correspond to the human eye and the aravos represent the lips (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 30:14).

The Four Species further draw together the four types of Jew across the spectrum: the estrog alludes to a fully righteous individual who has both Torah learning (taste) and mitzvah observance (scent). The aravos with neither taste nor aroma depicts the wicked person. The lulav that has taste but no smell and the hadasim with smell but no taste indicate those Jews that have only one of the two categories (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 30:12).

Symbolizing the interaction of the bodily components and members of the nation "all for one", the Four Species captures the tone of Succos, "festival of the ingathering" (Exodus 23:16). All the energies of the agricultural year are assembled. Yet another illustration of this phenomenon is the mitzvah of Hakhel, "Assembly", where the nation would congregate as

one to hear a public reading of the Torah on the festival of Succos after the sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 31:10-13)

Bringing together seemingly separate entities is illustrated, most vividly and memorably, in the Four Species. Like a family reunion, the consolidating all parts, "one for all", generates much joy and happiness. The peaceful harmony of the festival - as in our prayers "Succos Shlomecha, booth of peace" - is the period of being "completely joyous" (Deuteronomy 16:15). Together, we joyously come together - as one body and as one nation - under the protection of G-d to serve and become one with Him.

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Time Capsules

Philosophy is an intimidating subject. Most of us would rather deal with concrete intellectual and emotional issues, something into which we can get our teeth - and our hearts. And yet, during the Festival of Sukkoth, amidst our most joyous celebrations, our Sages instituted the reading of King Solomon's Koheleth (Ecclesiastes), an often brooding work that agonizes over the philosophical problems of existence. What is the connection between this work and the transcendent joy of Sukkoth? What message does it carry that could not have been delivered in a more conventional form?

Let us take a brief look into this penetrating book. In its recurring theme, Solomon declares, "All is emptiness," the pleasures of the world are all without value. More than any other Jewish king in history, Solomon enjoyed virtually limitless honor, wealth and luxury. He had vast properties, numerous slaves and one thousand wives and concubines. His palaces were adorned with the most exquisite works of art, and his tables were laden with the finest foods and wines. No material pleasures were denied to him, and no one was in a better position to assess their true value. Having sampled everything that the material world had to offer, he was able to step back and take an honest look at it. And he concluded that all was emptiness. The only reality was to fear and obey Hashem.

So what are we meant to derive from this philosophical evaluation? How can we relate to concepts of extreme unreality when we've just taken out a mortgage on a house and the car needs a new brake job?

Let us look a little further into the words of King Solomon. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under Heaven, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to uproot, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to grieve, a time to dance."

These lines, so clearly profound and meaningful, have been quoted and paraphrased and borrowed for poems and songs the world over. But what do they really mean? What insight into the meaning of time is immortalized in King Solomon's enigmatic words?

Time, if we stop to think about it, is an inexorable current which sweeps us along through the passages of life. It is the framework in which we live, the receptacle of our experiences. We create terms and classifications - years, days, hours, minutes, seconds - in a vain attempt to gain a modicum of control over time, but it remains uncontrollable. We feel its relentless flow through our very beings. There is no stop button, no pause button. The unstoppable tick of the clock controls our lives. But what is this thing called time? Is it merely the passive blank canvas on which we paint the stories of our lives? Or is it something of far

deeper significance?

These are the questions King Solomon is addressing. "For everything there is a season." Time is more than a path upon which we tread. Time is Hashem's most amazing creation in the natural world. It is a dynamic force, the source of all life energies. The mystical sources point out that time is not defined by the artificial units we assign to it but by the different energies and emanations that infuse it. One particular block of time may be charged with the energies of planting, and that activity is therefore most suited to it. Another block may be charged with the energies of uprooting, and so forth. Each moment has its distinctive challenges and opportunities, and therefore, only by tapping into the correct energy source of each moment of time can we utilize it to its fullest and capture it.

"All is emptiness," King Solomon tells us. The only reality is that which can be contained and preserved in time. The accumulation of material possessions has no real value. It does not connect with the synergies of time. It is no better than a boulder by the riverside, left behind by the rampaging current. Only the way we live and the things we do penetrate to the core of time and are carried along with us through and beyond our lifetimes.

On the Festival of Sukkoth, when we begin the new year with a clean slate, King Solomon's profound message shines for us like a beacon in the dark. Throughout the year, we have been caught up in the mad rush of the daily grind, pummeled by the spinning hands of the clock. We have allowed ourselves to be subjected to the tyranny of time. But with our new insight into time, we can harness and control this relentless flow. If we can perceive the nature of time as it passes, if we do not plant in a time of uprooting nor weep in a time of laughing, we can spare ourselves the frustrations of futility and find serenity and peace of mind. Only then can we capture and preserve the capsules of time for all eternity.

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The Happiness Box

Every once in a while when reading a bed time story to the younger children I find myself in the end wiping a tear from the corner of my eye and wondering if any of the children are really capable of appreciating the depth of the seemingly simple story, if it is not meant more for the parents and if we get it either.

One such book reappeared on the bookshelf recently. It must have been with all the stuff for sukkos 'cause it certainly belongs there. It's called, "The Happiness Box". The plot is something like this. There's this kid that's never happy with what he has. He finds things to complain about all day. Whatever he has is not enough or not just right and all he can find is fault.

One day after his family moves into a beautiful new house a giant package arrives. It's a washing machine or some other large appliance and the kid is suffering from existential nausea because it's not for him. His clever father convinces him that the box is the real item of desire and it's just for him. It's called "a happiness box" and while inside one must think only happy thoughts.

This boy accepts the premise of the box and at first begrudgingly but later with greater ease is able to generate happiness producing thoughts such as; "Sometimes my mother

makes dinners I like." And other such affirming statements that put him into a state of mind that makes him feel rich and full. After a while he's complaining a lot less. Then he becomes anxious about going to summer camp because all his possessions need to fit neatly into a duffel bag and he would have to leave "the box" at home. What would become of his state of happiness? He then realizes the great truth that the happiness is not in his box but in his head. The important life lesson is well learned. The children are fast asleep but I am more awake.

The simple child's story reminds me a little of a bad joke about a fellow who claims his dog is so talented he can do anything he is commanded to do. The challenge is taken up by a friend who throws a stick a distance and commands the dog, "Fetch!"

The dog looks up at him and begins his diatribe. "All day long people tell me what to do. Roll over! Jump! Go through the fiery hoop! Good dog. Bad dog. Sit! Heal. Eat this! Don't eat that! I can't take it anymore. It's no fun being a dog. I hate it. I wish I were never born! The fellow interrupts the dog and tells him with a sense of outrage, "All I asked you to do was fetch." The dog answers back with surprise, "Ohhhhhh! I thought you said "Kvetch".

Sukkos is referred to in our liturgy as "the time of our happiness". How do we celebrate? We leave our lovely homes and sit exposed to the elements in little boxes. We are commanded by the Torah; "and you should rejoice with your holiday and be only happy!"

Maybe the story is not so simplistic and the joke not so (as we say in yiddish) "farfetched". It's very easy to be focused on what's missing in life; to give special recognition to the cruel and heartless; to the unfinished business of history and history of business. Even more so these days we need a way to regain a sense of optimism. How about 7 days in "a happiness box" to see what's right in G-d's world. Hearing clearly the commandment as it is pronounced is a critical point. No where does it say, "kvetch"!

We all know how we can feel sometimes and how it creates a contagion of negativity. Therefore we hung two signs in our sukkah. One upon entering reads, "You are entering a no kvetching zone". The other posted prominently reads, "Don't even think of kvetching in the sukkah!" The Vilna Gaon called this the hardest mitzvah in the Torah to fulfill. So, don't expect it to happen with a simple story, a bad joke, by reciting an imperative verse, or by hanging a humorous sign but it sure is a good beginning.

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Past Perfect

Both of the holidays of Pesach and Succot are weeklong festivals. In the Land of Israel they are seven days in length while in the Diaspora they are eight days in length. In Israel, the first day and seventh days of Pesach are full holidays, while in the Diaspora the first, second, seventh and eighth days of Pesach are full holidays. For Succot, in Israel, the first day is a full holiday and in the Diaspora, the first two days are full holidays. The balance of the days of these holidays is called Chol Hamoed - the intermediate, less holy days of the holiday. This

extremely sophisticated concept of days that are holidays but not completely so, is a unique Jewish creation. Unlike the actual full holy days of the holidays, these intermediate days do not carry with them the entire gamut of restrictions on work. In fact, any work that is necessary for comfort and/or to prevent monetary loss is permissible. However, the intermediate days are not to be treated as ordinary workdays. Unnecessary work, work that is easily postponed till after the holidays, lawsuits and other contentious matters, etc. are all not to be pursued during Chol Hamoed. Therefore, in Israel and in many parts of the Diaspora, Chol Hamoed is a vacation and leisure time. Stores and offices are closed and entire families participate in touring, visiting friends and relatives and attending concerts and other forms of entertainment. On Chol Hamoed, holiday clothing and finery is worn and festive meals are served. It is a joyous and sweet time of the year for all concerned, especially for the children who are free of school and their routines for the week.

Chol Hamoed is a practical example of the Jewish ability to transform the everyday into the special and the mundane into holy. We can all understand the concept of Sabbath and holidays and the fact that work is somehow inconsistent with the spirit and message of those days. But Chol Hamoed affords us an opportunity to work and not work, celebrate and yet not divorce ourselves from the occurrences and tasks of everyday life. There is a ritual and rhythm to Chol Hamoed that governs this remarkable time. It is a time for family and friends, for study and reading, for relaxation and refreshment. But it is not summer vacation or midwinter break. It has holiness, ritual, and halacha attached to it. That it is what gives Chol Hamoed its special resonance and feeling in the Jewish world.

Part of the custom of Chol Hamoed is to pay one's respects to the great rabbis and scholars of Israel. In Israel, and in the Diaspora as well, the great rabbis, the Chassidic leaders, and the heads of the yeshivot all hold open house and court during Chol Hamoed. There are Jews who travel from all corners of the world to visit their spiritual leaders and pay their homage to the Torah and its scholars. In Jerusalem, there is a special "Blessing by the Kohanim" (priests descended from the family of Aaron) ceremony conducted at the plaza of the Western Wall. Hundreds of priests gather there to bless the tens of thousands of Jews who gather at the Wall to receive their heavenly blessing on Chol Hamoed.

During Chol Hamoed of Succot, there are parties held every night to celebrate the "drawing of the water" service that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Talmud describes how in Temple times this ceremony was celebrated with song, dance, torches and bonfires, jugglers and performers. The "drawing of the water" from the spring of Gichon south of Jerusalem and its libation on the altar of the Temple symbolically marked the beginning of the rainy season in Israel and the prayers for a bountiful rainfall during the winter months. Though the Temple and its altar are not now present, the celebrations of Chol Hamoed Succot have survived and prospered. Throughout Jerusalem's many neighborhoods, the parties and celebrations take place. The Talmud stated that 'sleep did not find our eyes' at these festive Chol Hamoed nights. That still is pretty much the case for the young today during these Chol Hamoed celebrations.

A Perfect Cycle

Sukkot comes at the exact right time of the year, psychologically and emotionally speaking. If it were not for the advent of Sukkot and all of the preparations involved regarding this festival of joy and happiness, we would all be very depressed at having to climb down from the pinnacle of Yom Kippur to everyday mundane existence.

The Torah allows us to contemplate our future year with a sense of happiness and satisfaction. The sukkah signifies the protection that the Lord will provide us with for the whole coming year. Though the actual sukkah may be small and relatively flimsy as compared to our homes, it nevertheless symbolizes faith, serenity and confidence in the eternity of Israel and its Torah.

The four species of vegetation that are an integral part of Sukkot reinforce our appreciation of the beauty of God's world. It reminds us that the world can be a Garden of Eden and we should endeavor not to destroy it or be expelled from it.

The different species represent the harmony of nature, the flash of its color and its built in symbiotic nature. Whereas pagans worshipped nature, Judaism stressed its role as being one of the great wonders of God's creation.

Abraham had it right when he stated that people wonder at the magnificence of a beautiful building but ignore the genius of the architect that designed it. Judaism, while always impressed by the wonder of the building itself, always looks intently to recognize and acknowledge the architect behind it.

Sukkot helps remind us of the necessity to always search for that architect in all of the facets of our lives and world.

Sukkot also reveals clearly our dependence upon Heaven for rain – for water. Without water in abundance, life cannot function and grow. The Torah tells us that the Lord sent us purposely into a land where water is a precious commodity. There are no great rivers or giant lakes that appear on the landscape of the Land of Israel. We are therefore dependent on the winter season's rains.

We pray on Sukkot for those rains to be abundant, gentle and saturating. Rain has a cleansing effect not only on the air we breathe but on the life spirit that exists within us. Hence its deep association with the joy of Sukkot.

Rain and water also symbolize Torah and purification. Moshe, in his final oration to Israel, states that his words of Torah should be felt as gentle rain and dew descending on the Holy Land. The prophet Yeshayahu compares Torah to water as does King David in Tehillim.

The holiday of Sukkot reinforces this connection with its own link to Simchat Torah, the day that marks the conclusion of this great and noble holiday period. For as obvious as it is that the Land of Israel cannot survive and prosper without water, so too the people of Israel will be unable to prosper and survive without an attachment to Torah, its commandments and values. The message of Sukkot is the perfect conclusion to the spirituality of Yom Kippur.

