



Each of the three major festivals, the sacred seasons sanctified by the G-d of Israel, has a designation by which it is known in the texts of Jewish liturgy and tradition. Passover, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, is known as "the time of our freedom;" this is the holiday of national emancipation. Shavuot, the anniversary of the Sinai Revelation, is "the time of the giving of our Torah." These holidays, wherein the entire nation makes the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem and the Holy Temple, each possess a special quality. At the same time, each presents its own timely challenge as well.

**Lev. 23:33-44**

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them, the 15th day of this seventh month shall be the Festival of *Sukkot* - seven days for the L-rd... for seven days, you shall present a burnt offering to the L-rd..."

"On the first day, you shall take for yourself a fruit of the citron tree (Hebrew: *etrog*), a palm frond (*lulav*), myrtle branches (*hadas*) and willows (*aravah*). You shall rejoice before the L-rd your G-d for seven days. During these seven days each year, you shall celebrate to G-d. It is an eternal law for all generations that you celebrate in the seventh month."

"During these seven days you must live in thatched huts; all Israelites must live in thatched huts. This is so that your future generations will know that I caused Israel to live in huts when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the L-rd your G-d."

### ***Background: The Time of our Joy***

"All seven days of the festival, each one should turn the hut into his permanent residence, and his house into the temporary one" (Sukkah 2, 9)

It is most apropos that the Festival of *Sukkot* is referred to as "the time of our joy." For although it is marked by the observance of special, highly visible commandments such as the "four species" (see the Biblical verses quoted above); and while on the surface level, it commemorates a specific period and event in Jewish history - the huts in which the Jews lived after they left Egypt - nonetheless, the central theme of this season is the pure joy of having a relationship with the Creator. It was none other than King David who taught us that this is the epitome of true happiness - and true religious experience.

Now, some of our sages have stated that those original "huts" of that generation were actually G-d's Clouds of Glory, which He spread over Israel in His protection and Divine grace (BT Sukkah 11:B; Rashi). Whether or not this statement is taken literally is irrelevant - for what it symbolizes is a concept that not only personifies the very essence of this holiday, but the essence of Israel's faith as well.

Israel's calendar - *G-d's calendar* of sacred seasons - is a Divine plan; a schedule whereby man is given the capability of plugging into a network of vast Heavenly resources. Each festival arrives just in time; each in its respective season. As these seasons change, just at the time when man needs to find a way of renewing himself, his belief, and his spiritual strengths, the festival knocks upon his door... "the voice of my beloved knocks" (Song of Songs 5:4). The unique observances and commandments associated with each festival are the vessels which hold the radiance of G-dly light; they are the tools, tailor-made to fit the needs of each season by the Tailor who created man and knows exactly what he lacks.

### ***What is the Source of this Great Joy at Sukkot?***

We can find no better illustration for this than the unique festival of *Sukkot*. For the booths in which Israel live during these days symbolize her rock-steady, unshakable faith in the One G-d of Israel. Just in the fall, as the days are getting shorter and colder, most people are coming indoors. It is no longer pleasurable to sit outside as it was in the summer. But this is just when "every citizen in Israel" moves from the comforts and security of home, and takes up residence in temporary dwellings, thanking G-d for the harvest in this season and recalling His constant, enveloping presence. This knowledge is true joy! Unconcerned with sunshine or warm weather, these temporary dwellings do not appear to be "secure" in the physical sense... they may shake a little in the wind; their roofs are but thatches open to the stars. But yet Israel sits within, unmoved and unaffected by what may be mistakenly perceived as a hostile world - for like the booth, this world is temporary, and we are but temporary dwellers within her. But just as the walls of this hut surround us, so we are surrounded by the constant, protective presence of G-d Himself. The winds may shake and the elements may confront us, but the shadow of the *Sukkah* is the shadow of the Divine Presence.

### **"Escaping into the Sukkah"**

Herein lies the exquisite precision of G-d's calendar, answering the need of every human emotion by providing strength, encouragement and opportunities to connect with the Divine. For this great time of year follows just 4 days after *Yom Kippur*, the time of awesome reckoning and the dispensing of justice. And lest one feel dejected, despondent or fearful that perhaps his judgment was not favorable, and he has lost that Divine connection - immediately after the Day of Atonement he is given bundles of commandments to fulfill, the construction of the booth and the preparation of the 4 species. Then he goes out into the booth itself, symbol of Divine mercy; instead of running away from the Holy One he flees directly into His presence, as it were. There, he is overwhelmed by the realization of the depth of G-d's love and concern. Commenting on the juxtaposition of these holidays and the great Divine wisdom which plans for every human contingency, King Solomon was moved to write (Ecc. 9:7) "Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already accepted your works."

