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## Joyful Symbols

by Eitan Kaszovitz (DRS '16)

The *pasuk* in Parshat Emor states: "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" (Vayikra 23:40). The Gemara in Sukkah (35a) interprets this to mean that we should take an *etrog*, a *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravot*. From this Gemara, a very basic, yet, fundamental question arises- why is there a *mitzvah* to take four species on Sukkot?

In explaining the reasoning behind the "*arbah minim*," the Sefer HaChinuch explains that man is heavily influenced by actions which he does constantly. When man does something over and over again, the action and by extension the ideas behind that action, build up in his mind. For this reason, Hashem gave us so many *mitzvot* to perform each and every moment. By constantly performing Hashem's will, we will constantly have Him on our minds and be more connected to him. By doing *mitzvot*, we are essentially focusing our hearts and minds on the ideas and concepts that punctuate Hashem's universe.

One of the names of Sukkot is "Chag HaAsif," the "Harvest Festival." Sukkot is given this name because it takes place during the time when farmers are harvesting their fruits from the field. The harvesting season represents happiness, we are happy by receiving fruits out of the dust of the earth. But, in this case of physical happiness, we may take our joy in the harvest for granted and come to act in a way that is unappreciative towards Hashem and all he does for us. For example, we may arrogantly think that it's because of our hard work and effort that the harvest is so great, when it's really all from Hashem.

Hashem provides us with the *mitzvah* to take four species because He wants us to constantly be reminded of and draw closer to Him. We must be reminded that our appreciation must be directed towards Hashem. Hashem wants the "reminder" to be joyful, so he combined the *mitzvah* of *arbah minim* with the joy of the harvest season. The *chag* of Sukkot represents our time of happiness and joy, as it is called *zman simchateinu*. On Sukkot, Hashem wants us to do *mitzvot* in ways which are conducive to feelings of joy and appreciation, so that we will always know who is the source of all blessing and happiness

This idea of the Sefer Hachinuch, teaches us a very

valuable lesson: always have Hashem on your mind. We must always understand that everything in this world is a product of Hashem's infinite love for us, and we must strive to be as righteous and pious as Hashem expects us to be.

## The Economics of *Hiddur Mitzvah*

by Avi Siegal (SAR '16)

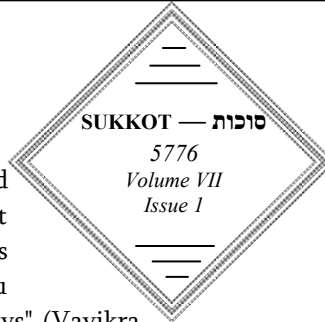
*Aggadah* and Jewish folklore are replete with instances of Jews who went to great lengths, with severe financial consequences, to purchase beautiful *etrogim* for *Chag Ha-Sukkot*. The drive for the protagonists of these various stories is the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, glorifying commandments. The *Gemara* in Shabbat 133b elucidates the source of this concept:

*For it was taught: "This is my God and I will glorify him" (Shemot 15:2) - glorify yourself before Him in [the fulfillment of] commandments; make a beautiful sukkah in His honor, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful fringes, and a beautiful Torah, and write it with fine ink, a fine pen, and a skilled scribe, and wrap it about with beautiful silks.*

Notably, the *mitzvot* of *sukkah* and *lulav* - the latter referring to the *arbaat ha-minim*, the four species - appear at the top of the *Gemara's* list. For this reason, the holiday of *Sukkot* is very much defined by the pursuit of *hiddur mitzvah*. We decorate the sukkah, we buy a beautiful *etrog* case, we carefully consider the caliber of our *lulav* - the list goes on.

The Torah terms the *etrog* "*pri eitz hadar*" (Vayikra 23:40), which Ibn Ezra would render "the glorious (*hadar*) fruit." As its Biblical description would suggest, the *etrog* provides the quintessential opportunity for *hiddur mitzvah*. The *Mishnah* in the third chapter of *Masekhet Sukkah* discusses specific qualities that decide the suitability of an *etrog* for the *mitzvah* of *arbaat ha-minim*, spawning extensive Halakhic literature on the nature of a proper *etrog*. Generations of Jews have taken these guidelines to heart; today, certainly, we often veer toward purchasing a more expensive *etrog* in order to have an especially beautiful *etrog* for the *mitzvah*. This inclination crystallizes another facet of *hiddur mitzvah*: seeking to improve one's performance of a *mitzvah* can actually mean expending additional funds.