Succah: Strictly Under Divine Supervision

By: Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah:

The Jew dwells for seven days in a succah, booth. Needing a minimum of two and a half walls and organic material as its roof covering, the basic mitzvah is eating bread on the first night of Succos. All activities should be relocated to the succah during this festival (Leviticus 24:42-43)

Succos commemorates the Israelites' shelter – either the actual 'huts' in which the Jewish people dwelled or to the Ananei Hakovod, miraculous Clouds of Glory protecting them in the wilderness.

But it beggars belief why there is a festival to celebrate this miracle? And why should Succos follow in the wake of the Days of Awe?

By swapping his permanent building for a temporary booth exposed to the natural elements, the Jew affirms how he is, in truth, "strictly under Divine Supervision".

What Succos marks is not just simply their miraculous protection but how G-d lovingly enveloped the nascent nation under His protective shelter. Ever since their emergence as the Chosen People, after the Exodus, the Jew would be subject to a special constant Divine providence.

However this unique relationship forged between G-d and Israel almost disintegrated at the foot of Sinai. This was because of their treacherous disloyalty in worshipping the Golden Calf.

Only on Succos, explains the Vilna Gaon, did the Clouds of Glory which had departed because of their sin, return. That G-d allowed his Divine Presence to return and rest upon the Jewish nation, and their instruction to construct the Sanctuary, confirmed their full atonement. The restoration of the Clouds of Glory is the source for the joyous celebration of Succos, Zman Simchosenu, "time of our rejoicing". Succos is sequentially placed after the judgment and atonement of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

But with their repentance, G-d once again rested upon Israel. Of the three miracles in the wilderness – the manna, wellsprings of water and clouds of glory – only the latter was not essential for the nation's on-going survival. Instead, it was an expression of G-d's love and affection. And they, in turn, would take delight in His protection.

Into the succah the Jew goes.

It is on this festival, that the Jew's eyes are fixed upon the Heavens. He places his trust and reliance in G-d – and not in the security of physical structures or his financial assets.

The succah is the symbol of G-d is directly involved in every aspect of a Jew's life – just as He was, is and continues to be involved in their miraculous national survival against all odds through the pages of history. Where challenged and persecuted, the only fortress within which Israel can seek refuge is under G-d's wings.

It is the knowledge Israel is "strictly under Divine Supervision" which is the happiness celebrated on Succos.

Bullish Outlook

By: Rabbi Eliyahu Koffmann

Sukkos is a unique Yom Tov in so many ways, one of which is its karbanos (ritual offerings). While the number of rams and sheep sacrificed on each of Sukkos' seven days remained constant (2 rams, 14 sheep), the bulls were offered in varying quantities. Specifically, 13 bulls were sacrificed on day one, 12 on the second day, 11 on the third day, and so on. Over seven days, 70 bulls were sacrificed.

Chazal, our Sages of blessed memory, offer a fascinating insight into the "diminishing bulls." There are, according to the Talmud (Sukkah 55b), seventy nations of the world. The seventy bulls correspond to those seventy nations, and it was in the merit of these bulls that the nations flourished and succeeded. Regarding this, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar 684) quotes the verse (Tehillim/Psalms 109:4), "In place of my love - they hated me." "Rabbi Yehuda said: How foolish the nations are! They have lost, yet they know not what they have lost. When the Holy Temple stood, the Altar [with its seventy bulls] would bring them forgiveness. Now - who will bring them forgiveness? (Sukkah ibid.)"

Seemingly, the seventy bulls were a gesture of (largely unappreciated) generosity offered by the Jews on behalf of the nations. Yet Chazal (see Rashi, Bamidbar 29:18) also note that although the quantity of sheep (symbolizing the Jews) remained constant, the bulls were offered in diminishing quantities, which is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. How can we reconcile these two seemingly opposite ideas?

Perhaps both concepts are necessary: We wish the nations much success and prosperity. At the same time, we are concerned that their success and prosperity not "go to their heads," leading them to arrogance, pride, and irreverence, which can often be the precursor to anti-semitism. Therefore, we "weaken their resolve" by offering the bulls in diminishing quantities. Now that we have no Temple, the unparalleled prosperity of earlier days is no longer with us, nor them. On the other hand, nothing is left now to weaken their resolve and their natural inclination to hate the Jew for being different. (Need more be said?)

If we dig a little deeper, we may wonder why it is that Sukkos, among all the Yamim Tovim, was chosen to offer this token sacrifice on behalf of the nations?

Rav Aaron Kotler zt"l (Mishnas Rav Aaron vol.3 p.61) writes that he heard the following story from the holy Chafetz Chaim zt"l: In the times of the Gaon of Vilna, there was a famous convert, known as the Ger Tzedek (righteous convert) of Vilna. He came from an aristocratic family, and risked his life to become a Jew. He lived as a Jew in hiding for many years. By chance, however, he was recognized, and was taken prisoner and subjected to brutal torture in an effort to have him renounce his Judaism. But it was all for nought; the Ger Tzedek of Vilna had become a pious and committed Jew, and no amount of torture could change that. He was sentenced to death. Before putting him to death, his detainers had second thoughts about the brutal torture to which they had subjected him. They asked for his forgiveness. Otherwise, they feared, he would take his revenge in the World to Come.

"Let me tell you something," he told them. "It is written (Tehillim/Psalms 117:1-2), 'Praise

Hashem all the nations - praise Him, all the states! For His kindness has overwhelmed us! This seems contradictory: Why should the nations praise Hashem, if His kindness has overwhelmed us [i.e. the Jews]? (See Pesachim 118b which poses this question.) The answer, however, is simple. Right now, as things stand, it is impossible for me to forgive you for the barbaric and inhumane treatment you have given me. Yet worry not. Because after you kill me, my Jewish soul will ascend on High, and I will be so overwhelmed by the Almighty's kindness and love, that it will no longer be possible for me to bear a grudge against you. To the contrary, for every beating you gave me, I will experience infinite bliss and light in the World to Come!"

Rav Kotler explains: Sukkos is a period of extreme joy in the Jewish calendar. We sinned, we were judged, we were forgiven, and we've been given an invitation into the Almighty's private tent. In many ways, it must not have been easy for the Jews to offer sacrifices on behalf of the nations. These are the same nations that have persecuted, victimized, and exploited our nation for millennia. And now we are to beseech Hashem and offer sacrifices on their behalf? So Hashem says: First come into My tent. Sleep in My shelter. Let us rejoice together. And then, once you have come to feel My great love for you, you will be able to wholeheartedly do what needs to be done on their behalf, offering love in the place of hatred.

While there may be those who decry the aggression and militancy of our nation, the truth is obvious and self-evident. We are a peace loving nation. All we ask for - all we have ever asked for - is to be allowed exist as Jews, and serve Hashem in peace. In these difficult times, we beseech the Almighty that the moment may come that we may once again offer sacrifices on behalf of ourselves, and on behalf of the nations of the world; that we be so overwhelmed by His kindness, love, and goodness, that the bitterness and resentment in our hearts will cease to be recognizable. Ba'agalah u-vi'zeman kariv - may it come speedily, in our days.

Permanent Assets

By Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

The Tur (1) writes that the mitzvah (Divine command) to dwell in Succah booths derives from our forefather Yaakov (Jacob), whom the Torah says "built himself a house, and for his livestock he made succos (shelters)." (Beraishis/Genesis 33:17). What connection is there between the current festival and the huts Yaakov made for his animals?

Our Sages teach us that prior to Yaakov's struggle with the angel (ibid 32:25-33) he found himself alone, away from his family, retracing his steps to retrieve some small jars he left behind. It was then that the angel - Esau's guardian angel, Satan himself - wrestled with him. What is the connection between going back to retrieve the small jars and meeting this heavenly being?

"Yaakov remained alone for the sake of small jars: from here one sees that to the righteous, their possessions are dearer to them than their body, for they do not stretch out their hand to theft." (Talmud Chulin 91a) Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon (2) explains the central focus of a righteous person is his service of G-d. Thus, he spends only requisite time to make

a living to provide his family with the necessities and, of course, he does not earn his livelihood dishonestly. Every penny he has is hard earned and he knows that it is a Divine gift. He understands that every possession he owns is meant to facilitate his service to G-d. With this perspective, his possessions are very dear to him.

Tanna Devei Eliyahu expounds that the difference between Yaakov and Esav (Esau) was that Yaakov, even from the womb, wanted Olam Haba, the exclusively spiritual World to Come, whereas Esav pursued the pleasures of the physical world. The entire confrontation between Yaakov and Esav's angel is rooted in this concept. When Esav's guardian angel saw Yaakov retracing his steps to retrieve the jars, he thought that perhaps Yaakov was excessively invested in his possessions. He would then be able to overpower and destroy Yaakov, for Yaakov was "stealing" from Esav's portion. When the angel saw that Yaakov intended to retrieve only what he needed to help get to Olam Haba, the angel struck the socket of Yaakov's thigh, representative of his offspring. The angel could not overpower Yaakov but he could strike against his future generations.

To safeguard his future generations, Yaakov immediately taught his progeny to avoid Esav's pursuit of physical pleasures - and G-d gave us the festival of Succos to reinforce the lesson annually. He "built himself a house, and for his livestock he made shelters." He built himself a permanent structure as a place to study Torah, but temporary shelters for his possessions, to emphasize to all of us that our only true permanent possession is our G-d connectedness that we take with us to our spiritual eternity. Our material possessions of this world are simply a means toward that higher goal.

Putting the Squeeze on Sin

"It is found in the Midrash," the holy Rebbe of Belz used to say, "that there is a mountain just outside the Land of Israel called the Mountain of Faith. When Moshiach arrives, the Jews will encounter this mountain on the verge of entering the Land. They will stop there, and sing song to Hashem, and then they will enter the Holy Land."

Why, he asked, if they are already so close, would they not put off their song for a few more moments, in order that the song be sung in Israel, and not on the impure soil of the Diaspora?

The Torah, in commanding us to take the Four Species on Sukkos, writes (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:40), "You shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of a beautiful tree (Esrog), branches of a date palm (Lulav), braided tree branches (Hadasim), and brook willows (Aravos)." The Midrash (Tanchuma Emor 22) asks:

Why does the Torah refer to the "first day?" Isn't Sukkos on the fifteenth day (of Tishrei)? It is called "first," because it is the first day for the counting of sins.

The Tur (Orach Chaim 581) explains that on Yom Kippur we were absolved of our sins. Since then, we have been so busy getting ready for Sukkos that there was no time to sin. In this sense, Sukkos is the "first day that sins are counted," for the coming year.

Aside from the obvious discomfort some of us may feel at having squeezed-in a sin or

two over the past few days in seeming contravention of this principle, we might also ask why the Torah would go out of its way to mark the date from when the sin-tally commences. Is this cause for celebration? Also, why does the Midrash refer to the first day of the reckoning of sins, as opposed to the first day sins are committed?

The holy Kedushas Levi, R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov zt"l, explained that the Gemara (Yoma 86b) teaches that depending on the type of repentance (teshuva), different types of absolution are granted. One who does teshuva out of fear (of punishment), any intentional sins he has committed are given the status of accidental sins. There's still a blemish, it's just a lot smaller. One, however, who repents not out of fear but out of love for Hashem and extreme regret for having done something that displeased Him, not only are his sins completely forgiven - they are commuted to mitzvos!

At first glance, this concept seems difficult to understand. Forgiveness is something we can grasp; we express regret, remorse, we accept not to sin again, and we are forgiven. It's something we practice with our children and our friends all the time. While Divine forgiveness is far more complex, the concept is a familiar one. But what is the logic, and indeed where is the justice, in taking sins and converting them into mitzvos - thereby increasing the sinner's reward due to his having sinned!

When one repents out of fear for punishment, he wishes nothing more than to bury his sins beneath the ground and pretend they never happened. Teshuva me-ahava, repentance borne by love, has nothing to do with sweeping the dirt under the carpet. It's not even like giving the dirt a really good scrubbing. Love motivates the penitent to revisit his sins - time and time again - not to agonize over them, but rather to examine them and extract an important lesson; the extent of his desires, and the lengths he's willing to go to achieve them. The insight that can be gained by analyzing our least-auspicious moments has the potential to transform the passion and desire to sin into a holy fire that burns to study Torah and do mitzvos with more zest, energy, and enthusiasm than we may ever have realized had we never sinned. This is why (Berachos 34b), "Where the penitent stand, even the most righteous can't stand."

Perhaps, then, it is not that through teshuva out of love one's sins are per se converted to mitzvos gratis. Rather the teshuva me-ahava process elevates and rectifies the sins by allowing the ba'al teshuva to grow in his service of Hashem and achieve far greater levels than he would have otherwise.

During the Days of Awe, from the beginning of Elul until after Yom Kippur, the teshuva process is generally undertaken out of fear of the approaching Days of Judgement. We repent, but since it is driven by fear, we do not yet have the opportunity to take our pitfalls and turn them into merits. When Sukkos - "zeman simchaseinu/the time of our joy" arrives, we rejoice with the Yom Tov's special mitzvos like no other time of the year. It is only then that we are fully able to strive for the higher level of teshuva, through love, through which sins become credits. This is what the Midrash means, says the Kedushas Levi, when it refers to Sukkos as "the first day that sins are counted," i.e. it is the first time that we go back and "count up" our sins that we previously swept under the rug; we examine them, take out of them what we can, and hopefully become better Jews as a result.