### **"The Place Which He Will Choose"**

Nowhere is this great wave of *Sukkot* joy felt so strongly as in the Holy Temple, focal point of worship, thanks, and connection to G-d... the connection which imbues the human condition with the vision of that which is real, and that which is merely illusion. For this is "the place which He will choose;" here He has chosen to cast asunder the imaginary veils which separate Him from His precious creations - for those veils exist only in the minds of men.

### **True Joy is Only Experienced "Before the L-rd your G-d"**

The Biblically ordained expression of this happiness is the taking of the "4 species;" this is the vehicle through which G-d instructs Israel to demonstrate their joy to Him:

"... you shall take for yourself a fruit of the citron tree, a palm frond, myrtle branches and willows. You shall rejoice *before the L-rd your G-d for seven days.*"

Indeed, it was only in the Holy Temple that this joy was given the opportunity to burst forth in true expression. For while today we are accustomed to rejoicing with the *lulav* (meaning all the species collectively) and reciting the festive *hallel* prayers all during the festival, this was not always the case:

The Mishna (*Sukkah* 3, 12) describes that in the time when the Holy Temple stood, the *lulav* was taken all week long only by those who worshipped in the Temple itself. However, outside the Temple-even for those in the holy city of Jerusalem proper - the *lulav* was only held on the first day; for the remainder of the week it was not used except in the Holy Temple. This is solely on account of the verse (Lev. 23:40) which reads "... and you shall rejoice ***before the L-rd your G-d*** for seven days."

The great sages understood that the place which is "before the L-rd your G-d" is only the Holy Temple itself, the place of constant Divine revelation. The verse makes it clear that it is only there that an individual is required by the Biblical commandment to rejoice with the 4 species all week long; everywhere else is referred to by the words "And you shall take for yourselves *on the first day*" (ibid.).

### **"A Remembrance for the Temple"**

It was only after the Holy Temple was destroyed that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, head of the Sanhedrin-in-exile at Tiberias and composer of the Jerusalem Talmud, enacted that *hallel* should be recited with the *lulav* everywhere during the entire festival of *Sukkot* - as a remembrance for the Holy Temple! This is the origin of our practice today.

### **Background: Rabban Yochanan and the Destruction**

Rabban Yochanan was an eye-witness to the Temple's destruction. Acting out of a firm belief that the Temple would be rebuilt speedily, and concerned that its practices and procedures should remain fresh in Israel's collective consciousness, Rabban Yochanan enacted a series of measures which fully demonstrate the centrality of the Holy Temple in the lives of the Jewish people... a centrality so vibrant and a force so powerful in her life, that it remains not merely a memory, but a fire which refuses to be extinguished. Truly, all other factors in Israel's national life are eclipsed by the importance of the Holy Temple.

### **Other Temple Remembrances**

In addition to this measure concerning the use of the *lulav* throughout *Sukkot* as it was done in the Temple, here is another aspect of Rabban Yochanan's legislation: Priests who can keep track of the day on which their shift serves in the Temple service should behave themselves on those days as if the Temple still stood -meaning, they should abstain from drinking wine, so that they will remain in a state of readiness to resume their priestly duties.

Similarly, other customs were adopted by the majority of Israel which were designed to keep the Temple's memory at the forefront of their awareness. For example, the famed sage Hillel's custom of eating the *matzah* and bitter herb together in a sandwich on the seder night, in the same manner that the Passover celebrants ate in Jerusalem in the shadow of the Temple. Likewise, to paraphrase Psalms 137:6, "Jerusalem is to be raised above our chiefest joy." Thus at the hour of a man's chiefest joy, his wedding, he breaks a glass under his foot to symbolize the destruction of the House of the L-rd. The message is clear: Even this great moment of joy, perhaps the greatest of his life, cannot be complete as long as the Temple still lies in ruins.

In section 560 of Rabbi Joseph Caro's (1488-1575) monumental Code of Jewish Law, we find other instances of these remembrances which were enacted by the great sages living in the generation of the Second Temple's destruction. For example, when an individual builds a home, he must leave a small section of the wall opposite the entrance blank and unplastered.



### ***What is the "Hallel?"***

The *hallel* prayer, a collection of songs of thanksgiving and praise to the Almighty, is one of the oldest and most original examples of traditional Jewish liturgy. It consists of the following chapters from the book of Psalms: 113-118, plus a number of important additional verses. The sages speculate (BT Pesachim 117:A) as to its exact source and time of origin of the recitation of *hallel*, and essentially they are of two opinions: Either it was sung the first time by Moses and the Children and Israel when the sea split before them; or, it was written by King David.

In all probability, both opinions are correct. Ever since its inception as a nation, Israel has collectively given praise to G-d through the songs of the *hallel*. But it was the sweet psalmist of Israel, the anointed King David, who later organized the ancient songs and put them in order. He also completed the book of psalms with many of his own original work.

### **Historical Background: "Ten Elders"**

This approach to understanding how the *hallel* came to be written as we know it today can apply to the entire book of Psalms, as well. For while David wrote most of the Psalms and published them, some had been transmitted to him from previous generations (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:3). There is a discussion in the Talmud as to whether the Psalms were written prophetically (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, 2:45).