*Chazal* take note of this, realizing the necessity of an effort to concretely and responsibly introduce the monetary aspect of



*hiddur mitzvah* into the Halakhic system. Accordingly, in Bava Kamma 9a-9b, the *Gemara* recognizes the praiseworthiness of spending extra money on a *mitzvah* while simultaneously placing significant restrictions: *R' Zeira said in the name of Rav Huna: For a commandment one should go up to a third. A third of what? If you say "a third of one's possessions" - if three commandments came one's way at the same time, one would have to give up all of one's possessions?! Rather, R' Zeira said: For glorifying a commandment one should go up to a third of what was spent on the commandment itself.*

R' Zeira's statement is a powerful endorsement of financial *hiddur mitzvah*. An additional third - whether of one's possessions or of the normal cost of the *mitzvah* - is *substantial*. Indeed, to many, it might prove a considerable burden; yet it seems very clear from the *Gemara* that spending well beyond the minimum is admirable, even recommended. On the other hand, the *Gemara* is also mounting a significant attempt to preclude profligacy in *hiddur mitzvah*. An additional third is emphatically determined as the spending limit. Moreover, the *Gemara* discounts the option that "a third" could be referring to "a third of one's possessions" (though, as an aside, it is a remarkable indication of the Jew's devotion to mitzvot that "a third of one's possessions" could even be a possibility a priori) and insists that the intent of R' Zeira's statement is a third of the normal cost of the *mitzvah*.

*Hiddur mitzvah* presents an extraordinary opportunity to sanctify the mundane, to utilize one's money for a higher purpose and demonstrate what is truly significant. It is critical, however, that *hiddur mitzvah* not become an exercise in extravagance or foolishness. In their formalization of the concept, Chazal successfully cast *hiddur mitzvah* as highly admirable yet bound by limitations that preserve the integrity of the concept.

## United We Sit

by Elisheva Cohen (Maayanot '16)

The *Gemara* in Sukkot 27b teaches us a fascinating idea with regards to sitting in the *sukkah*, expounded from a *pasuk* in Vayikra. In Vayikra 23:42, the Torah writes, "You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period, all who belong to the people of Israel will live in sukkot." From this verse, the Talmud teaches that "it is fitting for all of Israel to sit in one sukkah." Rav Kook questions this idealistic vision, as there is no *sukkah* large enough to fit all of the Jewish people. What does the *Gemara* mean when it says all of Israel will sit in one *sukkah*?

In order to answer this question, we first have to understand what it means to be unified. The concept of unity is not foreign to Judaism. In fact, it dates back to the time of Yaakov. When Yaakov journeyed down to Egypt with

seventy people, the Torah writes in Shemot 1:5, "All the soul who emerged from Yaakov's loins were seventy soul." This use of the singular when it clearly means the plural is meant to connote *achdut* or unity. Conversely, when describing Esav and his people, the Torah writes in plural, "souls," as it says in Bereshit 36:6, "And Esav took... all the (*nafshot*) souls of his household." Another place in the Torah that records Jewish unity is Shemot 19:1, as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai, and "*vayichan* (encamp) there, opposite the mountain." Rashi, quoting Chazal, explains that the word *vayichan*, in singular form, teaches that the Jewish people were "as one person, *with one heart*." *Clearly to be unified does not mean* to be one physically. Rather, we are one soul, unified spiritually. The *Gemara* in Sukkah was not meant to be taken literally in the sense that we will all sit in one sukkah. It teaches us that spiritually we will all be connected and it will be as if we are all in one *sukkah*.

It is understandable that we should be spiritually unified, but why specifically on Sukkot? Why is the *sukkah* the symbol of unity? The root to this answer lies in the placement of the holiday of Sukkot relative to the other *chagim*. Sukkot comes right after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, two very personal holidays focused on our individual relationships with Hashem. Sukkot, on the other hand, is a communal holiday containing many *mitzvot* related to bringing people together, whether it be through building the sukkah or having guests in our sukkah. It is important to focus on our individual relationships with Hashem, but we also need to focus on our relationship with others. After Yom Kippur, when we are free of our sins, it is easier for us to overlook people's flaws and thereby connect and join with others. It is quite fitting, therefore, for Sukkot to be a holiday of unity, right after the more reflective and personal holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Another reason behind the unity of Sukkot, and specifically the symbolism behind the *sukkah*, relates to the one of the architectural requirements of a *sukkah* - the need for it to be temporary. Why does it need to be temporary? The answer to this question is that a permanent dwelling reflects our own personal mindset, our own house, something self-centered. By having the sukkah as a temporary structure and leaving our permanent homes, we are essentially leaving our self-centered mindset and looking out for others. This is unity. We are connecting with and helping others, thereby creating a cohesive community and environment.

Often it is much easier to remain united as a Jewish people during hard times, when we all pray for one request to Hashem, we united. Sukkot is our reminder that we should be united at all times and we should never lose sight of this goal. Indeed, there is a Midrash in which Hashem says that if we join together, Hashem Himself is elevated. This Sukkot, we

should all strive to look out for others and merit to be a unified people.

## The Wake Up Call of Kohelet

by Akiva Gold (Ramaz '16)

Every year during Sukkot, we read the penultimate Megillah, Kohelet. This practice, which can be traced back as far back as the Siddur of Rashi, is a seemingly normal one, as it continues the tradition to link a *chag* with the recitation of a Megillah. However, due to the grave and melancholic nature of Kohelet, it does not seem to be a proper choice for Sukkot, a holiday called “Zman Simchateinu”. Shouldn’t a more happy and joyous Megillah be read at this time, one whose messages fit into the festive nature of this period of the year?