The Ba'al Shem Tov uses this concept to explain the verse (Jeremiah 50:20), which, speaking about Moshiach's times, says, "In those days and at that time, says Hashem, the iniquity of Israel will be sought, but it will not be there, the transgressions of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will forgive those whom I allow to remain." If Israel's sins will be

forgiven, he asks, then why go looking for them? He answers: To convert them into mitzvos!

Yet this begs the question: If they're being sought in order to convert them into mitzvos, why does Scripture state that they won't be found?

"So remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and those years arrive of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them.' (Koheles/Ecclesiastes 12:1)" The Ramban (Devarim/Deuteronomy 30:6) writes that the "days of no pleasure" refers to the period of Moshiach. They are called this, because we will no longer desire worldly pleasure, and keeping the Torah will become easy and matter-of-fact. The verse warns us that we should remember our Creator in "the days of our youth" - before Moshiach's times, for now we have the opportunity to perfect ourselves and hopefully accumulate reward in the World to Come. Once Moshiach arrives, free-will will lapse, and that opportunity will be gone forever.

Perhaps this is what the Ba'al Shem Tov meant. In those times, when we no longer have to contend with the yetzer hara (perverse inclination), we would very much like to re-examine our previous sins, grow through them, and convert them into mitzvos. But we will have missed our chance. Once the challenge is gone, there is no longer a need, nor a benefit, in teshuva, and the opportunity to earn reward ceases to exist. It is a scary thought.

This is why, says the Belzer Rav, before entering the Land, we will stop to sing song on the Mountain of Faith. We realize that once we enter Israel in the Messianic state, there will be no more opportunities for trials and challenges, no more tests of our faith, which at times made us feel so bleak and distant. From then on, we will serve Hashem with clarity and vision. There will be no need to buffer our hearts against the onslaught of unanswered questions and doubts that plagued us in the past. And we realize that in a way, we will miss it. We will miss the opportunity to believe in Hashem even when life was so difficult. And we will take one last moment to sing to Hashem - from hearts full of faith on the Mountain of Faith - before we enter the Land of Clarity.

While we anxiously await Moshiach's arrival every day, this Sukkos it's important to remember the galus-specific opportunity of teshuva with love.

Shaking Up Our Priorities

By Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

R' Yitzchak's wife and children all knew there was no mitzvah quite as dear to their father as the mitzvah of Arba Minim - the four species taken on Sukkos; Esrog, Lulav, Hadasim, and Aravos. The Torah (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:40) describes the Esrog as, "P'ri Eitz Hadar - A magnificent fruit of a tree," and R' Yitzchak made it his business to settle for nothing less than the most magnificent. All year long he set aside a portion of his wages so that when the time came for the customary haggling to procure the rare and unique fruits, he could offer whatever it took. Not that R' Yitzchak was a haughty man; he gladly allowed anyone who asked to use his Esrog as well. "Will the Almighty not have equally great pleasure from others using such a beautiful Esrog as well?" he would say. He simply had an inextinguishable love for the once-a-year mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog.

One year, as he always did before Sukkos, R' Yitzchak gathered his belongings,

including all the rubles that he had put aside, and left home to travel to a nearby town where the Four Species could be bought. Travelling along the roadside, he stopped suddenly when he heard the sound of someone crying. Indeed, a Jewish man sat in a nearby field, head in his knees, crying and moaning bitterly. R' Yitzchak approached him. "Reb Yid, what's the matter?"

"Don't even ask," the Jew said, "a bittere pekel tzures - what a bitter portion the Almighty has dealt me! Woe is to me. I had one horse. That might not seem like much, but it was enough to support my family. It was a good horse. I rode it from town to town, delivering people's mail, parcels - whatever they needed. I didn't make a fortune, but we had what to eat, and we were happy. But today I awoke, and - woe is me - I found her dead. She must have passed away overnight. As it is, we live from hand to mouth. If I have to deliver by foot, I don't stand a chance of making a living. Woe is me!"

"Tell me," asked R' Yitzchak, "what would a new horse cost you. I'm sure she was a good horse, but there are other horses out there."

"Of course there are other horses, for someone who has 300 rubles to spend! It would take me almost a year to earn that kind of money! So you see, all is lost!"

Without further ado, R' Yitzchak took out his wallet and counted out 300 rubles, leaving for himself only the smallest sum from all the money he had so carefully put aside. He placed it in the pocket of the forlorn Jew, who had all the while never taken his head out from between his knees. Sticking his hand into his pocket, he was flabbergasted to find the entire sum he needed to buy himself a new horse. "What... What have you done. I... I never expected." Completely choked up with emotion, he barely managed to thank R' Yitzchak for his magnanimity. Little did he know, R' Yitzchak himself was not a rich man, and that he had just parted with the lion's share of his own savings.

That year R' Yitzchak had to settle for the plainest of Esrogim, much to the surprise and wonder of his friends and family. Despite their best attempts to find out, he told no one of what had come of his plans to purchase the most beautiful Esrog, nor of his savings, except to say, cryptically, that "the money was not lost - in fact it had just galloped off and was being put to very good use."

During Chol Ha-Moed (the Intermediate Days of Sukkos), R' Yitzchak travelled to Lublin to visit his Rebbe, the famed Choize (Seer) of Lublin. At the festive Yom Tov meal, the Choize remarked to his disciples, "The mitzvah of Arba Minim must be performed with great joy. We must thank Hashem that we all managed to perform the mitzvah of waving the Lulav and Esrog. When we wave the mitzvos, all the Heavenly spheres and realms are awakened, and much joy and goodness permeate the upper realms, ultimately reflecting that joy and goodness back down to this world where we can reap its benefits. We all shook the Lulav and Esrog, but, R' Yitzchak," he said, turning as he did so to face him, "to wave a horse - now that is a truly original and exceptional way to perform a mitzvah!"

The Sukkah of the holy R' Mottele Twersky zt"l was likely the most famous Sukkah in the Old City of Jerusalem. Its panels were made of the finest wood. When R' Mottele emigrated from Russia, he brought along the panels which he had inherited from his saintly ancestors. Its walls were full of inscriptions and carvings, and those who knew said that its drawings depicted combinations of letters and esoteric meanings which mortal eyes could not even discern. There were seven panels, corresponding to the seven Sefiros - or Heavenly spheres. It was said that one merely had to pass by the Sukkah, and one would be enveloped with an aura of holiness. It is told that R' Shmuel Salant, chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, once

passed by this Sukkah. Though already blind, he stopped in his tracks and remarked to his shamash, "I can sense the aroma of Gan Eden!"

How shocking it was, then, when in the year 5676 R' Mottele's Sukkah never went up. All Sukkos people talked and hypothesized about what could have come of the famed panels. R' Mottele himself had nothing to say. It was only months later that the elderly R' Yisroel Meir Gottlieb revealed the answer to the mystery, at a meal he hosted at his home. "Several months ago," he began, "My grandson Shlomo became critically ill. The doctors had all but given up hope. Thanks to Hashem's great mercy, he has in fact had a complete recovery. It is necessary that I tell you how this transpired.

"The doctors concurred that the only way to save the boy's life was to bathe him several times a day with hot water. But from where was one to squeeze a drop of kerosene or a branch of firewood in these bitter times? In my desperation, I turned to R' Mottele, pouring out my tale of woe. He immediately rushed and led me to the place where his marvellous Sukkah was stored, saying, 'Quickly, Yisrael Meir, take these boards and burn them for firewood!' At first I was appalled by the suggestion. But R' Mottele demanded that I obey by virtue of his rabbinical status. I had no choice. We burned the panels to prepare hot baths for the boy whose life was thereby saved."

R' Shaul Yitzchak Freund, who was also at the meal, was suddenly reminded of another story concerning the Sukkah. In 5668 the wealthy R' Heshel Genichovsky arrived in Jerusalem for a visit. R' Heshel was famous for collecting valuable Judaica. Having heard of the celebrated Sukkah, he offered R' Mottele a price that could have supported him and his family for the rest of their days. Yet R' Mottele refused to even hear of it. "Yet now," R' Shaul Yitzchak concluded, "when the mitzvah of saving a life presented itself, he did not hesitate for even a minute, but immediately gave his priceless Sukkah away to burn! How great is his love for a mitzvah!" (Adapted from *The Heavenly City* v. 2 pp. 156-178)

In a sense, Sukkos itself is about getting our priorities straight. Here we just finished with the Days of Judgement, hopefully with Hashem's blessings for a year of prosperity and success. Yet the first thing we do with our new-found blessings is to leave our comfortable homes for the temporary shade of the Sukkah. We thereby acknowledge that there can be no greater "success" in life that to do what Hashem really desires, even when it's not what's most comfortable. Sometimes we shake with the Esrog and sometimes we shake with the horse - the main thing is to strive to understand what Hashem wants of us in a given situation, not what we want or what makes us feel good. As the pasuk says (Mishlei/Proverbs 3:6), "In all your ways know Him; He will straighten your paths."

Somebody's a Nobody

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

One of the most joyous customs associated with the holiday of Sukkos is the celebration of Simchas Bais Hashoaevah. In the times of the Bais HaMikdash, a water libation accompanied the customary offerings. Simchas Bais Hashoaevah, literally, the Joy of the Water Drawing, was observed with a most ebullient celebration. It included a marvelously

varied array of harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets, among other instruments. The greatest sages and most pious of rabbis performed acrobatics and antics that would have normally been below their dignity. In fact, the sages in Tractate Sukkah 51, note that, "one who has not seen the celebration of the Bais Hashoaevo has never seen true joy."

Rambam (Maimonides) discusses this aspect of exuberance and adds that "one who in his insolence restrains himself from serving Hashem in a joyous manner is a sinner and fool." Yet the Rambam adds a caveat. "But this joy was not performed by the ignorant ones and by anyone who wanted (to dance). Only the great sages of Israel, the heads of Yeshivos and the Sanhedrin, the pious, the elders and men of righteous action would dance, clap, and sing in the Bais haMikdash on Sukkos. Everyone else, men and women would come to watch and listen" (Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:14).

This passage begs explanation. Why shouldn't everyone, even the most profane of men, sing and dance and make merry in celebration of the L-rd? Further what does the Rambam mean by not including "those who want to dance"?

Ultimately, anyone who ended up dancing, even the most pious of sages, obviously wanted to dance. What, then, does he Rambam mean when he said that this joy was not performed by anyone who wanted to dance? A classic story circulates in all Jewish humor anthologies.

Before the start of the Ne'eilah service, the holiest and final supplication of Yom Kippur, the rabbi rose from his seat and bolted toward the Holy Ark. He spread his hands toward heaven and cried out, "Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, I am a total nothing before you! Please inscribe me in the book of life!"

All of a sudden the chazzan (cantor) ran toward the Aron and joined the rabbi! "G-d Almighty," he shouted, "please forgive me, too, for I am truly a nothing before you!" There is an awed silence amongst the congregants.

The shammas (sexton) then followed suit. He, too, ran up toward the ark and in tearful supplication pronounced, "I too am a nothing!"

Mouths around the congregation dropped open. The President of the synagogue's men's club, Ed Goldstein, a large man, was also caught up in the fervor of the moment. Suddenly, he, too, bolted from his seat in the back, and lumbered toward the front of the shul. With great eagerness he prostrated himself in front of the Ark and cried out at the top of his lungs. "Forgive me Oh L-rd he shouts, for I too am a nothing! Suddenly a shout from the back of the synagogue was directed toward Goldstein's hulk of a figure. It shouted with incredulity. "Harrumph! Look who thinks he's a nothing!"

Rambam teaches us that whoever runs to dance and sing and make himself crazy is not truly lowering himself before the Almighty. If someone inherently likes to cavort wildly, then he is not dancing for the sake of lowering himself before the Almighty, rather he is having a wonderful time. When King David liberated the Aron (Ark of the Covenant) from the Phillistines, he danced in front it as if he were a lowly slave. When confronted by his wife, Michal, for dancing like a servant, he retorted. "I would make myself even lower before Hashem."

When rejoicing during the festivities we must bear in mind our true reasons for enthusiasm -- who we are, and why we dance. Because in order to be a nobody, you gotta be a somebody.

The First Day of the Rest of the Year

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

Simchas Torah's celebration of the completion of the Torah involves reading the final portion from the Torah, VeZos HaBeracha, and reading the account of the seven days of creation at the start of Beraishis (Genesis). The Torah's conclusion is primarily the blessings that Moshe gave the Nation of Israel immediately before his death. But while the Parsha starts, "And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, bestowed upon the children of Israel before his death." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:1), before delivering the actual blessings, he first reviewed the giving of the Torah by G-d on Mount Sinai. Why is this interjection necessary?

Nachalas Dovid (Rabbi Dovid of Tevil, primary disciple of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, disciple of the famed Rabbi Eliyahu, Gaon of Vilna) explains that blessings cannot simply enter our lives. Rather, blessings are requests for additional good to be added to the good one already has. The prior blessing acts as a vessel to receive and carry the additional blessing. Moshe wanted to bless the Children of Israel, but he first needed to awaken their cognizance of their existing blessings. Thus, Moshe started with our receiving the Torah, utilizing the Jewish nation's greatest blessing as the receiving agent for his blessings.