In addition to King David, there is a tradition (BT Bava Batra 14:B) that ten elders wrote and contributed portions of the book of Psalms:

1. Adam Psalm 92
2. Malkitzedek Psalm 110
3. Abraham Psalm 89
4. Moses Psalms 90-100
5. Heiman Psalm 88
6. Yeduthun Psalms 39,62, 77
7. Asaph Psalms 50, 73-83
8. Assir ben Korah Psalms 42, 49, 78, 84, 85, 88
9. Elkanah ben Korah Same as above
10. Aviassaph ben Korah Same as above

### **How is the Hallel Recited?**

On the festival of *Sukkot*, the *hallel* is recited while holding the 4 species. As the verse (Lev. 23:43) states, "you shall take for yourself a fruit of the citron tree, a palm frond, myrtle branches and willows... you shall rejoice before the L-rd your G-d for seven days." It is with these things that you shall rejoice.

While reciting the *hallel*, the *lulav* is held in the right hand, and the *etrog* (citron) is held in the left.

This is because, since precedence is always given to the right over the left, the right hand is involved in the fulfillment of more commandments: for the branches of the *hadas* and *aravah* are bound together with the *lulav*. The left hand grasps the *etrog*.

### **Shaking the Lulav**

It is customary to shake the *lulav* lightly at various points while reciting the *hallel*. This was done in the Holy Temple (and still today, in all congregations of authentic Jewish prayer) at several points:

1. During the words "Give thanks to the L-rd, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever" (this is the first and last verse of Psalms chapter 118); and

2. During the words "We beseech You, O L-rd, please save!" (*Hosha Na*)

### **"The Trees of the Wood"**

This practice is based on the verse which states (I Chron. 16:33-35): "Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy at the presence of the L-rd, because He comes to judge the earth. Give thanks to the L-rd, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever. And say, save us, O G-d of our salvation." The sages explain this verse on an allegorical level: The whole world is judged on Rosh HaShanah, and no one knows what the Divine verdict will be... who will be found innocent, and who guilty. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave this precious commandment to Israel, in order that they may rejoice before Him with their *lulavim*-like one who has just received a verdict of "innocent" joyfully departs from the presence of his judge (waving a branch like a banner-this was an ancient custom).

This is the meaning of the words "the trees of the wood sing for joy:" When the Creator judges the world and you depart with a verdict of innocent, sing for joy with the trees of the wood-while waving the branches of the *lulav*.

And at what point shall you sing with these "trees?" During "Give thanks to the L-rd, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever," and during "Save us!"

### **When the First Day of the Festival Falls on the Sabbath**

During the time of the Holy Temple, the sages ruled that since the commandment to rejoice with the *lulav* is so important, taking it into one's hands to recite the *hallel* songs of praise even overrides certain prohibitions of Sabbath observance which are normally in effect. Thus, although these type of plants would not usually be touched on the Sabbath, if the first day (and only the first day) of the festival falls out on Shabbat, the *lulav* would nonetheless be taken up... because the commandment specifically mentions the first day, "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day." In those days, this ruling applied equally both for the Temple and outside of it. Today, if the first day of the festival is a Shabbat, the *lulav* is not taken under any circumstances.

However, this only applied to the actual holding of the *lulav* for the prayer services; it still did not allow one to carry the *lulav* from one place to another. For the transferal of anything from one area to another, such as from a private home to a public domain, is forbidden on the holy Sabbath. If so, how did the worshippers bring their *lulavim* to the Holy Temple to celebrate "before the L-rd," if the first day happened to be a Sabbath?

When it transpired that the first day of the festival fell out on Shabbat, the entire nation would make sure to bring their *lulavim* to the Temple Mount before the onset of the Sabbath. Certain lay-leaders there were given the responsibility of watching over all the *lulavim*; these took them from the people, and arranged them in the covered hall of columns which transversed the Temple's periphery. Older people, who could not bear the squeeze and press of the large crowds who came to receive their *lulavim* in the morning, would place theirs in a room which was provided for them.

Now outside of the Holy Temple, the same thing would transpire in all the synagogues; all would arrive on Friday and bring their *lulavim* in advance. In the morning, all would rise early and make their way to the synagogue. There, each man would recognize his own *lulav*, and take it up. This is because of the verse which states "... and you shall take for yourselves on the first day"-from which the rabbis deduce that the *lulav* must be one's own; the requirements of the commandment cannot be fulfilled with another's *lulav*. Thus on the first day, it was necessary for each individual to recognize his own; but on the remaining days of the festival the obligation may be fulfilled using another's *lulav*.