A clear examination of the reasons for reading Kohelet brings to light why we read this Megillah on Sukkot. The first, and very practical reason that the Megillah is read on Sukkot is due to a vague reference to the holiday itself within the Megillah, as mentioned in Kohelet Rabbah. In Perek Yud-Aleph, Kohelet says “divide a portion into seven, even into eight”. Kohelet Rabbah says that this is an allusion to Sukkot, a holiday with seven days and an additional eighth day, Shmini Atzeret. Additionally, the Abudraham says that the reason Kohelet is read on Sukkot is because Shlomo read Kohelet to the people during Hakhel, which occurred on Sukkot. So, just like Shlomo read Kohelet on Sukkot, so, too, we read this Megillah on Sukkot. Although these answers are quite practical in linking the holiday and Megilla, they do not solve our issue of the contradictory nature of Sukkot and Kohelet.

Interestingly, there are two reasons recently posited that explain why Kohelet and Sukkot are fundamentally linked. In a Dvar Torah entitled “Vanities vs Progressions: The Lessons and Joy of Koheles and Sukkos”, Mrs. Chana Glatt explains that the oft occurring word in Kohelet, “*hevel*” does not mean vanities, the most common translation. Rather, Mrs. Glatt writes, *hevel* means a lack of progression, and an inability to develop. So, Mrs. Glatt continues, Kohelet is not merely bemoaning the horrid world, rather, it is warning against failure to progress or advance. Additionally, in his book *The Complete Story of Tishrei*, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel writes that the reason for reading Kohelet is the same reason that we live in a Sukkah: by reading this dour Megillah, and by moving into temporary dwellings, we are reminded that as Jewish people we must only rely on Hashem and nothing else, and that during the month of *Tishrei*, we must try our hardest to return to Hashem. Additionally, he adds, these two actions are supposed to remind us that physicality and materialism (traits spurred by both Kohelet and the *Sukkah*) are short lasting and useless, and that during this time of the year we

must focus our efforts on bettering our spiritual selves.

By combining the ideas of Mrs. Glatt and Rabbi Dr. Mindel, as well as understanding the history of the Megillah, it becomes clear why we read Kohelet on Sukkot. Having just begun a new year, it is important now that we do not forget all that we promised on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Kohelet, therefore, is a spiritual wake up call, a reminder to remove the hevel from our lives, and continue the progression we started two months before during Elul. Furthermore, Kohelet is not just a spiritual reminder, but also a physical wake up call. Although we hope for inscription in the Book of Life, it is not enough to just change ourselves spiritually. We must also remember that our relationship with the physical must change as well, if only for a short time. Although Kohelet may seem a little dramatic with the shunning of materialism, it is a necessary reminder that we cannot live by being entirely based on our physical things. Rather, we must remember the importance of our non-tangible relationship with Hashem, our community, and ourselves. These lessons that Kohelet contains are the reasons that this Megillah is read at this time, as there is no better time for a spiritual and physical wake up call than at the end of *Tishrei*.

## The Symbolism of the Season Sukkot

by Yosef Solomon (TABC '17)

The Torah writes that we sit in Sukkot “*Lema’an yeid’u doroteichem ki BeSukkot hoshavti et Bnei Yisrael BeHotzi’i otam MeiEretz Mitzrayim*,” “in order for the generations to know that I [Hashem] sat Bnei Yisrael in Sukkot when I took them out of Mitzraim.” Rashi explains that the Sukkot mentioned in this *pasuk* refer to the *Ananei HaKavod*, the Clouds of Glory, which surrounded Bnei Yisrael during *Yetzi’at Mitzrayim* and throughout their journey in the *Midbar*. The Tur famously asks why we sit in Sukkot on the fifteenth of *Tishrei* as opposed to on Pesach, the holiday in which we celebrate all of the miracles associated with *Yetzi’at Mitzrayim*.

In answering his question as to why we celebrate Sukkot on the fifteenth of *Tishrei*, the Tur famously explains that we sit in Sukkot during the fall so as to avoid accusations that we sit in outdoor huts merely to enjoy the weather. Although this explanation offers a practical solution to the problem of people questioning our motives for sitting in Sukkot, it raises an obvious question. Why do we care if other people will erroneously assume that we sit outside just for comfort? Why would we move the date of Sukkot from its proper time just to ensure that everybody realizes our motives for celebration?

Additionally, the Vilna Gaon explains that there were two sets of *Ananei HaKavod*. The first set accompanied Bnei

Yisrael as they left *Mitzraim*, but *Bnei Yisrael* subsequently lost these Ananim when they worshipped the *Eigel HaZahav*. After this sin, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai once again and entreated Hashem to forgive Klal Yisrael. On Yom Kippur, the tenth of Tishrei, Hashem forgave Klal Yisrael and Moshe descended the mountain with the second set of Luchot. Along with the new Luchot came the second set of *Ananei HaKavod*. It is as a remembrance of these *Ananei HaKavod* that we celebrate Sukkot on the fifteenth of Tishrei, less than a week after Yom Kippur. This raises an additional question, why are the *Ananei HaKavod* the basis for our celebration of Sukkot- would it not be more appropriate to thank Hashem for the *m'an* and *b'eir* which sustained *Klal Yisrael* throughout its forty years in the *Midbar*?