We all know we are supposed to "Count your blessings," but we do not usually consider that a person who only sees the negative parts of his life he has no vessel to carry any blessings that he may deserve. However, one who is constantly attuned to all the good that he does have can receive even more, for now he has a "vessel" in which to carry them.

The holiday of Simchas Torah is a day to rejoice in the completion of the Torah. But it is also the completion of the cycle of holidays with which the Jewish year starts. We now appreciate the gifts G-d has given us: a renewed relationship with Him from Rosh Hashanah, a new lease on life and all of life's accoutrements on Yom Kippur, and a new sense of trust in our Heavenly Father from Succos. Today we celebrate our manifold blessings: we savor the blessings of these past three weeks, and with them we ready ourselves to receive the bounty G-d has in store for us for the coming year.

Reb Yosef Asher's Tune

Rabbi Eliyahu Koffmann

Anyone who has ever participated in the hakafos of the Bobover Chassidim on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah has likely noticed that while the niggunim (tunes) sung for the first six hakafos may vary, the seventh and final hakafah is invariably conducted to the accompaniment of the same, unusual niggun. I'd love to describe this unique and unforgettable niggun, but the print medium somehow defies adequate description of a tune. [Perhaps, though, there is a way - more about that later.] What is the history behind this

special niggun? Once, the Bobover Rebbe Shlita (may he have a complete recovery from his illness, together with all the sick of Israel) told the following amazing story:

Reb Yosef Asher Brinner of Lemberg z"l was one of the close disciples of the first Bobover Rebbe, R' Shlomo zt"l. He was renowned among the chassidim for his devout worship of Hashem and his exceptional and elevated character. In his older years, he fulfilled a lifelong dream by moving to Eretz Yisrael. Even so, from time-to-time he would make the arduous journey from Israel back to Europe in order to spend time in the presence of his Rebbe.

On one of his trips back, he brought with him a niggun - an ancient tune sung by the elder chassidim of Yerushalayim - and taught it to the Bobover Chassidim. The niggun became popular among the chassidim, and from then on one could on occasion hear what became fondly known as "R' Yosef Asher's niggun" in the courts of Bobov.

Once - Simchas Torah before the seventh hakafah - the Rebbe turned to the chassidim in charge of the tunes for the hakafos and told them, "Sing R' Yosef Asher's niggun!" (This was some time after R' Yosef Asher had already passed on.) Although the Rebbe always danced the hakafos with great energy and enthusiasm, it was evident to the chassidim that the seventh hakafah that night was something special - the Rebbe danced with all his might before Hashem, displaying tremendous passion and intensity.

The following morning, Reb Avraham gabbai was one of the first to enter the beis ha-midrash. Excitedly, he called over the few chassidim who were there: "You're not going to believe what I dreamed last night after the hakafos: Reb Yosef Asher came to me and told me that he must get in to see the Rebbe immediately. The attendants, however, told him that the Rebbe was extremely busy then, and it was not possible to interrupt him.

"Not to be deterred, Reb Yosef Asher began searching, and somehow managed to find a hidden entrance into the Rebbe's library which was unlocked. He went in to the Rebbe and spoke with him privately. When he came out, he said to me:

"R' Avraham - I am deeply grateful to the Rebbe for singing my niggun last night at the hakafos. It was a great kindness to my neshama!"

Just as Reb Avraham gabbai finished relating his dream, Reb Yisrael Yitzchak entered the beis ha-midrash. "You're not going to believe what I dreamed last night," he told the chassidim who had just finished listening to Reb Avraham gabbai's dream. "Reb Yosef Asher Brinner came running towards me with great speed. As he approached, he said to me: 'R' Yisrael Yitzchak, I owe a tremendous yasher-koach ("thank-you") to the Rebbe! You have no idea to what extent my soul was elevated in the Heavenly realms as a result of the Rebbe singing my niggun during the hakafos last night!"

Soon after, a third chassid entered the beis ha-midrash; he too had seen Reb Yosef Asher in his dream last night, and heard from him the great ascent his soul had received in Heaven as a result of the singing of his niggun. From then on, the singing of Reb Yosef Asher's ancient Yerushalmi niggun for the final hakafah became a time-honoured custom in the courts of Bobov.

Oh, by the way, about the niggun - if you'd really like to hear it, you're welcome to join us for our hakafos on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah!

Not Competition, Composition!

Rabbi Label Lam

There's something sweet and warm about sleeping in a Sukkah at night tucked under a layer of blankets, stars and shy moon peeking between the branches above. The little children can't stop squirming and giggling with excitement. It's too fabulous, the feeling of getting away with such an easy Mitzvah. It's like getting paid to play baseball or eat ice cream.

To the mature mind and graying beard it seems a little eerie to be lying on one's back, in a flimsy box, staring into the night sky. One can't help but wonder if this temporary hut is conspiring with the requirements of the day to drop a heavy message at our doorstep.

It's through the lens of the bramble and branches atop the Sukkah and the special readings that certain profound lessons for life can begin to come into rich focus. We read the words of that person reputed to have been the wisest of all men, King Solomon, in the book of Koheles.

There he states the case for existential nausea, "Futility of futilities! - said Koheles-Futility of futilities! All is futile! What profit has man from all his labor that he toils under the sun?" (Koheles 1:2-3) We could be depressed and be excused if as the song goes "that's all there is!"

The Dubner Maggid offered the following Parable to make more vivid the human condition according to King Solomon. There was a group of blind people on a tour. They became separated from their leader. A jokester approached them and played a cruel trick.

He said aloud, "Here is a bag of gold coins for you to divide between you, amongst the members of the group." He gave no one a single coin. In a few moments, each one became suspicious of everyone else for harboring what he felt was justly his. A huge fight erupted and their energies were tragically wasted in search of nonexistent coins and such. Rabbi Dessler describes in his treatise "On Kindliness" having once witnessed a pack of wolves tearing and bloodying each other over an unclaimed carcass. In the end, the snow was covered in blood and they were all too wounded to enjoy the prize. What a waste of effort! What a waste of life! No winners! All losers!

A few weeks ago my eight-year old daughter came home from the first day of school and asked my wife with a sense of urgency, "What's competition?" My wife spent the next few minutes defining the word and the mechanics of the concept. "When there are limited resources, people will tend to compete for a slice of the pie. Sometimes it's good. It provides an incentive to excel. Sometimes it's not beneficial, when people act desperately and harm others on the way to their goal." In the middle of her diatribe, my wife interrupted herself and asked, "Sarah, why do you want to know?" She answered, "My teacher said I need a competition notebook!" "Sarah!" chuckled my wife, "Not competition, composition!" All was not for naught!

In the end, concludes King Solomon, in the final analysis, everything counts. "Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for this comprises the whole man. Every deed-G-d will bring to judgment, even on all the hidden- to determine if it's good or if it's bad." (Koheles 12:13-14)

With a Mitzvah mentality, the chilling sense of forlornness furthered by studying the cracks in the Sukkah where the cold gets in can be cured. The feeling of being totally enveloped in a Mitzvah warms better than a bundle of blankets. The chuckling of the children is not so childish as it once seemed. With whom are we fighting a whole day? In a composed and sober state of mind it's real and clear. There's no shortage of Mitzvos to be done here. Nobody's goodness takes away from anyone else's. Each only adds and multiplies benefits for all. The Sukkah helps us to focus upon what a wolf could never know, "Not competition, composition!"

Just Desserts (& the Penultimate Correction)!

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Talmud in Tractate Avodah Zarah talks about the future. It details for us a scenario that will occur after the final redemption, when the G-d of the Jews and His Torah are known and accepted by all of mankind. The entire world will see the great reward meted to the small nation that endured an incessant exile while following the Torah scrupulously. Then the idol-worshippers from other nations will line up before G-d and complain, "what about us?" Had we been given the Torah we, too, would surely have kept it! Why are you only rewarding the Jewish people?" The Talmud tells us that G-d makes a deal. "All right," He tells them. "I'll give you one easy mitzvah. If you observe it correctly, fine. However, if you do not, then your complaints are meaningless.

The Talmud tells us He will give them the mitzvah of Sukkah. G-d will then take out the sun in all its glory and the protection of the Sukkah will be no match for its rays. These idol-worshippers, predicts the Talmud, will kick the walls of the Sukkah and flee in disgust.

There are many mitzvos in the Torah. 613 to be exact. And there are quite a number of difficult ones. Some are conducive to despair and disheartenment without a broiling sun. Why, then, was the mitzvah of Sukkah chosen to be the cause celebre that differentiates our commitment to that of an idolator?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in his first book of the Magid Series tells the story of a Reb Avraham who was about to enter a restaurant one late spring afternoon. Upon entering, he noticed a familiar vagrant Jew, known to all as Berel the beggar, meandering outside.

Reb Berel, rumor had it, was a formidable Torah scholar back in the old country, but had his life shattered physically and emotionally by Nazi atrocities. He was a recluse, no one knew exactly where or how he lived: but he bothered no one, and not too many people bothered with him.

Reb Avraham asked the loner to join him for a meal. He was about to make a business trip up to Binghamton and figured that he might as well prepare for the trip with more than a hot meal - he would begin it with a good deed.

Reb Berel gladly accepted the offer; however, when it came time to order, he asked for nothing more than two baked apples and a hot tea. Reb Avraham's prodding could do nothing to increase the poor man's order. "All I need are two baked apples and a steaming tea," he insisted.

Reb Avraham's trip to Binghamton was uneventful until the rain and the darkness began to fall almost simultaneously. As if dancing in step, the darker it got, the heavier the deluge fell. All Reb Avraham remembered was the skidding that took him over the divider and into oncoming traffic on Route 17 in Harriman, New York. He came to shortly after two tow trucks had pulled his wrecked car from a ditch and lifted him to safety. Refusing hospitalization, he was driven to a nearby motel that was owned by the Friedmans, a Jewish couple who were readying the place for the summer migrations.

Mr. Friedman saw the battered Reb Avraham and quickly prepared a comfortable room for him. His wife quickly prepared a little something for him to eat. She brought it out to a shocked and bewildered Reb Avraham. On her serving tray were two baked apples and a glass of steaming tea.

When the Jews left Egypt, they had nothing to look at in the vast desert but faith. They built simple huts, almost in declaration: "Hashem we will do ours, we are sure You will do yours." And those simple huts, those Sukkos, protected them from the heat, the cold, the wind, and the unknown. Hashem tells the prophet Jeremiah to tell his folk, "I remember the kindness of your youth as you followed Me in an unsowed desert." (Jeremiah 2:2)

Perhaps when the final redemption arrives, it will again be the simple Sukkah that will stand as the protectorate and advocate of the People who stood for 2,000 years in the face of idolators, who invited the Jews to join them... or die. So, when we enter the Sukkah this year, let us remember that it is only a small Sukkah stop on a long journey home. And when we arrive there, the Sukkah will be there once again to greet us as it was more than 3,300 years ago in the Sinai Desert. After all, it's nice to be served at the end of a 2,000-year-long journey with just desserts.

Sukkah - Finding the Real You

In huts (Sukkos) you shall dwell for seven days. (Vayikra 23:42)

Sukkos, the Festival of Huts, commemorates the shelters Hashem provided for the Jewish nation when they left Mitzrayim (Egypt) and entered the Wilderness (Midbar). Yet we may ask: What is really so noteworthy about these temporary booths that they deserve everlasting recognition? Normally one commemorates an event of distinction or inspiration, perhaps a miracle, but why commemorate the seemingly insignificant huts used by the 'leavers of Mitzrayim'?

To understand this, we must realize that Yetzias Mitzrayim/the Exodus from Egypt is significant on two levels. Simply, Yetzias Mitzrayim was our freedom from bondage. As we say in the Pesach Haggadah, "And had the Holy One, Blessed be He, not removed us from Egypt, we and our children would [still] be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt."

Yetzias Mitzrayim, however, was more than just freedom from physical bondage. It was also our release from spiritual bondage. Not simply that the Jews in Egypt were not free to practice their religion openly - that is likewise a result of physical bondage. Rather the Jews in Mitzrayim found themselves so steeped in pagan culture that they were unable to free themselves from the throes of their own yetzer hara/evil disposition. As Chazal, our Sages, describe it: They had sunken to the 49th level of tumah/impurity. Hashem, in taking them out

of Mitzrayim, removed from them the shackles and chains of their own immorality , so that they could begin to serve Him and receive the Torah.

Thus Yetzias Mitzrayim carries for us two distinct meanings: It commemorates our release from both physical and spiritual bondage.

This second type of Yetzias Mitzrayim is in fact somewhat of an ongoing process. Our release from physical bondage was a one-time deal - it has lasted to this very day. But spiritual bondage as we have explained it - the spiritual limitations one experiences through captivity to his own physical/material/base desires - is a slavery from which most of us have yet to attain our ultimate freedom.

Everyone's yetzer hara is different. But everyone knows that certain aspects of his character prevent him from achieving the spiritual heights to which he aspires. For some it may be laziness. For others pride, anger, lust, overindulgence, lack of self-confidence, shallowness, etc. We struggle with these and other types of spiritual bondage every day.

Then comes Yom Kippur. The one day of the year where everyone tastes a bit of freedom from his yetzer hara. We don't eat, drink, or indulge in other pleasures - basically all we do is daven (pray) and spend our day re-connecting with Hashem, from Whom we have drifted throughout the year. It is a day, if you will, of Yetzias Mitzrayim - each person's release from the bondage of his own disposition.