However, in the Holy Temple, there was such a large number of people present that it was impossible for everyone to get his own *lulav* back! The sheer numbers of *lulavim* prevented their owners from recognizing them. So in the Temple, the Sanhedrin taught everyone to accustom themselves to declare out loud: "Any man who receives my *lulav*, be informed that I hereby consider it as a gift to him." This was done in order to allow each one to fulfill the obligations of the day-for on the first day the *lulav* must belong to each individual, as we have learned.

### **"Crowd Control" in the Temple**

In the morning, the worshippers would arrive at the Temple and the overseers would stand before the people and fling the *lulavim* out to the immense crowd. But as each man tried to grab at his own - for they preferred to receive their own back, especially as if they saw it winging out towards the assembled - all of the people present inadvertently came to blows! They would strike each other as they attempted to catch up their *lulavim*. Seeing that the situation was becoming dangerous, the sages ruled that from this point on, whenever the first day falls on Shabbat, rather than bring them on Friday, everyone should leave their *lulav* at home, and each would simply recite the benedictions and prayers with the *lulav* in his own house.

## ***The Commandment of the Willow***

### ***A Tradition Handed Down from Moses***

In addition to the Biblical commandment of taking the four species to rejoice on *Sukkot*, there are also two other commandments that were fulfilled in the Holy Temple during this festival. However, these two practices are not mandated by a verse in the Scriptures; they are included in that body of custom called *halacha l'moshe mi'sinai* - details of religious observance that G-d taught to Moses at the Sinai Revelation. Moses subsequently related these to Joshua, and on to the Elders of Israel, and likewise throughout all the generations they were transmitted orally. These two items are the "special commandment of the willow," and the water libation, which we will discuss further on.

This singular commandment of the willow is not to be confused with the 2 *aravot*, the willow branches that are included in the four species, tied together with the *lulav* branch and myrtle twigs.

For this willow branch of the Mosaic tradition is a different practice altogether, and one uniquely associated with the Holy Temple:

### ***Placing the Willows Around the Altar***

"There was a place at the foot of Jerusalem called [Motza](#) (there is suburb in Jerusalem's outskirts called *Motza* to this day). Each day of *Sukkot*, the people would descend there and cut down huge willow leaves. These branches were exceptionally long-their height reached 11 *amot*. The worshippers would place these branches all along the foundation of the altar, with their heads bent over the top" (Sukkah 4, 5).

Since the altar itself was 10 *amot* high and the branches measured 11 *amot*, a length of one *amah* would hang over the top of the altar on all four sides. This was the essence of the oral commandment that Moses received at Mount Sinai... to place these *aravot* [all around the altar](#).

### ***Trumpet and Shofar Blasts***

As an expression of the feeling of great joy which reverberated through the congregation on account of the opportunity to fulfill the will of G-d through this precept, the bringing of these branches each day and their arrangement along the altar was accompanied by [trumpet-blasts](#) and the sounding of the shofar by the priests and levites.

### ***Surrounding the Altar***

Each day of the festival, after the willow branches were thus arranged firmly along the altar's foundation, the priests would march one time around the altar, making a

circle with their *lulavim* in hand, appealing to the Almighty "We beseech You, O L-rd, please save us! We beseech You, O L-rd, please grant us success!" (Ibid.)

On the last day of the festival, the seventh day, they would "surround" the altar seven times-as a remembrance of the conquest of Jericho (JT Sukkah 4, 3). It was customary on the last day of Sukkot, after the final circling of the altar, for the children to playfully snatch the four species from the adults, and eat their *etrogs*! The adults would graciously indulge the children.

### ***The Willows are Also Placed on the Sabbath***

The willows were placed around the altar on *Shabbat*, just as during the weekdays of the festival. However, as picking plants from the ground is an activity prohibited on this holy day, the branches were gathered on the Sabbath eve, and likewise brought to the Holy Temple before the onset of *Shabbat*. There, they were kept in golden vessels filled with water, to prevent the leaves from withering until morning.

### ***"This Beauty is Yours!"***

At the conclusion of these prayers around the altar, the priests departed from it with these enigmatic words: "This beauty is yours, O altar! This beauty is yours, O altar!" (Rashi explains this to mean "we are beautifying you, for you atone for us"). We give thanks to G-d, and we praise you, O altar. You are beloved before Him, for you atone for us."

### ***The Water Libation***

The other non-Biblical commandment observed in the Temple during *Sukkot* was the water libation. Like the special willows, the water libation is also a Mosaic commandment and also takes place at the altar.

Each morning of the festival, during the daily sacrifice, water was poured onto the altar in a special manner. The joyous service was purposely conducted with great public ceremony - and for good reason: as we learned earlier, during the era of the Second Temple a sect called the Sadducees had substantial influence in society. The platform of this cult was based on denial of all aspects of the Oral Tradition.

## ***To Distinguish the Authentic Ways of Israel from those of the Sadducees***

The observance of the water libation, handed down orally as halacha l'moshe mi'sinai, is the classic example of Oral Tradition. Thus the Sadducees, who denied that there was any such requirement on *Sukkot*, vehemently opposed it. In order to demonstrate Israel's unswerving faith in the authenticity and validity of her Mosaic traditions, this ceremony was carried out on a grand scale and in the public eye.