Although we are obligated to be thankful for Hashem's providing Bnei Yisrael with food and water throughout their journey in the Midbar, we would expect Hashem to give us the necessities to live. Therefore, we do not devote a holiday towards thanking Hashem for the *m'an* and the *b'eir*. However, the *Ananei HaKavod* were not necessities. Hashem protected Bnei Yisrael with these clouds in order to demonstrate His closeness and love for them. Because Hashem gave us the Sukkot (*Ananei HaKavod*) merely as a demonstration of his love of us, it is of the utmost importance that everybody realizes that we celebrate the holiday of Sukkot to demonstrate our love for Hashem. Therefore, we celebrate the holiday of Sukkot in *Tishrei*, to avoid any confusion about our motives.

This holiday, as we sit in our Sukkot, let us focus on what they are meant to symbolize in our relationship with Hashem. In doing so, the Sukkot will hopefully serve to instill within us a lasting love and appreciation for all that Hashem gives us.

## **Sukkah: Symbol of Exile**

by Tani Finkelstein (Cooper '17)

Throughout history, Klal Yisrael have engaged in many sins that are deserving of exile. One could ask, how can Hashem punish us with exile in present times, aren't we already exiled? The Yalkut Shimoni answers that if Klal Yisrael are sentenced to exile, when we uproot ourselves from our houses on Sukkot, Hashem considers it as though we were actually exiled.

Why does Hashem equate the *mitzvah of sukkah* with exile? On a basic level, the actions bear some resemblance. Just as in exile, we are temporarily uprooted from our homeland, so to, we temporarily uproot ourselves from our homes on Sukkot. However, this does not explain why the two are equated. In order to truly understand the deeper connection between the sukkah and exile, we must examine the root of the *mitzvah*.

The *passuk* in Vayikra says that Bnei Yisrael should dwell in sukkot for seven days, so that the later generations will know that Bnei Yisrael dwelled in sukkot after they left Egypt. What exactly does the word *hoshavti*, literally translated as "I made them dwell," mean? According to Rashi, *hoshavti* is referring to the clouds of glory that Hashem made to protect the Jews in the desert. The Ramban, takes a different approach, explaining that *hoshavati* means that throughout Bnei Yisrael's time in the desert, Hashem provided them with all of their needs.

What ever way you understand *hoshavti*, we clearly see that the sukkot serve to commemorate a time when Hashem protected us, despite the fact that we were wandering the desert without a home. As Hashem promises us in Parshat Yitro, every place where you will mention my name, I will come to you and bless you. The key to the mitzvah of Sukkah is the idea that even in exile, the remotest, most feeble of places, Hashem resides with us and protects us.

One of the few places in Tanach in which an instance of the observance of Sukkot can be found is Sefer Nechemia. Nechemia writes that the Jews who had returned from exile in Bavel, "made *sukkot* and dwelt in the sukkot, for since the days of Yehoshua ben Nun until that day, Bnei Yisrael had not done so and there was very great happiness." This *passuk* brings up two questions: Why was this Sukkot so special and why had there not been one as great since the times of Yehoshua ben Nun?

I believe we can answer this question by connecting this to our aforementioned development of the intrinsic relationship between the Sukkah and exile. Who would be the most prime candidate to fulfill and truly understand this exile-themed *mitzvah of sukkah*? Someone who witnessed the miraculous survival of an exiled nation and the hand of Hashem as they were returned to their homeland.

Bnei Yisrael at the times of Yehoshua and Ezra had witnessed Hashem's hand in their miraculous survival and ascent to Eretz Yisrael. With their deeper understanding of this central motif of the mitzvah of the *sukkah*, they were able to practice Sukkot to its fullest extent.

Let us hope that this will be the year when we will finally merit to see our redemption, with the coming of the Moshiach. Then, we will be able to fulfill the *mitzvah of sukkah* to its fullest extent. In the meantime, as we live in exile, we should take the time to internalize the themes of the *sukkah* and make sure that we fully appreciate Hashem's protection of us each and every one of us, every moment of our lives.

## **Torches of Torah: Sukkot in the Mikdash**

by Baruch-Lev Kelman (Maimonides '17)

Sukkot is the most festive holiday of the year and was doubly so in the period of the two Batei Mikdash. Let us go



back two millennia in history and experience Sukkot as it was meant to be experienced.

It is the year 100 BCE and you are standing on a pier overlooking the Shiloach pool in the City of David. Suddenly, a great cheer erupts from the crowd behind you. Kohanim descend from the Temple Mount, as they do on every one of the seven days of Sukkot, to the Shiloach pool in a great procession headed by a Kohen bearing a silver flask. The flask is then filled with water from the Shiloach and is marched back up to the Beit HaMikdash. When the flask-bearer reaches the Water Gate, “Shofrot [are] sounded together with the silver trumpets” (Masechet Sukkah 4:9). A tall *arava* branch is fixed so that it covers part of the *mizbayach*, and then two small cups with spouts are put on either side of the southwest corner of the *mizbayach*. The water from the spring is poured into one, while wine is poured into the other. The liquids drain down together into two holes, called the *shittin*, in the foundation of the *mizbayach*. Again, silver trumpets are sounded.