So what do we do after experiencing a day that so uplifts our spirits? A day of freedom from the physical desires and passions which so often cause us to sway from the straight path? It is written in Shulchan Aruch (624:5), "One should begin building his Sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur." We build a Sukkah. Simply explained, we do this to go straight from one mitzvah into the next.

But there's more. Sometimes, Yom Kippur sends us into an identity crisis: Is this the real me? I mean, this is all very well one day a year - a day devoid of all the physical pleasures and yetzer haras I'm used to - but that's all. It can't be the real "me". I am human, and have certain limitations and weaknesses which just can't be avoided. Aren't I?

Therefore, says the Sanzer Rav (Rabbi Chaim Halberstam z"l, Divrei Chaim p. 20), the Torah instructs us to build a Sukkah. The Sukkah is a temporary dwelling place; an abode devoid of all the luxuries and comforts to which we are accustomed. Yet this hut is to become our dwelling place. "Ba-sukkos teshvu, In Sukkos (huts) you shall *dwell*," as the Gemara describes it: One must dwell in his Sukkah as he would in his primary residence (Tractate Sukkah 27a). The Torah is sending us a message: This is where you really belong. This is the real you! The "you" of Yom Kippur. The "you" minus the bad habits and the focus on materialism. The "you" for whom a simple Sukkah - lacking in physical grandeur yet rich in spiritual qualities and infused with Hashem's Presence - is more than enough. It's where you really belong.

As we sit this Yom Tov in our Sukkos, surrounded by the "Shade of the Faithful One," perhaps it's appropriate to allow our thoughts to drift back to the sublime sanctity of Yom Kippur, to remind ourselves how right it felt to spend our day in total dedication to Hashem, without all the frills and luxuries of life in the Western world. And to absorb the holiness that permeates the walls of every Jew's Sukkah. And to remember - this is where I really belong.

The Name of the Game

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

And this is the blessing which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death. (Devarim 33:1)

Another brisa taught: On the seventh of Adar Moshe died and on the seventh of Adar Moshe was born. How do we know he died on the seventh of Adar? Because it says, "And, Moshe, the servant of G-d died there" (Devarim 34:5), and, it is written, "The Children of Israel cried for Moshe for thirty days in the glen of Moav" (Devarim 34:8), and, it says, "And it came to be after Moshe, the servant of G-d, died " (Yehoshua 1:1), and, it is written, "Moshe my servant has died -- arise and cross over (Yehoshua 1:2), and it is written, "Go through the midst of the camp and command the people saying, 'Prepare provision for yourselves, for, in another three days you will cross this Jordan'" (Yehoshua 1:11), and, it is written, "The people ascended from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month" (Yehoshua 4:19). Go and count backwards thirty-three days, and you will see that Moshe died on the seventh of Adar (Rashi: They are the ten days of Nissan and twenty-three days of Adar, which brings us to the seventh of Adar). How do we know that Moshe was born in the seventh day of Adar? Because it says, "I am 127 years old today, and I am no longer able to go out and to come" (Devarim 31:2); the Torah did not need to say "today" -- why did the Torah say "today"? To teach that The Holy One, Blessed is He, sits and fills the days of the righteous to the day, and to the month, as it says, "The days of your life I will fill" (Shemos 23:26). (Kiddushin 38a)

That's a lot of Talmud just to prove that Moshe died the same day he was born, 120 years later to the moment, because, the concept of G-d giving tzaddikim fullness of days is there regardless of the above discussion. Who needs it, if the Torah's main emphasis is not history, but morality?

I don't know. But, what I DO know is that part of Moshe's "blessing" to the Jewish people in death was the fact that he died on the exact same day as he was born, for, that reality played a major role in the redemption of the Jewish people 920 years later. Behold, the Talmud reveals:

It was taught: Since the lot fell in the month of Adar he (Haman) was very happy, and he said, "The lot fell for me in the month that Moshe died!" but he did not know that on the seventh of Adar Moshe died, and, on the seventh of Adar, Moshe was born. (Megillah 13b)

This, of course, is part of the Talmudic discussion that says, before G-d inflicts punishment on the Jewish people He makes sure the "cure" already exists. Hence, in keeping with this idea, Moshe could not have died on the seventh of Adar without first having been born on the seventh of Adar, since it was the month of his death that provided Haman with the impetus to destroy the Jewish people.

Thus, Moshe's birth was the source of the Jewish people's salvation from Haman's annihilistic plans, which, perhaps, is why it was kept such a mystery in the Torah. Furthermore, if you recall Moshe's birth, the Talmud comments:

It is written here, "... And she (Yocheved) saw that he (Moshe) was good ..." (Shemos 2:2) and there it is written, "G-d saw the light, that it was good." (Bereishis 1:4). (Sotah 12a)

The Talmud is setting up a comparison between Moshe and the Hidden Light of creation, since they are both described using the same word: good. In other words, it is not incidental that the Torah refers to Moshe as being "good," but an indication that there was something special about him from the moment he was born, as the Talmud first explained:

The Chachamim say that when Moshe was born, the entire house filled with light. (Sotah 12a)

Perhaps, then, the following from the Megillas Esther may have added significance:

For the Jews there was light (Esther 8:16)

Which light? The light of Moshe Rabbeinu's birth, which was the key to washing away the darkness of Haman and Golus Bavel, which became a powerful source of redemption once it became the same day on which Moshe died. It is true: Tzaddikim are greater in death than during their lifetimes (Sanhedrin 47a).

And this is the blessing which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death. (Devarim 33:1)

As most people know, the holidays of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are on the same day in Eretz Yisroel. Now, normally we say, "One should not combine joyous events" (Moed Katan 8b), which, would necessitate that Simchas Torah come on the next day as it is outside of Eretz Yisroel, perhaps, just like Rosh Hashanah is also celebrated over two days in Eretz Yisroel.

But they ARE on the same day, in the end -- and the reason is simple: it is all ONE simchah! (Not to mention, this year, Shabbos as well!!!)

For, Shemini Atzeres celebrates the special relationship the Jewish people have with G-d (see Rashi on Vayikra 23:36); Simchas Torah celebrates the special relationship the Jewish people have with Torah. And, the Zohar ties it all up rather nicely by stating: The Holy One, Blessed is He, and Torah are one; one who merits a portion of Torah merits the Name of The Holy One, Blessed is He (Zohar 90b). Elsewhere, the Zohar says, "there is no Torah except for The Holy One, Blessed is He."

Thus, the day on which both Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are celebrated is the time that both relationships ought to dovetail into one, where the grasping and cherishing of Torah is also the cherishing of one's relationship with G-d. The feeling of love of G-d is the fulfillment of the holiday of Shemini Atzeres; the feeling of love of Torah is the fulfillment of the holiday of Simchas Torah. The feeling of both at the same time is the fulfillment of what it means to be part of the Jewish people in totality.

Because, it is very possible to feel one and not the other. For example, there are some people who love Torah and are committed to it, but, have difficulty staying focused on G-d, especially when it comes to prayer. Whereas learning Torah for them is an experience, an overwhelming one at that, praying to G-d is a ritual, an underwhelming one at that.

Other people love to pray to G-d, and pray to G-d, and pray to G-d, in one form or another. That is a wonderful thing, for, the Talmud calls prayer one of those things that are at the highest heights (Brochos 6b). However, the Talmud also calls prayer something of This World, and, Torah, something for the sake of the World-to-Come (Shabbos 10a), since the

former often deals with crises in everyday life.

Obviously we are talking about a balance, one that is suitable to the individual. There will always be some people within Klal Yisroel who will be better suited to prayer than learning, and some people better suited to learning than prayer. It all depends, as the Arizal explains, upon the "root" of one's soul. There will also be people who will excel at both, and some who will excel at neither.

However, EVERYONE can love both with all of their heart; that is, everyone can feel tremendous love of G-d and of His Torah, AND MUST. Very often, when that is the case, prayer becomes a more uplifting experience, as does the learning of Torah, no matter where one's soul is rooted. For, whether it is tefilah or Torah, both have one goal in mind: feeling the Presence of G-d everywhere we are, no matter what we are doing, or when. It's all avodas Hashem -- service of G-d.

Never mind the fact that, outside of Israel, the two holidays fall on separate days. The message is the same for all Jews, everywhere, and, at all times. Perhaps, if you think about it, this is the underlying meaning of the closing parshah of the Torah, which, we read specifically on Simchas Torah:

And this is the blessing which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death. (Devarim 33:1)

The blessing is, really, the Torah that Moshe Rabbeinu taught us and with which he left us. It came from a "man of G-d," someone for whom talking to G-d never was secondary to learning and teaching His Torah. It ought to be the same, at least, for us.

Moshe was 120 years old when he died. There never again arose a prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom G-d spoke to face-to-face, [and who could perform] all the signs and wonders which G-d sent him to do in the land of Egypt, against Paroah, all his servants and all his land, or any of the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moshe dis-played before all the eyes of Israel. (Devarim 34:7-12)

That's not all the world lost with the death of Moshe Rabbeinu, as the Talmud explains:

Rabbah son of Rava, and some say, Rebi Hillel son of Rebi Wols, said: From the days of Moshe until Rebi (Yehudah HaNasi), we have not found Torah and greatness (wealth) in one place (a single individual). Is that so? There was Yehoshua? (No,) there was (also) Elazar (who was equal to him). There was Elazar? (No,) there was (also) Pinchas. There was Pinchas? (No,) there were the Elders (as well). There was Shaul? (No,) there was (also) Shmuel. Did not Shmuel die (during his lifetime)? We're talking about over an entire lifetime. What about Dovid? There was Ira the Ye'iri. But he died (during his lifetime)? We're talking about over an entire lifetime. There was Chizkiah? No, there was (also) Shevna. There was Ezra? (No,) there was (also) Nechemiah. Rav Acha son of Rava said: I can add that from the time of Rebi until the time of Rav Ashi, we have not found Torah and greatness in one place. (Gittin 59a)

And, the truth is, even this doesn't tell the whole story. What was really lost with the death of Moshe Rabbeinu was a single individual capable of bringing the redemption, single-

handedly. According to tradition, Moshe's spiritual greatness was so superlative that he was able to tap into spiritual energy sources so powerful that he could have, had the Jewish people been ready and willing, ushered in the Final Redemption right then and there.

This was because The level of Moshe Rabbeinu was from the Ohr HaGanuz itself -- the Hidden Light of creation. Therefore, says the Talmud, the Torah was given through him, as well as all chidushei Torah (Torah novella) throughout time.

This is the way the more esoteric side of Torah phrases it:

... He was from the "Mystery of the Upper Emanation" of Adam HaRishon, which was withdrawn as a result of the sin. Had the Jewish people not sinned [with the golden calf, then] Moshe would have entered the land and would have been in a position to return the world to perfection from before the [Adam's] sin. (Dayah 2:277b).

Because, as the Arizal explains, it all comes down to soul "roots," that is, the level within the Sefiros from which one's soul originates, and Moshe's descended from the heights of the sefirah, Chochmah. This is why the Talmud made the comparison between the light Moshe emanated at birth and the Hidden Light of creation. It took such a high-level soul to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt, and, according to the Arizal, it will take such a high-level soul to redeem the world once again, in the Days of Moshiach.

A Song of Ascents -- by Dovid. If not for G-d Who had been with us --let Israel say it now! If not for G-d Who was with us, when men rose against us, then, they would have swallowed us alive, when they were angry with us. Then the waters would have inundated us, the current would have surged across our soul. Then, the treacherous waters would have surged across our soul. (Tehillim 124:1-4)

Here, Dovid HaMelech is giving praise to G-d for saving the Jewish people from its enemies throughout all the generations. As the Haggadah says, "In every generation, our enemies rise to destroy us"

And why are we still here? It is a question that baffles any historian who takes our history to heart, especially given that the Jewish people are not the warrior-type. We have our giants and our militarily-adept types, but, for the most part, we are made up of Ya'akov Avinus -- without the hands of Eisav.

But, then again, who needs the hand of Eisav when he has the hand of G-d?! G-d is our lifesaver Who saves us from drowning in the tumultuous seas of world history, and hopefully, b'ezras Hashem (G-d willing), from this drowning sensation we are experiencing today. In fact, it was written a couple hundred years ago:

"This is the language of the Bais Yechiel:

In the book, 'Emes L'Ya'akov,' on the stories of the Talmud, by Rabbeinu Ya'akov of Lissa, the author of 'Nesivos Mishpat' and 'Chavas Da'as,' he wrote an interpretation of the stories of Rabbah bar Bar Chanah. One of the stories has Rabbah bar Bar Chana sailing with a group of men at sea, and docking at what they thought was dry land. They went onto this island and began to cook and bake there. In reality, they were on a large fish, and, when the fish felt the heat of the cooking, it turned over. The entire group fell into the sea, and, if the boat had not been close by, they would have drowned.

The author of the 'Nesivos' explained:

Rabbah bar Bar Chanah saw with ruach hakodesh (holy spirit, a minor form of prophecy) that, in the End-of-Days, Israel would rule over a particular people, whom they will believe to have no hope of ever overcoming them. Therefore, Israel will humble them, and when this people become troubled enough, they will 'turn the plate on its face' and turn against Israel. If Moshiach is not forthcoming, then Israel will 'drown' from all its troubles.