### ***What is the Water Libation? How is it Done?***

At the foothills of Mount Moriah, down below in the City of David, flows a natural spring called Shiloach. This spring is ancient, and as it is located literally in the shadow of the Holy Temple, it has always had spiritual significance for Israel. It is the original source of Jerusalem's water.



### ***Silver altar cup and golden flask***

Every day of the festival, the priests descended down to the [Shiloach](#), accompanied by all the congregation assembled in the Temple. There, they filled a [golden flask](#) with 3 lug (about 1/2 liter) of the pure water. Ascending back up, carrying the flask with song and elating with that singular feeling that comes only from fulfilling the Holy One's will, the gathering entered back into the Temple through the Water Gate, one of the gates on the southern side of the court (it received its name on account of this event (Shekalim 6, 3). As they entered the [gate](#), their steps were greeted by the sound of trumpets and shofar-blasts, in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's words (12:3) "With joy you shall draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Once in the Temple, the priest who had the honor of performing this service now carries the golden flask up the altar ramp. At the top, he turns to his left. Since the ramp is located at the south side of the altar, this means that the cohen now faces the southwest corner; it is here that the libations were [poured](#). Here at this corner, two silver cups were fixed on the top of the altar, sitting next to each other. The one further east received the wine libations that are poured out every day at the time of the daily tamid sacrifice; the other was designated for this service, which took place exclusively on *Sukkot*.

Each of these cups featured a narrow opening into which the libations were poured. These openings were of two different sizes; the cup that received the water libation had a bigger opening than that of the wine. This is because the wine and water libations were poured out at the same time, and it was a necessary

requirement that they flow at the same pace and reach the bottom of the altar simultaneously. Since water is thinner than wine and therefore flows faster, the opening for the water was narrower to accommodate for this. Thus the two liquids were kept flowing at the same ratio.

At the bottom of the altar, the libations collected into a reservoir system called the *shi'tin*. The Talmud teaches that young priests-in-training would clean out this reservoir when it became full.



The Mishna (Sukkah 4, 10) relates that on at least one occasion, the water was not poured into its proper cup at all... the officiating priest poured out the libation onto

his own foot!

It seems that this particular priest was of the Saducean persuasion, and secretly subscribed to their beliefs. Thus he did not believe in the water libation, which was revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai-and he certainly had no intention of performing it. So, instead of pouring the water into the silver cup for it to trickle down the altar, he emptied the flask's contents onto his foot. Those present in the Holy Temple immediately understood, and reacted as one man: "the entire congregation stoned him with their *etrogim* (citrons) (ibid.)."

In order to preclude this unfortunate scenario from ever repeating itself, from that time on all present at the water libation would cry up to the priest at the altar-top: "Raise up your hand!" So that the congregation assembled below may clearly see that he is indeed pouring the water straight into the cup, as required.

### ***The Water Libation on the Sabbath***

Since it is prohibited to transfer something from one domain to another on the holy Sabbath, it was necessary to make accommodations for the water libation before the onset of Shabbat, in the same way that we have learned regarding the *lulavim*. Thus the Mishna (Sukkah 4, 10) records that before the Sabbath, water was drawn from the Shiloach pool in advance and then kept in a golden cask which stood in the Temple court. The next day, the attending priest would fill the flask from this barrel.

## ***The Festival of the Water Libation***

"With joy you shall draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3).

Based on this verse, the drawing of water from the Shiloach spring and its libation upon the altar of G-d was accompanied by great rejoicing and celebration in the Holy Temple. In fact, this joy was so immense, and the celebrations so uplifting, that the sages of Israel emphatically stated: "Whoever has never seen the celebrations of the Festival of the Water Libation-has never experienced true joy in his life" (ibid. 5, 1).

But what was the cause of such great happiness, to the extent that this statement was recorded for all posterity? Indeed, what could be so moving about the simple act of gathering up some water, and pouring it onto the altar? True, there is always a feeling of joy when an individual has the opportunity to fulfill the will of G-d. And true, too, that this observance has always been associated as a propitious harbinger for the coming season's rainfall. But there is still more significance to this great rejoicing...

### ***"Closeness to G-d is Good"***

The answer can be found in the words of King David, expressing one of the purest of human emotions: "But as for me-only closeness to G-d is good" (Psalms 73:28). Man, being a most limited and finite creature relates to everything by comparison. When we consider something to be "good" or "bad" it is solely on the basis of experience; if something is thought to be good, it can only be in relation to something else which we have previously encountered and know to be good. But David said that all pursuits, endeavors and aspirations are but folly for him, for the only thing in which he had any interest, that which uplifted him and motivated him, was the ultimate goodness to which nothing can be compared... only closeness to G-d.