At night, a great crowd gathers in the Ezrat Nashim, the Court of Women: men gather at the base of the court, while women gather on an elevated balcony called the Tikkun HaGadol (the Great Rectification). Young lads climb up four fifty-amah high (100 feet!) menorot (lamps of gold), and light their massive wicks. The light emanating from these golden menorot is strong enough to light up a garden miles away. Members of the Sanhedrin and great Rabbis then dance and sing before the people. Each *dayan* (judge) had his own unique way of celebrating: Rabban Gamliel is renowned for being able to juggle eight flaming torches, and Rav Yehoshua would swallow knives before his students. The Mishnah states: “Any person who has not seen the Simchat Beit Hashoeva (the Water Libation Ceremony) has not seen a *simcha* in his life” (Sukkah 1:4).

On Sukkot, Sh’ar Nicanor is opened, and the Leviim gather on the gate’s fifteen steps to sing the Shir HaMaalot, the fifteen-part Song of the Steps.

Every morning, all of Israel make a singular *hakafah* around the *mizbayach*, and throughout the week a total of seventy bulls are brought as a *korban mussaf* representing each of the seventy nations. After a cycle of seven days, the crowds break up and return home. Some spread through Israel, some return to the Judean colonies in Europe, some to Alexandria, some to Persia, and some to their villages further east in northern India. To the lucky few who remain in Jerusalem throughout the year, it is just a matter of waiting around till the next *chag*.

You, unfortunately, are forced to return to the twenty-first century, but *be’ezrat* Hashem the wait until the next *chag* won’t be too long and who knows, I might see you there.

## The Circles of Simchat Torah

by Faigy Shtaynberger & Elisheva Abilevitz (Shulamith ‘16)

On Simchat Torah, we finish reading the final *parshah* in the Torah, only to start the Torah again, immediately afterwards. By restarting the Torah, we demonstrate the eagerness and love with which we serve Hashem. Since there is never a moment in time when we as a people are not engaged in the reading of the Torah, it can be said that we as a people are constantly going around in this circle.

Indeed, the circle is a common feature in many elements of our religious observance. For example, eating round *challahs* is a Minhag on Rosh Hashanah, symbolizing that life is a circle. This view of life as a circle, stands counter to the way we normally view life, as a circle has no beginning, middle, and an end. However, upon further inspection, our perception of life as a line clearly stands in direct contrast to Jewish tradition and our actions on Simchat Torah.

If we view life as linear, then, ending seems sad and tragic. However, on Simchat Torah, upon concluding the Torah, we dance *hakafot*, the dancing that is done in circles on Simchat Torah in celebration of the completion of the Torah. Just like *hakafot*, life really is a circle, for just as we dance on Simchat Torah upon completion of the Torah, we are also dancing for the beginning of a new cycle and life.

There are many lessons we can learn from a circle. First, all points in a circle are an equal distance from the center. The dancing in a circle on Simchat Torah signifies how we are all equal, celebrating together. During this collective celebration no one person is more important than anyone else, rather, every participant is needed in order to achieve real celebration and complete the shape. This practice signifies the *achdut* that we as a nation yearn for.

Circles can also represent love. This is because when one wants to show affection to someone, the natural instinct is to encircle or hug them. When we all come together, whether it’s in times of *simcha* or in times of hardship, there is nothing we cannot accomplish so long as we are there for each other, supporting one another.

The Torah also shows us the importance of a circle. In the last verse of the Parshat Vizot Habracha, Rashi explains how when the Torah talk about the good deeds of Moshe, it is talking about the breaking of the *luchot*. At first glance, one might wonder why the Torah would conclude on such a negative note. However, upon close examination, one will find that the Torah is not concluding on a negative note at all. When Moshe breaks the *luchot*, he is also beginning a new cycle of growth for the Jewish people. Vizot Habracha includes the famous line, “Moshe commanded us the Torah, the inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov.” Although Moshe is the one who first brought the Torah down for us, after he passed away, the Torah still continues to be an inheritance for the whole nation, thanks to his righteousness and

d e t e r m i n a t i o n .

We must continue where Moshe has left off. It's our job as the Jewish people to pick ourselves up from whatever challenges we might face and keep the Torah alive in every generation. This means that on Simchat Torah, we do not leave the Torah broken or finished, for the Torah is not a linear book, but a circular one, where the ending and beginning blend smoothly into one another. In this celebration of our Torah, we dance *hakafot*, circles around the Torah. These are circles of unity, love and tradition and we do not make them alone.

## Simchat Beit Hashoeva: Continuing the Happiness Through Chol HaMoed

by Miriam Schottenstein (DAT '16)

Every year when Sukkot rolls around, my inbox is full of invitations to Smachot Beit Hashoeva. As I open up the invitations many questions pop into my head: What exactly is a Simchat Beit Hashoeva? Why are people still partaking in a Simchat Beit Hashoeva if we don't have the Beit Hamikdash any more? How is a Simchat Beit Hashoeva still applicable in the present day?