I showed this account of the 'Nesivos' to my teacher, Rebi Nachum Partzovitch, zt"l, immediately after the Yom Kippur War. He told me that these words were written with ruach hakodesh, since, at the time of the Nesivos, it would only be possible through prophecy to say that Israel would rule over any people, something incomprehensible at that time.

My teacher, HaGaon Rebi Nachum, zt"l, told me a story of how Rebi Boruch Ber, zt"l (1866-1939) from Kaminetz, every time he mentioned the name of the Nesivos, would refer to him as 'The Holy Nesivos,' something he was not accustomed to do for any other gaon of his time, except for Rebi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837)"

Are treacherous waters surging across our soul?

We would do well to learn the rest of this short little, but powerful psalm:

Blessed is G-d, Who did not give us as prey for their teeth. Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunters' trap; the snare broke and free are free(6-7)

When is this the case? When Our help is through the Name of G-d, Maker of Heaven and Earth. (8)

Do you think we'll EVER learn?

The World To Come

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This Shabbos we begin the celebration of the seven days of Sukkos, followed by the holiday of Shmini Atzeres on the following Shabbos.

The Tur Shulchan Orech [Orech Chayim 417] writes that the 'shalosh regalim' {three holidays} each correspond to one of the Forefathers. Pesach {Passover} corresponds to Avrohom Avinu. The travelers/angels visited him on Pesach and the cakes he asked Sarah to prepare for them were actually matzos. Shavuos, the holiday of receiving the Torah, corresponds to Yitzchok Avinu. The shofar that sounded at Har Sinai was from the ram that was sacrificed in place of Yitzchok. Succos corresponds to Yaakov Avinu as it says by Yaakov that he built Sukkos.

Shmini Atzeres, often mislabeled as the eighth day of Sukkos, is actually a holiday in and of itself. The passuk {verse} refers to it as "atzeres"--a gathering [Bamidbar 29:35]. Rashi there explains, based on the Medrash, that during Sukkos seventy offerings were brought. These corresponded to the seventy nations of the world. When that was completed, Hashem asked that we remain for an additional day. At my brother-in-law's wedding, after all of the guests left, just the immediate family remained for a small, intimate celebration. That is the atzeres, the gathering, of Shmini Atzeres.

The Zohar teaches that Shmini Atzeres corresponds to Yosef HaTzaddik. We need to understand the connection between this holiday and Yosef.

"You have been shown to know that Hashem is Elokim {All-powerful}, ain ode milvado {there is none beside Him}.[Devarim 4:35]" The Medrash on this explains that there is none beside Him, even in the 'chalal' {space or void} of this world.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that the 'chalal' refers to the free-will that we have in this world. That free-will appears as a 'space', as a void, wherein man has power even beyond that of Hashem. That is where the forces of evil seem to be able to act.

That is what the Medrash is teaching. Even in that area which appears to be a void, Hashem is in absolute control--there is none beside Him.

This is included in the prayer of Shmini Atzeres. After experiencing the judgment of Rosh Hashana and the atonement of Yom Kippur, followed by the intimacy of Sukkos, we are now ready on Shmini Atzeres to recognize this concept of "ain ode milvado {there is none beside Him}."

This full realization, in its blinding clarity, will only truly be reached in the World to Come. There one will understand how even those seemingly incomprehensible events of this world all fit neatly into the Master's master-plan. All was the clear will of Hashem.

However, on Shmini Atzeres one can attain a certain internalization of this 'ain ode milvado.' The number seven connotes the natural cycle. Eight rises over and supersedes the natural. The holiday of the eighth day, Shmini Atzeres, affords us the potential to glimpse at the 'natural world', as if we are above and beyond it, and to understand it in a different way.

With this we can understand the connection of Shmini Atzeres to Yosef. On the passuk: "And no man stood there as Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers [Breishis 45:1]," the Zohar teaches that this is both a reference to Shmini Atzeres and to the World to Come.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that it's the intimacy that Bnei Yisroel experience on Shmini Atzeres which is a taste of the intimacy of the World to Come that is alluded to in this passuk of Yosef.

The entire episode of Yosef and his brothers affords us a glimpse of the clarity of the World to Come. The brothers were confused. They had simply come to purchase food in Egypt and seemingly out of nowhere, everything that could go wrong, does. Nothing makes any sense... until Yosef reveals his true identity. At that point, they comprehend that the same person that they thought was trying to harm them was actually their brother trying to help them.

So too, in the World to Come, we'll understand all of the difficulties that were encountered during this long, long exile. It appeared that we were under the subjugation of the nations but in fact, we never left the hand of Hashem. Ain ode milvado {there is none beside Him}--even in the 'chalal' of the world...

A ray of the clarity we'll have in the World to Come pierces through the dark, confusion of this world on Shmini Atzeres, the holiday of Yosef HaTzaddik.

A Simple, Peaceful Abode

By Rabbi Naphtali Koff

Imagine the following scenario. One cool October afternoon, a religious man goes to visit his Torah observant therapist to discuss his many stresses. He is uneasy with his material lot, and feels the strain of keeping up with all of the proverbial Goldbergs in his life. It troubles him to see others in his community who live in larger, more beautiful homes, drive fancier cars, and go on more elaborate vacations. He is pained to see the names of these same people appear on dedication plaques and as dinner honorees, while he can barely eke out a small contribution. The therapist listens closely. After much thought and reflection, he directs his suffering client, not to medication or further counseling, but to a Sukkah. "There", he says, "you will find relief from your troubles." One could envision the confused and troubled look on the face of the client, especially after he receives his bill!

Yet, that is exactly one of Hashem's primary remedies to such feelings of material inadequacy.

Every evening during Maariv we ask Hashem to "spread upon us your Sukkah of peace." One might wonder, what is the relationship between the Sukkah and peace? We understand that the act of sitting (and even sleeping) in a Sukkah evokes memories of Hashem's miraculous preservation of the Jewish people during their forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert following their exodus from Egypt.

You shall dwell in Succos (booths) for seven days...so that your generations will know that I made the people of Israel to dwell in Succos, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 23:42-43)

But how does such commemoration bring us to a deeper sense of peace and tranquility?

In truth, there is much more to the mitzvah of Sukkah than a simple historical commemoration. Sitting in the Sukkah affords us the opportunity to take a step back from the competitive rat race in which we live, and come to a fuller and more accurate understanding of what this world is really all about.

Never has this been truer than in our times. Our world is that of Madison Avenue, where the marketing of luxury products continues unabated, echoing one basic message: Without this, your life is incomplete. Of course, depending on the target audience, "this" may refer to anything from toys and dolls (American Girl, mind you), to designer clothing, to oversized houses with granite backsplashes, as well as sleek sports cars which can go from "0 to 60" in 0.2 seconds. In such a world, a person who lacks any – or certainly all – of these comforts simply cannot find satisfaction. (Of course, we know that even those who are able to acquire these items are typically far from satisfied, as their attention is soon drawn to a new line of the "latest and greatest".)

On Succos, we leave the comforts of our materialistic existence behind and enter a simple structure called a Sukkah. There we are to remain for seven days, living directly under Hashem's protection without concern for our worldly comforts.

The Sukkah is the great equalizer. It is there that we turn our attention away from

materialistic pursuits. Instead, we gaze up at the sky above us and come to a deeper appreciation that Hashem runs the world and that only He can and does provide for us.

The Sukkah reminds us that there is no physical permanence for us in this world, that all efforts at achieving materialism are fleeting and wasteful. In the words of the wisest of all men, King Solomon, “vanity of vanities...all is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) It is for this exact reason that we read these words on Succos.

That, says Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav M’Eliyahu, Vol. 1, pp. 106ff), is how a Sukkah can bring a sense of peace to man. Peace, he says, can only exist when each person is satisfied with his lot, and does not view others as being his personal competition. Once we have been redirected away from our materialistic urges and our competitive sense has been removed, we can work together harmoniously for the common good, perfectly at ease with one another.

It should thus come as no surprise that the clouds of glory which protected the Jewish nation during their long trek through the desert were bestowed to the people in the personal merit of Aharon Hakohen (see Leviticus Rabbah 27:6, et al). Aharon was the quintessential “pursuer of peace” (Hillel used to say, ‘Be of the students of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace.’ – Avos 1:12). What is perhaps even more compelling is the fact that, according to one opinion in the Mishna (Sukkah 11b), the “Sukkah” to which the Torah refers was not an actual booth, but was clouds themselves. Thus, the defining characteristic of Aharon Hakohen, peace and contentment, emerges every time we sit in the structure that his merits inspired!

While it is still unlikely that the above explanation would bring solace to our incredulous patient, it should be comforting to us, particularly in the tumultuous times in which we live, to know that we can enter our own “Sukkah of peace”, which will bring us the deep sense of contentment that we all so desperately seek.

Jewish Citizenship

Citizen has always been a title of honor not easily attained. In the city-states of ancient Greece and especially in the Roman Empire, citizenship was a highly prized distinction. It was a recognition of social and economic status and a guarantee of special rights and privileges. But what does citizenship signify in Jewish society?

Let us take a look at the Torah’s presentation of the mitzvah of sukkah. After the uplifting experience of the High Holidays, we are enjoined to build an impermanent booth and make that our primary place of residence for an entire week. “You shall dwell in booths for seven days,” the Torah tells us, “every citizen of Israel.”

This is an unusual choice of words. The Torah always directs itself to “all the people of Israel.” Yet here, the Torah seems to limit the injunction to people of status and privilege. We know, however, that this is not so, that the mitzvah of sukkah is universal, regardless of class and social status.

The commentators explain that the Torah is being as inclusive here as everywhere.

The use of the term citizen, however, is meant to teach us an important lesson. Jewish citizenship does not derive from an accumulation of worldly possessions, high social status or political power. Quite the contrary. It derives from a deep faith in the benevolent guidance of the Creator, from a focus on spirituality rather than materialism.

Where does this supremely Jewish attitude manifest itself? In the sukkah. When the harvest is in and the weather grows cold, the entire world withdraws to the warmth and security of home and hearth, but not the Jewish people. We leave the comfort of our homes and celebrate the festival of joy in our makeshift booths to show that we are in Hashem's hands. If we have faith, we are secure anywhere, and if we don't, we are secure nowhere. Those who enter the sukkah are the true citizens of Israel.

A traveler from a distant land paid a visit to a great sage. Many people stood on line for the privilege of spending a few brief moments with the sage, and it was fully an hour before he was allowed to enter.

The sage sat at the head of a rough-hewn table, which groaned under the weight of his holy books; the furnishings of the room were threadbare.

The sage lifted his kindly, wise eyes, greeted the traveler warmly and invited him to sit down. The chair groaned angrily under the traveler's bulk, but fortunately, it did not collapse.

"If you would forgive me," said the traveler, "I would like to ask a personal question."

"Go right ahead," said the sage.

"You are so famous and celebrated. People come to ask you advice and blessing from all over the world. Why isn't there any decent furniture in this room?"

"A very good question," said the sage. "But let me respond with a question of my own. Where is your own furniture?"

"Back home, of course."

"But why isn't it here with you?"

"Because I am a traveler. I am only passing through this place."

"Ah, that is indeed the answer. And it is also my answer to your question. I too am only a traveler. I too am only passing through this world. In the few years I will spend here, I have no need for fine furniture."

In our own lives, we are inevitably absorbed by material pursuits. We have to earn a living to put food on the table, to provide health care for our families, to pay the mortgage and tuition. We need to replace the old car, and the children need braces. But once a year, we should step back and put it all in perspective. When we enter the sukkah, we face the true reality of our existence, that the kindness of Hashem protects and sustains us and not the walls we build around ourselves. When we accept this knowledge into our hearts and respond with the transcendent joy of the festival, that is when we are granted our citizenship papers.

Succos - Staying Focused

By Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

For most holidays, the Torah reading is the narration of the events the festival is commemorating. This past week's Yom Kippur reading detailed the procedures for the special service in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem). The Pesach reading recounts the Exodus from Egypt, and we read of the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot. Succos, though, does not honor one particular event, so the reading comes from Parshas Emor, where all of the holy days are discussed in the middle of a narration of numerous facets of Divine service.

"On the fifteenth day of [Tishrei] is the festival of Succos, a seven day period for Hashem." (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:34). It is noteworthy that the Torah calls this holiday "Succos" (plural of succah) but has not, at this point, explained why a succah is germane to the celebration. It is not until the end of the narrative, even after the discussion of the mitzvah of the Four Species, in verses 42 and 43, that it is related, "You shall dwell in booths ("succos") for a seven day period...So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt." If our observance of dwelling in booths is the focus of the festival, these closing verses are out of place; they should be at the opening.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Torah Jewry of his time) explains that the concept of "succah" - living in a transient, temporary abode - is not novel to the Jew. Essential to our faith is the precept that our daily existence in this world is given to us as our chance to perfect our spiritual selves and develop a G-d consciousness by utilizing mitzvah opportunities and studying Torah. Furthermore, since the physical trappings of our existence in this world are given to us as aids to achieving our spiritual objectives, there should be no discomfort when we spend money or utilize assets for the fulfillment of mitzvos or giving of charity; this is ultimately why we were given these assets!

Therefore, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, the concept of "succos" is not new, as it is lived everyday, no matter where we find ourselves. The festival of Succos was given to us to help concretize and fortify this tenet in a practical, substantive way.