This is the true aspiration of the Jew who wishes to live his life in connection to G-d, guided by His commandments and determined to sanctify himself through them. And it is in the holy Temple that this pursuit reaches its resounding crescendo, for there, unlike any other spot on earth, G-d beckons to man to come forward and recognize that the universe has direction, life has meaning... and ultimately, that not only does man seek to know his Creator, *but the Creator seeks man as well...*

Thus at the celebrations in the Temple, the famed sage Hillel enigmatically recited: "My feet lead me to a place that I love to go. And the Holy One, blessed be He, says 'If you come to My house, I will come to your house. And if you do not come to My house, I will not come to yours' - for the verse states (Ex. 20:21) 'In all places where I will cause My name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you'."

### ***The Epitome of True Happiness is Spiritual Fulfillment***

This realization of connection to G-d, and a life led for Divine purpose, is the true secret to happiness. This is King David's message in these words. *Sukkot*, itself "the time of our joy," is the season for great rejoicing - and its climax is at the water libation. This is the holiday of true faith in "the shadow of the Divine Presence." When the heart is freed and opened to this experience, the true happiness of spiritual fulfillment actually leads to prophetic enlightenment. The sages teach that prophecy itself can only come about through joy. A prophet can never receive enlightenment unless he is in a state of joy, for the Divine presence itself only rests on one who is joyful. Thus with regard to the prophet Elisha, the verse states (II Kings 3:15) "And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the L-rd came upon him."

### ***Drawing Down the Spirit of Prophecy***

Herein lies the true secret of the "festival of the water libation," states the Jerusalem Talmud: the great joy was in the receiving of prophetic inspiration. For the Hebrew word for the "drawing" of the water, *sho'eva*, also indicates drawing in a different direction - the drawing down of prophetic enlightenment. Thus "whoever has never seen the celebrations of the Festival of the Water Libation, has never experienced true joy in his life" - for it was here that prophets like Jonah the son of Amitai received their prophecy. The Jerusalem Talmud relates that Jonah was not expecting any revelation, but merely arrived at the festival of the water libation along with all the other holiday pilgrims. He was so overcome with joy that he received Divine inspiration... and in turn, there can be no greater joy than this.

Thus, on the holiday that is predisposed to joy, we find the epitome of true celebration taking place in the hallowed courtyards of the L-rd. There, His people experienced such spiritual happiness that it resulted in no less than the highest brush with the Divine possible for a human being to attain: the prophetic experience. All this came about by the fulfillment of the will of G-d in His presence.

### ***Preparing for the Festivities***

While the actual act of pouring the water on the altar takes place early in the morning, this libation is preceded by celebrations which last the entire night, each night of *Sukkot*.

### ***Balconies in the Women's Court***

It was in the Women's Court that most of the daily festivities took place. At the conclusion of the first day of the festival, the priests and levites prepared this area by erecting raised balconies all along the periphery of the court. In this **gallery**, the women sat and gazed down at the Temple court from above, and the men would stay below. This enabled the women to be present during the entire festival. The sages of Israel sought to make a separation between the men and women, since together they may inadvertently come to levity. Because proper behavior between men and women is of such paramount importance, this remodeling was referred to as a "great rectification" (Sukkah 5, 2).

In fact, it was on account of this act that the Women's Court received its name. For in reality this area of the Holy Temple was not designated for women only, as many assume. This was the place where all Israelites who were pure could enter.

### ***Great Lamps of Gold***

Huge lamps were erected in the Women's Court to illuminate the Festival of the Water Libation. These each consisted of four containers of oil mounted on a huge pole. Young priests-in-training were given the task of filling these lamps by climbing up to them on ladders while carrying great jugs of oil, and pouring them into the containers at the top. Each one of the jugs these young men pulled up to the top contained 30 lug of oil - about 15 liters.

The wicks for these lights were made from the old and worn pants and belts of the priests. The lamps towered over the court and shone forth with a light so bright that "there was not a single courtyard in all of Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the Festival of the Water Libation" (ibid, 3).

### ***At the Festival: The Celebrations***

The actual participants in the celebrations were not the common folk, but the greatest scholars and the most pious men of the generation-the heads of the Sanhedrin, the sages, the academy heads and the elders. In the presence of all those assembled in the Holy Temple, these exceedingly righteous men would dance, sing and rejoice. All the denizens of Israel came to watch and listen. There were those amongst the sages who even danced while juggling flaming torches! It is related that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel juggled eight such torches, catching them in his hands one at a time without allowing them to touch each other. In utter simplicity, without regard to their own stature or station, they



danced in honor of the libation, the holiday, and most of all, to honor the Holy One who has chosen to make His presence known in this house. It was in this same spirit that King David danced before the ark of the L-rd (see II Samuel 6:21).