To understand why people still have a Simchat Beit Hashoeva today, we first need to understand what a Simchat Beit Hashoeva is. Simchat Beit Hashoeva is translated as "The Rejoicing of the House of Drawing." Drawing refers to the drawing of water during the morning korban every day of Sukkot in the times of the Beit HaMikdash. When the morning *korban* was brought, there was a special water offering brought as well that was poured on the *mizbeach*. In the Gemara Rosh HaShana we learn that water was used because on Sukkot the world is judged for the amount of water we will receive in the coming year. Therefore, we bring a special water offering.

Every night of Sukkot, except the first day and Shabbat, masses of people would come from afar and gather at Har HaBayit to watch the sages dance and sing in celebration. Special lamps were lit, lighting up all of Yerushalayim, so bright that it almost felt like daytime. These festivities, the Simchat Beit Hashoeva, were considered to be the greatest celebration of all time. As it says in the Gemara Sukkah 51a "Whoever did not see this celebration never saw a celebration in his days."

What was the cause of such a great celebration? Each *chag* has a special *middah* with which it is associated. The *middah* associated with Sukkot is *simcha*. While on every *chag* there is a commandment to be joyous, happiness receives a special emphasis on Sukkot. To help fulfill the mitzvah of *simcha* everyone would gather in celebration to dance and sing. The Chassidic masters add that the water celebration represents a joy caused by a connection to

Hashem so deep and so true that it has no describable taste, like water.

What is the central theme of Sukkot? Rashi believes that the whole holiday is based on *nisuch hamayim* (water pouring). The Rambam, however, disagrees with Rashi. The Rambam talks about the added emphasis of being joyous on Sukkot and goes into great detail explaining how to be joyous, specifically at a Simchat Beit Hashoeva. When describing the Simchat Beit Hashoeva, the Rambam surprisingly does not mention the water drawing. How could the Rambam leave out such an integral part of the Simchat Beit Hashoeva? To understand the Rambam's reasoning we need to explore two words, *geshem* and *gashmiut*. The word *geshem* (rain) comes from the word *gashmiut* (materialism). Rain, a source of water, represents the ultimate symbol of human existence, yet is also very basic and materialistic, since it is a physical need rather than a spiritual one. On Sukkot, we take the most basic and materialistic items and elevate them to the highest form and connection to Hashem through *korbanot* on the *mizbeach*. This could explain why the Rambam left out the drawing of water. While the Simchat Beit Hashoeva and the drawing of water are directly linked, the Rambam wanted to take away from the material aspect and focus on the ultimate theme of Sukkot, to be joyous.

The Simchat Beit Hashoeva was an important event during the times of the Beit Hamikdash, but why do many communities still continue this tradition today? Although we no longer practice the water pouring ceremony, we still have the obligation to be joyous on Sukkot. Therefore, every year when Sukkot rolls around, many communities continue the custom of Simchat Beit Hashoeva to help fulfill the obligation of being joyous. The Simchat Beit Hashoeva is a time during Chol HaMoed when we can remind ourselves of the times during the Beit Hamikdash, focus on our connection with Hashem, and truly express our joy.

## Kavanna by Sukkot

by Etan Soclof (Mizrachi '16)

Perhaps one of the largest sugyot in Shas is the debate whether *mitzvot tzrichot kavannah* or *mitzvot eino tzrichot kavannah*: do *mitzvot* require intention when performed to be considered valid or not? Although there are many Rishonim that maintain *mitzvot eino tzrichot kavannah* (*mitzvot* do not require intention), the Shulchan Aruch (60:4) rules that *mitzvot tzrichot kavannah*. However, the Shulchan Aruch (475:4) rules with regard to the *mitzvah* of *matzah* on the first night of Pesach that one does not require *kavannah*. The Mishnah Berurah (475:34) resolves this seeming contradiction by explaining that by the *matzah* no *kavannah* is needed because one derives benefit from eating and therefore does not require *kavannah*. The Beur Halacha (60:4 "Yesh Omrim")

extends this principle to the mitzvah of eating in the *sukkah* by claiming that it too is a *mitzvah* of eating, and therefore does not require *kavannah*. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach (Minchas Shlomo Tanina 5:5), however, disagrees with the statement of the Beur Halacha, noting that when one eats in the *sukkah*, he may be deriving benefit from the food, but he is not deriving benefit from the *sukkah* which is the mitzvah he is actually performing when eating.

Perhaps this *machlokes* between Rav Shlomo Zalman and the Beur Halacha is dependent on the nature of the mitzvah of eating in the *sukkah* on the first night of Sukkot. The Gemara in Sukkah (27a) derives from a *gezeirah shava* (a method of biblical interpretation) that the first night of Sukkot is equated to the first night of Pesach: just as there is an obligation to eat (*matzah*) on the first night of Pesach, so too there is a specific obligation to eat (bread) in the *sukkah* on the first night of Sukkot. The Harerei Kodesh, a commentary on the Sefer Mikraei Kodesh (Siman 31), discusses an interesting *chakirah* (difference by inquiry) about the nature of this requirement on Sukkot: is the requirement of the first night of Sukkos one of Yeshiva BaSukkah (sitting in the *sukkah*) or is it one of *achila* (eating, like by *matzah*) which happens to take place in the *sukkah*? In other words, is the focus of this *mitzvah* on the eating, or the sitting in the *sukkah* at the time when one is eating?