This understanding also offers a deeper insight as to why we are forbidden from residing in the succah when it is extremely uncomfortable, such as when it is raining or very cold. If the essence of the succah is to teach the perspective to be maintained through our daily lives - which includes the mindset that our assets should never be the cause for a sense of discomfort because they are all a temporary means to a greater end - then that lesson cannot be learned when the succah is physically uncomfortable.

The famed Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) once welcomed a visitor into his home. The visitor was somewhat surprised to see the Spartan conditions in which this renowned leader of Torah Judaism lived, with only a

simple wooden table and some benches furnishing the main room of the simple house. When asked what bothered him, the guest blurted out, "Where is your furniture?" Rabbi Kagan responded, "Where is yours?" The visitor answered, "I am only a guest here. I didn't bring any furniture." To which the Chofetz Chaim replied, "I, too, am only a guest in this world. My most prized possessions, my Torah learning and mitzvos, are waiting for me in my real home in the World to Come."

Our liturgy refers to the festival of Succos as "the time of our happiness". After the teshuva (return to G-d) of the month of Elul, the recognition of G-d as our Father and King on Rosh HaShanah and the spiritual cleansing of Yom Kippur, we now have seven days to enjoy and revel in our new relationship with our Father in Heaven. The blessings we asked for on the High Holy Days are not an end to themselves. The succah reminds us that we must not become distracted by the temporal; we must keep our focus on our ultimate objective of building the bond.

Learn to Love from the Lulov!

By Rabbi Label Lam

I merited a unique peak behind the scenes a few years back that helped to concretize an old idea that I had been carrying around for some time. It was one of those rare snowy winters in Jerusalem. A remarkable eighteen inches fell in one day, and the most beautiful city was ever more elegant dressed in white.

Early the next morning was a feast for photographers. A friend of mine pointed out something I may have otherwise missed. The wet snow weighed down the large leaves of the palm trees, and there it was in the center, like a finger pointing to the heavens was a single LULOV.

Click! I took a picture and gained an insight. The letters of the word LULOV can be deconstructed into two words, LO- To Him (HASHEM) LEV-is Heart. This is the essence of what we hope to accomplish by taking the four species on Sukkos to dedicate, to point our hearts heavenward.

Each of the species, our sages tell us, represents a different organ of human anatomy. The Esrog resembles the heart, the Lulov- the spine, the Hadassim the eyes and the Aravos the lips. Not only is the year a new year but so are we. Therefore after begging for life on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur we step out onto the soil of a brand new year with more than symbols picked from the garden of our inspiration, with a new heart filled with fresh feelings of devotion, and new spine focusing our newly found direction and with a clean eyes and pure lips with which to see and express ourselves.

The Mishne in Tractate Sukkah tells us that a Lulov that is stolen or dry is no good. A Lulov has to be yours as prescribed by the verse, "And you should take for yourself on the first day..." If it is somebody else's devotion that we are emulating and it is not our own then it is lacking in authenticity. If it is dry, a mere leftover from last year, a frozen institutionalized remnant or a souvenir of better years it doesn't qualify.

The Mishne continues to inform us that if it is from a tree that was worshipped or a city that indulged in idolatry it is also invalid. If our new found inspiration emanates from a decrepit source, that also disqualifies it.

If the head is chopped off or the leaves removed it is invalidated. If the leaves are spread apart, a little scattered that OK but Rabbi Yehuda says that we should bind them from above. If we are acting without our heads altogether impulsive or compulsive or in a way that we are divorced from our source, those are sufficient grounds to disqualify but if our problem is a lack of focus that's normal and passable but Rabbi Yehuda says, "Get it together!" We can learn an awful lot from its laws and its natural pose, but Most of all we can learn to love from the LULOV.

You Can Never Fool G-d

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And this (V'zos) is the blessing which Moshe, the Man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death. (Devarim 33:1)

In general, I write "Perceptions" two weeks in advance of the parshah, since it is only one of a few projects that I work on each week, and so that I can send it out Motzei Shabbos of the week of the parshah itself. This way people can read it in advance of Shabbos if they want to, and many seem to do just that.

I never felt that it was important to state that, until about two weeks ago. Until the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by terrorists, my parshah sheet was rarely out of step with current history, dealing with issues that were relevant long after the weekly parshah was read in synagogues.

Not any more. Now, so much happens so fast that affects the Jewish people in so many important ways that I find that what I may have written the week before may not be what is important to talk about the week of. To compensate, I have started to write additional essays and I am posting them on my website (www.thirtysix.org) to be available to anyone looking for such information at the time it is important.

The first word of this week's parshah, "v'zos," literally means "and this." However, the word also has a deeper meaning, which could change the meaning of the verse to: Zos is the blessing, meaning that whatever "zos" represents is in fact the blessing that Moshe gave to the Jewish people just before he left This World.

At this point, it is important to introduce two concepts, both of which are found in the following section of Talmud:

Rav Chizkiah said in the name of Rebi Yirmiyah, who said it in the name of Rebi Shimon bar Yochai: I see that the great people are few in number . . . But is that so? The master has said that the first wave that comes to greet The Holy One, Blessed is He, extends eighteen thousand miles, as it says, "All around it should be eighteen thousand" (Yechezkel 48:35). This is not difficult to explain; these see with "Esp'kilarya Hameirah," and these see with

"Esp'kilaritya sh'aino Meirah." (Succah 45b)

ESP'KILARYA: A division that separates between them and the Divine Presence; MEIRAH: like a mirror that you look into; there are some righteous people for whom it does not give off much light and they can't really see that much. (Rashi)

Although from Rashi it is still not that clear what an "Esp'kilaritya Hameirah" is, it is clear that it represents a certain level of vision along the road to prophecy. There will always be somewhat of a division between us and G-d, but there are some divisions that allow one to see beyond them, and some that block vision as well, though one may still have a sense of something beyond them.

According to the Tikunei Zohar 110d, "zos" is not just a word, but it represents a middah - a trait, specifically the trait of "Malchus" (Kingship) that also corresponds to the level of "Esp'kilaritya sh'aino Meirah, the lower less clear vision of G-d and His will. Though Moshe Rabbeinu himself was on the higher level of "Esp'kilaritya Hameirah" (Yevamos 49b), he did not possess the ability or time to elevate the Jewish people to the same level, and therefore, he settled for the level of "zos," which was far greater than no level at all.

As the Pri Tzaddik points out (Simchas Torah 48), there was precedence for this back in the days when Ya'akov Avinu blessed his own sons, the Twelve Tribes, just before he died:

And this (V'zos) is what their father said to them . . . (Bereishis 49:28)

For, by blessing his sons with "zos," and later, Moshe blessing the Jewish people, he caused the trait of Malchus to enter their hearts, and through this, they became merit worthy of the blessings that followed. And, logically-speaking this should be true of all the generations that have followed since then - the blessings can only help us when the trait of Malchus is in our hearts.

If so, then we need to know what it means to have the trait of Malchus in our hearts.

And this (v'zos) to Yehudah . . . (Devarim 33:7)

What better place is there to understand the concept of Malchus itself than from the source of it within the Jewish people, Yehudah, whose blessing happens to begin with the word "zos."

According to the Rokeach, the words "v'zos l'Yehudah" hint that all kings to descend from Yehudah must always learn Torah. This is because "zos" also always alludes to Torah. However, though this mitzvah may be more stringent by the kings of Yehudah, it is still one that applies to ALL Jews, and one which does not necessarily make Yehudah, the source of Malchus, unique.

To begin with, the Four-Letter Name of G-d is within Yehudah's name, which spelled, YUD-HEH-VAV-Dalet-HEH, which the Pri Tzaddik explains also corresponds to the level of Esp'kilaritya Hameirah. However, that is not the only source of Yehudah's name, as the Torah reminds us:

She became pregnant again, and gave birth to a son. She said, "This time I will thank (odeh) G-d." Therefore she called him "Yehudah" . . . (Bereishis 29:35)

In other words, Yehudah's name was a testimony to Leah's, Yehudah's mother, gratefulness to G-d for her fourth son's birth. His name comes from the Hebrew word "modeh" which can

mean "I thank" or "I admit." In fact, as Rashi points out in this week's parshah, Yehudah's blessing followed that of Reuvain because he had taught Reuvain to admit his mistake before his father.

In fact, admission is what Yehudah's life was all about, or at least his right to the kingship:

Yehudah, you, your brothers will acknowledge . . . (Bereishis 49:8)

You acted correctly when you admitted your guilt in the case of Tamar, and therefore, Yehudah, you, your brothers will acknowledge, for I recognize it too after having wrongly suspected you of killing Yosef. You are therefore chosen to be the king (Bereishis Rabbah 99:9).

What was this trait that Yehudah possessed that is the power of admission, but more importantly, the right to Malchus? If you think about it, admission is based upon the ability to surrender oneself to the moment, and in more general terms, history as a whole. You may be able to fool some of the people some of the time (including yourself), but you can NEVER fool G-d, and even a liar has to know that on some level.

At the moment of a truth, a person stands between two decisions: to save face but damage history, or to damage himself but save history. To save face means to do what is most comfortable for you at the moment, regardless of the long-term effects on history. To save history means to do what must be done for the sake of the bigger picture at that time, even if it means getting hurt along the way.

Yehudah could have lied. He could have denied being the father of Tamar's children, and they would have killed Tamar and her children, and no one would have been the wiser for it. However, Yehudah knew that one day the truth would catch up to him and that he would be held responsible for the distortion of truth, which would have to be rectified at his expense. That's the concept of "measure-for-measure," and given that an innocent woman and her children would die as a result, that was heavy price to pay.

Instead, Yehudah suffered complete embarrassment, and possible disownment by his father, which in the case of the Tribes meant more than just not inheriting one's financial part of the will. It even meant losing one's portion in the Jewish people altogether, and all the future rewards to come - also a VERY heavy price to pay.

But he paid it. Yehudah surrendered himself to the moment and to history, and for that, his father Ya'akov told him, he earned the Malchus. For that is the trait of Malchus - the ability to make history more important than our own individual lives, and to make the nation more important than the people who make it up.

It is THIS trait that removes the spiritual "blindness" from a person's eyes which prevent him from seeing history as it is, and Divine Providence as it really acts. It is THE difference between being able to see with the "Esp'kilya Hameirah" or the "Esp'kilya sh'aino Meirah," the lower less clear vision of G-d and His will. Ultimately, as we learn from the word "zos," it is the difference whether or not to be able to reap the blessings imparted to us by Ya'akov Avinu at the beginning of our history, and later by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Where do I begin to tell the story of the great love I feel for you?
A love, as a young boy I was unaware of, I never knew.

A "Tree of Life" You have been called by the wisest of the wise,
A flowing river of life, an invigorating stream, a source of light for the eyes.

You are one of the three goodly gifts that Hashem gave to his nation,
Kept in waiting for them thousands of years before creation.
It had been a joyous time, that saw a desert bloom and become flowery,
G-d the "Chasan," the Jewish people His "Kallah," Torah His dowry.

"We will do and we will understand," we said with complete trust,
We will do all the mitzvos, understanding that life with mitzvos is a must.
As the Faith Shepherd climbed the mountain to fulfill his greatest role,
We waited with anticipation to soon nourish our collective soul.

The time passed slowly, and evil still remained amongst us,
Moshe's extended absence gave "them" cause and time to fuss.
As is always the way of "the people" who left Egypt on our wings,
They sowed dissension, and drove us to horrible things.

As patient as You are, some things simply cannot be or exist,
Golden calves, worshipping idols, from which we were told to desist.
Had we only known then that it would break the work of Heaven,
We would have stopped them all, the worshippers of gold and "evven."

Before our very eyes, we watched Holiness fall to the profane ground,
And instantly understood that it was for destruction we were bound.
But You relented, had mercy on Your people, and gave us a second chance,
But not to receive the first set again of which we only were given a glance.

It took eighty days of prayer and supplication to gain atonement,
The punishment for which we were able to achieve postponement.
And then, on the eleventh of Tishrei Moshe Rabbeinu reappeared,
Holding dearly the Second Tablets for a nation whose eyes had teared.

Thus, on Simchas Torah we celebrate the gift of the Torah, the word of G-d,
Even though our lives and history still remain quite flawed,
We dance with great joy with a gift that has no equal,
There was nothing before it and nothing after it, it hasn't a sequel.

When we dance with the Sefer Torah do we keep it in mind,
How we were almost left in the dark, left to live amongst the blind?
But instead G-d came down and showered His people with love,
Giving His people life, joy, and a ladder to bridge Below and Above.

In these troubled times, when we feel so distant and so estranged,
And mankind commits acts and offences clearly so deranged,
It remains for us, the children of ancestry much larger than life,
To reunite with our G-d, His Torah, and finally bring end to all strife.

CHAPTER TWO: Relatively Sane

Based upon the conclusion of the previous chapter, it is worthwhile for our purposes to redefine some familiar terms. To begin with, if "order" is the purpose of creation, then "sin" is doing that which leads to chaos.

Inserting this definition of sin into the earlier Talmudic statement, it would read:

No person does that which leads to chaos unless a spirit of insanity enters them.

Certainly that makes sense; what sane person wants chaos? The only problem is that most of us who sin do not consider ourselves crazy, or wish to for that matter. It is important, therefore, to address the concept of sanity.

In general, a "sane" person is one who is able to live in reality, as it is. Likewise, an insane person is one who believes that reality is something other than what it actually is, and acts accordingly. This is what makes such people dangerous to themselves, and very often to others as well.