### ***"Happy is Our Youth! Happy is Our Old Age!"***

While the great men danced before the people of Israel, they sang and recited words of praise to G-d and inspiration to the nation. The very pious men declared, "Happy is our youth, that it has not embarrassed us in our old age!" These are the saints who have never experienced the taste of sin; whose lives have been consistently pure and devoted to the service of G-d. But the penitents, those who had been led wayward in their youth and have now returned completely to the Holy One with renewed vigor - these ones declared "Happy is our old age, for it has atoned for our youth!" And both groups sang together "Happy is he who sins not! And he who has sinned-let him return, and it shall be forgiven."

### ***Musical Accompaniment of the Levites***

While these celebrations were in progress down on the floor of the Women's Court, the Levites stood upon the fifteen steps that lead up from the court to the Court of Israel. These fifteen steps correspond to fifteen other "steps" - the "songs of ascent," chapters 120-134 of the book of Psalms. Normally, the levite choir stood within the Court of Israel, opposite the outer altar and facing the entrance to the Sanctuary building. A special platform was located there, just within the Nikanor Gates, and the Levites stood there and sang every day during the daily sacrifices. But now at the water libation it was upon these steps that they sang and played with "innumerable music instruments" like harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets.

### ***The Priests' Trumpet Blasts***

Additionally, two priests with silver trumpets stood at either side of the entrance to the great Nikanor gates. At the moment of dawn, with the rooster's crow and the overseer G'vini's cry of "Arise and stand to your duties," these two priests delivered blasts of the trumpets to signal that the time has arrived for all to descend down to the Shiloach spring, to bring up water for the libation.

As they began the descent down the steps, the entire assemblage began to move out of the court to exit the Temple. The two priests blew again when they reached the tenth step, and again when they reached the floor of the Women's Court. The priests elongated these last blasts, trumpeting as they continued to walk, until they reached the Eastern Gate - the gate which leads from the Women's Court, out of the Holy Temple complex and out onto the Temple Mount.

There at the Eastern Gate, the entire congregation turned their backs as one man, and once again stood facing west, towards the direction of the court and the Sanctuary.

### **"We are to G-d!"**

At this moment, after spending the entire night occupied with praises of G-d, as the first rays of the dawn now begin to shine and the nation stands with anticipation, ready to fulfill the commandment of the water libation, they gazed upon the Holy Temple - and this is what they recited together:

"Our fathers stood in this place with their backs towards the Sanctuary of G-d, and their faces towards the east. They prostrated themselves to the sun in the east. But we - we are to G-d, and to G-d our eyes turn. We bow to G-d and our eyes look to Him in hope" - meaning, we acknowledge Him for what has been, and hope to Him for the future.

This was a reference to the close of the First Temple era, paraphrasing the prophet Ezekiel. The verse (Ez. 8:16) actually reads: "And He brought me into the inner court of the L-rd's house, and behold, at the door of the Temple of the L-rd, were about 25 men - with their backs towards the Temple of the L-rd, and their faces towards the east; and they were prostrating themselves towards the sun eastward."

### ***Sukkot: A Unique Connection to the Gentiles***

Of all the sacred seasons that G-d commanded Israel to observe, the festival of Tabernacles has the strongest implications for the nations of the world. Even today, vast numbers of Gentiles identify with the holiday of *Sukkot*, and converge on Jerusalem just to be in the holy city at this time of year. It is as if their heartstrings are pulled by some invisible magnet, the source of which they know not. Some force draws them to connect between *Sukkot* and the location of the Holy Temple.

### ***In the Written Torah and the Oral Tradition***

This is well understood, for it is a connection emphasized by both the written Scriptures and the Oral Tradition. The relationship between the nations and the holiday of *Sukkot* dates back to ancient times, and arcs through our own period as well... to form a bridge into that future, rectified world that we all yearn and long for, Jew and Gentile alike-the day when "the L-rd and His name will be One" (Zechariah 14:9).

### ***The Sacrifice of Seventy Bulls***

During *Sukkot* in the time of the Holy Temple, a unique sacrifice was offered on the altar - with a unique intention.

In chapter 29 of the book of Numbers, the Bible outlines the sacrifices that are to be offered over the span of the holiday. Counting the number of bulls that are offered over the seven day period, we find that the total number was seventy. And in chapter 10 of the book of Genesis, there are seventy nations mentioned. These are the primordial nations, sometimes referred to as the "seventy languages," which

represent all humanity. The Talmud (BT Sukkah 55:B) teaches that the **seventy bulls** that were offered in the Holy Temple served as atonement for the seventy nations of the world. Truly, as the rabbis observed, "if the nations of the world had only known how much they needed the Temple, they would have surrounded it with armed fortresses to protect it" (Bamidbar Rabbah 1, 3).

Here we can already sense that inherent within the very nature of the holiday, an inexorable bond - as expressed through its sacrificial requirements - links it to the earth's peoples. *Sukkot* was mandated by the Creator Himself to be a holiday for all the world.