Perhaps it is this distinction that is the basis of the argument between Rav Shlomo Zalman and the Beur Halacha. Perhaps Rav Shlomo Zalman maintains that the *mitzvah* on the first night is one of Yeshiva BaSukkah, to sit in the *sukkah* while eating. Therefore, the principle that states one doesn't need *kavannah* when eating would not apply here, as the *mitzvah* is focused on sitting in the *sukkah*, not on eating. Contrastly, perhaps the Beur Halacha maintains that the *mitzvah* of the first night is fundamentally a requirement to eat, and that it just happens to be done in the *sukkah*. Therefore, the the principle that states one doesn't need *kavannah* when eating would apply here, as the *mitzvah* in its essence is a requirement to eat.

The above applies to the basic *kavannah* that one must have when performing any *mitzvah*; that is, the intention that he is doing it *l'shem shamayim*. However, by the mitzvah of Sukkah, it seems that there is an additional *kavannah* required. The Bach (in Tur Orach Chaim siman 8 and cited by Mishnah Berurah 8:19) famously explains that when the *mitzvot* of *tzitzit*, *tefilin*, and *sukkah* are commanded in the Torah, they are given a purpose indicated by the word "*Lemaan...*" - "So that...". Therefore, when one performs these *mitzvot*, one must have additional *kavannah* to fulfill the mitzvah for the reasons stated in the Torah.

With regard to the mitzvah of *sukkah*, the Torah says (Vayikra 23), "For a seven day period you shall live in

booths... in order that your [ensuing] generations should know that I had the children of Israel live in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt."

Thus, when one eats in the *sukkah*, one must have this in mind. However, it seems that this *kavannah* is not completely necessary, as the Mishnah Berurah states (625:1) that if one did not have this additional *kavannah*, he has still fulfilled his obligation, just not to its fullest extent. However, there are those that are stringent in this matter out of the concern that one does not fulfill his obligation at any level without this *kavannah*.

## The Sukkah: Lesson in Humility or Symbol of Affection?

by Eytan Merkin (YULA '18)

Imagine you are a Jewish farmer living in *Eretz Yisrael* in the time of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*. You have just endured a grueling year of tending your crops, and you are finally finished and ready to enjoy the fruits of your labor. The last thing you would want to do during that brief period of the year - between the end of one agricultural year and the beginning of the next - would be to leave the comfort of your home and live in a small, makeshift hut called a *sukkah* for a week. Yet, this is precisely what the Torah commands us to do.

Rav Binyamin Lau, in his book *Etnachta*, suggests that one goal of being "kicked out" of our own home is to teach us humility. The rules governing how we can build a *sukkah* strengthen that notion. We are commanded to build *sukkot* that are under twenty *amot* high, so that we don't feel the sense of grandeur that comes with tall structures. We are also commanded to build our *sukkot* underneath the heavens, without any other ceiling protecting us, and without too much *schach*, so that we can see the stars. This makes us feel as if we are exposed to the elements, reminding us that we are at *Hashem's* mercy. Additionally, we listen to Megilat Kohelet, which reminds us of the insignificance of our materialistic belongings. All of these halachot are designed to remind us of our own powerlessness. *Hashem* wishes to dissuade us from an exaggerated sense of self-importance or pride that we might have developed as a result of the accomplishments we have accrued over the course of the year. We must remember, even as we enjoy a much-earned respite from the toils of the year, that our reward comes not from ourselves, but from *Hashem*.

Rav Lau writes that there is another aspect to the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. In addition to teaching us humility, leaving the luxury of our houses can help us restore our relationship with *Hashem*. Through parting with the apparent safety of our homes, we revert to the days of old

when *Hashem* protected us in *Midbar Sinai*. Leaving our homes to live in a rickety, unstable shack is an expression of deep *emunah* in *Hashem*. As we say in *LeDavid*, which we recite after davening from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Shemini Atzeres, “*Ki Yitzpeneni BeSuko BeYom Ra*,” “*He will hide me in his sukkah on the day of evil*” (Psalms 27:5). A *sukkah* is a symbol of Divine protection and safety, and Sukkot is a reminder of our unique relationship with *Hashem*. Throughout the year, we get increasingly immersed in our work, and we sometimes unintentionally create a barrier between our mind and soul. Through the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, we accept the embrace of the *Shechinah* and remove the barrier that separates us from our Creator.

To take this a step further, I would like to propose that the dual symbolism of humility and our unique relationship with *Hashem* parallels a common theme during the *Yamim Noraim*: the duality of fear and love. Throughout Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, we emphasize that it is not enough to have either fear or love of Hashem; rather, we must have both. This principle is epitomized in the *tefila Avinu Malkeinu*, which we recite on the *Yamim Noraim* and on fast days. The name “*Avinu Malkeinu*” means “*Our Father, Our King*.” We learn from this *tefila* that we must view *Hashem* as both our father, which implies love, and our king, which implies fear. The dual concept of loving and fearing *Hashem* carries over to the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. The first aspect of *sukkah* is humility. Humility means the understanding that *Hashem* is infinitely more powerful than we are. Therefore, humility is directly related to fear of *Hashem*. The second aspect of the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is remembering the special relationship we have with *Hashem*, one of intense love and affection.