However, the truth be known, sane and insane are really two end-points on a single line:

INSANE o _____ o SANE

on which we all find ourselves, at some point or another.

To the extreme left of the continuum, there is insanity, or a wholly imperfect perception of reality; to the right extreme, there is sanity, the completely accurate perception of reality-God's reality, completely objective, totally unaffected by physical limitations or personal biases.

But how many people actually possess a perfect vision of reality? Very, very few. On the contrary, most people fluctuate between the two extremes throughout the course of their lives. Thus the world with man in it seems to consist of two realities, one which can be called "Small r Reality," or the subjective reality, and another, which can be called "Capital R Reality," or the objective reality.

The objective reality can be understood by imagining a world without mankind. The world existed before man was created, and it can exist after man has left. This is the objective reality - God's reality - the will behind existence, so-to-speak, outside of man's impact.

The subjective reality is the objective reality as perceived by mankind, and exists within the objective reality. As history has proven, the subjective reality has the potential to be at odds with objective reality, at which time destruction is the result.

For example, God wants peace and universal brotherhood. That is the objective reality. Man, too, would enjoy such worthy goals, and would achieve them if subjective realities didn't result in anything but peace on earth.

Thus, another way of expressing the "sanity-line" is the line that stretches between extreme subjective reality, and the objective reality. If so, then who is the "sane" person? One who lives a hairsbreadth past the half-way point, closer to the objective reality? All of a sudden, it's not so clear who's insane, and who's not.

What the rabbis of the Talmud are saying is that sin is the net result of losing track of the objective reality. As beings created b'tzelem Elokim, we possess the ability to pursue and discover the objective reality, and shed our subjective version of it. Doing so brings order to chaos, as the following dialogue illustrates.

"I don't like Sam."

"Why not?"

"He's always talking about himself, as if he doesn't care about others."

"You shouldn't say that about Sam."

"Why not? It's the truth."

"Even if it is, what gives you the right to talk badly about someone else?"

"What do you mean?"

"The Torah says that one must not speak loshon hora . . ."

"Loshon what?"

"Loshon hora. That's when you say something about another person that is derogatory, even if it is true."

"Why's that?"

"Well, for one, how do you know that Sam's not just covering up for an insecurity? Do you know what his life at home is like? Do you know what he went through as a child?"

"Well, not really . . ."

"That's the point. Speaking badly about someone is judging them, and we don't have the ability to weigh all the factors of a person's life. Why don't you get to know Sam, and find out why he does focus on himself. Maybe he's just looking for people like you to like him."

"Good point."

In the above example, Speaker One viewed reality subjectively, which he believed was the only reality to consider. Speaker Two introduced him to another reality, the objective reality, to which Speaker One became sensitized. He then adjusted his subjective reality to suit the objective reality, a process referred to as doing teshuvah, or returning (repentance).

If insanity is the lack of clarity of the objective reality in life, then it can be said that while Speaker One, was out of touch with the objective reality, he was somewhat "insane." And if this is so, then the road to sanity, to order from amidst the chaos of life, to the fulfillment of the purpose of creation, is in hot pursuit of the objective reality.

Summary:

Sin is the result of misperceiving reality. When our subjective perception of reality, according to which we act, conflicts with the objective reality, we sin. Thus, to permanently correct improper behavior, one must first correct improper thinking, in other words, build a clearer vision of the objective reality.

Sukkos
By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

The Talmud [Avodah Zarah 9A] teaches that the world as we know it will exist for six thousand years. The time designated for the Moshiach {Messiah} is somewhere after the year 4,000 but before the year 6,000. Each thousand corresponds to a day of the week. Upon the

completion of the six thousand years, the world will enter a totally different stage of existence, corresponding to the Sabbath. As we stand in the year 5,761, less than a quarter of a 'day' remains. Just as the tempo on Friday increases as the Sabbath draws close, reaching a feverish pitch on the last quarter of the day, the events that have presently engulfed Israel represent the frenzied preparations needed for the world to ready itself for its ultimate state.

In order to obtain a clearer perspective on the recent events we must first gain a better understanding of the purpose of galus {exile} in general. Rav Dessler, in his classic Michtav Me'Eliyahu, explains in the following way.

The essence of galus is that the Shchinah {Hashem's holy presence} is in exile--that holiness and spirituality seem to be subordinated. When we are exiled to a place where the truth is trampled upon, serving Hashem seems to be unimportant and inconsequential. Those who insist on such 'archaic practices' are the objects of derision. The mission of Klal Yisroel is to remain strong in our belief and implementation of that belief and not be influenced and deterred by the contrary environment surrounding us.

Those who stand firm in their commitment to Torah, recognizing it as the sole purpose of creation and ticket to eternity, while viewing the 'success' of society as superficial and transient, have 'passed' the test of galus, have been elevated through it and in turn elevate the entire world.

The need for exile dates back to the very beginning of man's odyssey. Adom Harishon {the first man}, before he sinned, was on the level of the Garden of Eden. He clearly saw spirituality as the only true reality and physicality as nothing more than a cloak attempting to obscure it. By sinning, he and the entire world were thrust into a state of concealment where physicality appears as reality. The odyssey of mankind, that became the lot of Klal Yisroel, is to first bring the world back to the state of Adom Harishon prior to his sin and then catapult it even higher to its ultimate perfection.

The deadline for this process is 6,000 years--the vehicle used is galus.

Each galus presented its own unique difficulties and challenges. However, the common thread is the opportunity and responsibility to see through the smoke screen of nature and the physical and to recognize the truth/reality.

The tikun {correction} first began on an individual basis with the Forefathers and then was transformed into a national task upon the seventy souls who descended to Mitzrayim {Egypt}.

Mitzrayim, our first galus, was an environment of intense spiritual involvement with the forces of impurity. Sorcery, demonism and contacting the dead were their means of subjugating nature to their whims and desires. Our not changing our names, language and mode of dress showed our rejection of that society and its norms.

The odyssey continued with receiving the Torah followed by the sin of the Golden Calf. The building of the First Beis Hamikdash {Temple} and its destruction and subsequent Galus Bavel {Babylonia}. The building of the Second Beis Hamikdash, Galus Yavan {Greece}, its destruction and our present galus of Edom.

The sin which led to that destruction was baseless hatred with haughtiness at its root. You're not competing with me and you're not trying to hurt me. Nevertheless, your very existence eats me up. This haughtiness leads to chutzpah--no embarrassment at all. Who are you to tell me what's right or wrong? Alternative lifestyles...

Whereas the galus of Mitzrayim at least had a connection to spirituality, the galus of Edom is all crass, sensual physicality. Technology allows seemingly complete mastery over nature, increasing the haughtiness with the sense of absolute control.

The final stage of this galus finds us returning to our land, yet the galus of the Shchinah {Hashem's holy presence} is still being perpetrated, but this time by our own people. It's difficult to quote such a thing but the Vilna Gaon wrote that at the time before Moshiach, the control of Israel will be in the hands of descendants from the mixed multitude that joined up with us as we left Mitzrayim. Their motto will be "The strength of my hand has brought me this" and the name of Hashem will be conspicuously absent from their litany.

This will be the final testing stage before Moshiach. Those who fight against the Torah will haughtily lay claim to all successes. They will attempt to disseminate heresy and contempt for the spiritual. We returned to the land. We fought for it. We control it. Who's Hashem? The test, Rav Dessler concludes, will be to see through the farce of "our strength" and focus our energies on seeing the clarity of Hashem's Hand through serving Him.

The odyssey continues. The rulers, with smug complacency, plan a secular revolution, attempting to tear down the remaining religious fibers which weave their way through society. The complacency is shattered.

The only way to bring peace is to be at peace with our mission in life. With that, the clarity of the Garden of Eden will again shine and the entire world will recognize His light.

As this Friday night's prayers state: Blessed are you Hashem, Who spreads the Succah of peace over us, over the entire nation of Israel and over Yerushalayim.

Yom Kippur to Sukkos

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

We are presently in the midst of the month of Tishray, the seventh month. We find that six mundane units are followed by a holy seventh. The six days of the week are followed by Shabbos. Each six-year cycle is followed by the Shmittah year (no work is performed on the fields). And the first six months are followed by Tishray, the month that is illuminated by so many holidays.

In order to understand the connection and transition from Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to Succos, the holiday of the Clouds of Glory, we must have an historical perspective.

On the fifteenth day of Nissan, Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} had their exodus from the oppressive slavery of Mitzrayim {Egypt}. The travel through the wilderness was accompanied by the 'Annanei Hakavod' the Clouds of Glory that led the way while also casting their protective shield over the nation.

Forty-nine days later, on the sixth day of Sivan, Bnei Yisroel stood by the foot of Har {Mount} Sinai as the heavens opened up and all heard the word of Hashem. Moshe then ascended the mountain to remain there for forty days in order to be taught the entire Torah and to then bring down the Luchos {Tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were written}.

Bnei Yisroel miscalculated, thought that Moshe was dead, and sinned by making the Golden Calf. Moshe descended on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, saw the Golden Calf, and broke the Luchos. As a result of that, the 'Annanei Hakavod' were withdrawn.

Moshe ascended the mountain again to plead forgiveness on behalf of Bnei Yisroel. On Yom Kippur, the tenth of Tishray, Moshe descended carrying Hashem's message of "Salachti--I have forgiven." On the next day Moshe gathered Bnei Yisroel to command them to bring sacrifices, which were then brought on the twelfth and thirteenth of Tishray. On the fourteenth, the materials that Moshe had collected were brought to the artisans who would be constructing the Mishkan {Tabernacle} and on the fifteenth the actual construction began.

On that day, the Annanei Hakavod returned and served as a Succah--the loving protection that Hashem gave to His children. We reenact that display of love and intimacy by moving out of our houses into the Succah each year on the fifteenth day of Tishray.

Closeness, distance and then an even greater closeness. We don't commemorate those first Annanei Hakavod--they didn't last. It is the Annanei Hakavod that followed the repentance that are commemorated yearly. Closeness, distance and then an even greater closeness. This is a pattern that is repeated not only on a national level but also on an individual one.

One of the most moving stories I've ever heard is told in Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust about a young girl named Ida. In 1944, she, her family and the rest of her Czechoslovakian town were sent to Auschwitz. The arrival platform was the last time she saw her family as only she and a sister passed the selection. She was given the job of sorting the clothes of the gassed according to size and quality to ready them for usage by German civilians.

One night, a strange noise was heard under the three-tiered bunk bed where Ida slept along with thirty-five other girls. The other eleven had to turn in order to enable Ida to get out and see what was causing this noise. Under the bed, curled up into a frightened ball, she found a little girl who had escaped the children's Aktion by hiding in the latrine and had later hid herself in the barracks.

The girl's name was Estherke and she had big blue frightened eyes and beautiful blond curls. Ida immediately fell in love with Estherke as her life took on renewed purpose and meaning--saving the life of Estherke. Her meager bread rations were split in half and somehow managed to sustain them both.

When her camp was going to be evacuated Ida knew that Estherke would never pass the selection. She worked out a plan where Estherke, bundled in a blanket, was thrown over the electrified fence into the waiting arms of a male inmate in the adjacent men's camp. Later that afternoon the package was sent again into the awaiting arms of Ida now in her new camp.

In January 1945, when the camp was again evacuated, Ida had Estherke on her back in a knapsack as she began the infamous death march. Through winds and snow Ida marched on with her precious cargo until they arrived in Bergen Belsen.

After months of horror, in April 1945, Ida, her sister, Estherke and the rest of those who had somehow managed to survive were liberated by the British. All wanted to return to their hometowns to see who might still be alive. For the first time since that fateful night in Auschwitz, Ida had to part from Estherke. They agreed to meet back in Prague in two weeks time no matter what the outcome of their searches would be and each went their way.

The two weeks passed, Ida returned to Prague but Estherke failed to return. Months of intensive search yielded nothing. Estherke seemed to have vanished.

Ida met and married a survivor and moved to America. Her sister outmaneuvered the British blockade and made her life in Israel.

In the early 1950's, Ida went to Israel to visit her sister. On a very hot day she fainted in the street and was brought to a hospital by two young soldiers. A friendship developed and they visited her each day.

As Ida was being discharged, she asked them how she could repay their kindness. One of them told her that he was getting married the next day and he'd want her to be at the wedding.

And so, with a gentle breeze blowing off the mountains of Jerusalem, Ida found herself among other guests trying to find a familiar face. "The bride is coming," someone near her said. Ida moved forward to get a glimpse of the girl that had been described so lovingly. The door opened and she watched in amazement as her beloved Estherke walked in. And so, under the bright stars shining over the Holy City, Ida stepped forward and escorted her Estherke to the chupah {bridal canopy}. Closeness, distance and then an even greater closeness. The odyssey of Ida and Estherke. The odyssey of the Annanei Hakavod returning after the forgiveness of Yom Kippur. The odyssey that every soul takes as it departs from the heavenly sphere to enter the earthly realm, only to later return bearing the fruits of its earthly journey.

There is another group of ordinary six that is followed by a holy seventh. The world will exist for six thousand years and then, after the transformation that the Moshiach will have brought toward the end of those six thousand, it will be rebuilt for the holy seventh.

May this be a year of blessing and redemption, where the world will leave its present state of distance and confusion to begin the era of ultimate closeness.