### ***Prophecies of the End of Days***

The *haftorah*, the section of the prophets read in the synagogue on the first day of the festival, comes from the 14th chapter of the book of Zechariah. This prophecy deals with the end of days, when the nations of the world will all gather together to do battle against Jerusalem. At the culmination of this, the L-rd will be King over all the earth.

Before continuing, it would be most beneficial for the reader to study the entire chapter in the book of Zechariah. Here is a brief scan at some of the key verses:

"Behold, a day of G-d is coming, when your spoils will be divided in your midst.

For I will gather all nations to do battle against Jerusalem...

Then G-d will go forth, and fight against those nations...

On that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives...

On that day there will be neither bright light, nor thick darkness,

But it will be one continuous day known as G-d's...

G-d will be King over all the earth; on that day G-d will be One and His name One.

All the land will become a plain... but Jerusalem will remain elevated on its site...

Men will dwell in it... Jerusalem will dwell in security."

This prophecy contains elements of a theme which recurs many times throughout the Bible: the idea that not everyone will merit to survive the awesome judgment of the end of days, but only a remnant - both of Israel and of the nations. Here, the prophet tells us that all the nations will gather together to wage war against Jerusalem.

He goes on to tell us that G-d will smite all those who stood against Jerusalem with a horrible plague; He will cause a great confusion to fall on them. But of those who have survived this time, the prophet has this to say:

Then every one who remains of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem will go up each year to worship the King, the L-rd of Hosts, and to keep the Festival of *Sukkot*. But if any of the nations of the earth does not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the L-rd of Hosts, there will be no rain upon it. If the family of Egypt does not go up and enter, there will be no rain on them; there will be the plague with which G-d will smite the nations that do not come up to keep the Festival of *Sukkot*. This will be Egypt's punishment, and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Festival of *Sukkot*."

Thus we see that the mark of separation, that which will distinguish those who remain after that awesome battle, is the single fact that they will celebrate the holiday of *Sukkot*. And a stern warning is issued to those who do not observe it.

### ***The Final Judgment - and Sukkot***

A similar thought is echoed by the Oral Tradition. The Talmud (BT Avoda Zara 3) relates that in the end of days, all the nations of the world will express a desire to repent, and G-d will judge them through the commandment of building a sukkah... He will give this single commandment to the entire world to fulfill.

### **The Festival of the Water Libation**

One of the main aspects of the holiday of Sukkot (Tabernacles) is the Biblical commandment, "And you shall be glad on your holiday, and you shall be only joyful" (Deut. 16:14). Indeed, the pilgrims who arrived in Jerusalem at the Temple's courtyard came to rejoice. The focus of this rejoicing was the ceremony surrounding

the commandment to pour water on the altar - the water libation. During this event, which mainly took place in the Women's Court, the levites and played on many musical instruments.

The sages of Israel testify to the celebrations of the water libation from the days of the Second Temple, describing the great joy of the ceremony:

"Whoever has not seen the celebration of the water libation has never experienced the feeling of true joy - great lamps of gold were hoisted, with four golden bowls at the top of each lamp. Four young priests-in-training would climb to the top, carrying immense oil jugs with which they would fill the bowls. Once lighted, there was not a courtyard in all of Jerusalem that did not glow with the light that emanated from the celebration in the Temple courtyard.



As the people sang, the righteous and pious men would dance before them while juggling flaming torches. The levites, standing on the fifteen steps that descend from the Court of Israel to the Women's Court, played on lyres, harps, trumpets and many other instruments. Two priests who blew silver trumpets stood at the top of the stairs on either side of the entrance to the great gate of the Court.

All this was done to honor the commandment of the water libation."

(based on Mishna, Tractate Sukkah, Chapter 5)



There were so many precious commandments to be fulfilled in the Holy Temple during the holiday of Sukkot, and they were so time-consuming, the Talmud notes that there was practically no time left for sleeping!

"Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanina said: During the days of the water libation ceremony, we

barely got to sleep at all. The first hour of the day saw us attending to the daily offering; following this we were engaged in prayer - afterwards, the additional offering. Then we ate, and it already became time to attend to the afternoon service. And this was followed by the celebration of the festival of the water libation, which lasted the entire night, and we would begin again" (Jerusalem Talmud, Sukkah 5).

Men, women and children participated in the immense joy of the water libation - some directly, while others stood and watched. Special elevated balconies were constructed to enable the righteous women of Israel to watch the wise men of the Sanhedrin as they danced.

At dawn, the assembly proceeded with melody and song to the spring of Shiloach, at the foot of the walls of Jerusalem. One priest carried with him a special golden decanter and filled it with the sparkling spring water. Then the congregation ascended again to the Temple, led by the priest who bore the golden vessel. Arriving at the Temple, he brought the decanter up to the altar, and poured the water into the silver cup at its corner.

This ceremony is connected to the rainfall of the coming year, and it was accompanied by yearning and prayers for blessing on the earth and its produce. On a deeper level, it was also directly connected to the reception of prophetic inspiration.