The combination of the two aspects reflected in the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, humility translating into fear of an all-powerful King, and *Hashem*'s protection translating into love for our Father in Heaven, elevates the spirituality of the chag and crowns it as the culmination of the “*chagei siyum shanah*,” “*the end-of-year holidays*.” On Sukkot, we remind ourselves that all of our accomplishments stem from *Hashem*. We also remove the barrier that separates us from our Creator, thereby accepting the embrace of the *Shechina*. In this way, we wipe our slate clean and prepare ourselves for the coming year.

## Once in a Lifetime: The Unique Message of Yovel

by Noah Notis (Kohelet '16)

The new year which Rosh Hashanah brings in this year is a year called *motzaei sheviit*, the year after the *shemittah* year. *Once* every fifty years, after the seventh *shemittah*, *motzaei sheviit* is celebrated as a special year, *yovel*. This jubilee year retains the *issurim* of working the land from

*shemittah*, but has three additional *mitzvot*: the blowing of the *shofar* on Yom Kippur, the liberation of all Jewish servants, and the return of all purchased land in Israel to its original owners.

The Mishna in Masechet Rosh Hashanah 3:5, mentions that *Yovel*, the fiftieth year from the beginning of the *Shemittah* cycle, shares two similarities with Rosh Hashanah: the blasts of the *Shofar* and the *Berachot* of Shemoneh Esrei. On the Yom Kippur of *Yovel*, the *shofar* is sounded just as it was ten days before on Rosh Hashanah, and *mussaf* contains the same three *berachot*: *malchuyot*, *zichronot*, and *shofarot*, that distinguish Rosh Hashanah's *mussaf* from other holidays' *mussafim*.

There are other connections between *yovel* and Rosh Hashanah aside from the shofar and the *berachot* of *mussaf*, though. In Rosh Hashanah 8b, Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yochanan ben Berokah claims, contrary to the simple reading of the *pesukim*, that *Yovel* actually begins during Rosh Hashanah. On 9a, Rabbi Yehudah holds that *Yovel* is actually the first year of the next forty-nine year calendar. According to Rabbi Yehudah, then, *Yovel* is a sort of Rosh Hashanah in itself, similar to the rest of the rosh hashanahs listed in Rosh Hashanah 1:1.

These external ties indicate a more essential connection between Rosh Hashanah and *Yovel*. Both Rosh Hashanah and the *mitzvot* of *Yovel* express God's ownership of the Earth. Within the context of teaching the *mitzvot* of *yovel*, the Torah states in Vayikra 25:23, “*And the land shall not be sold permanently for the land is mine*.” In other words, the inability of the land to remain in the buyer's hands past the *yovel* year is an expression of God's true ownership of the land. Similarly, the requirement to free slaves displays God's mastership over humanity. In Parshat Behar, the Torah states that if a Hebrew slave will not be redeemed by another Jew, he will go free during *Yovel*, “*for the children of Israel are mine as slaves... (Vayikra 25:55)*” The freedom experienced during the *Yovel* year only exists in order to engender a feeling of service of God. As clearly displayed in the *malchuyot* section of *mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah in which we praise God as King, acknowledgement of God's mastership is one of the main aspects of the First of *Tishrei*. In addition to that, Rosh Hashanah is the commemoration of the end of the six days of creation, the ultimate expression of God's ownership. Even though we will not be celebrating *Yovel* this year, we should think about its messages as Rosh Hashanah brings in a new *Shemittah* cycle.

## The Time of Gathering

by Ben Tzion Zuckier (MTA '17)

When contemplating the holiday of Sukkot, people tend to focus on *mitzvot* such as *yishevah basukkah*, *lulav* and *etrog*, and *nissukh hamayim*. However,



a *mitzvah* that is often overlooked is the commandment of *hak'hel*, which, in the time of the Beit Hamikdash, would have been observed this year. This is listed in the Sefer Hamitzvot as the second to last *mitzvah* and it entails the King reading from various sections of the Torah to the Jewish nation; men, women, and children. While illustrating this positive commandment, the Torah does not provide a specific date rather it provides three qualifications for the time period— *mikeitz sheva shavuot*, *b'moed shinat hashimettah*, and *b'chag haSukkot* (Devarim 31:10).

“*Mikeitz sheva shanim*” – “at the end of seven years” is a phrase that appears scarcely in the Torah; once here (Devarim 31:10) and once in relation to *shemittat kesafim*, when the Torah is discussing the waiving of loans (Devarim 15:1). *Shemittat kesafim*, unlike the other *mitzvah* of *shemittah* which is the commandment to let the land lay fallow, takes place at the conclusion of the seventh year, and it is only logical to assume that this is what the phrase *mikeitz* would connote in relation to the former *mikeitz – hak'hel*. In fact it does, as *hak'hel* (which takes place on Sukkot, as the Torah says “*bikhag haSukkot*” (Devarim 31:10)), and the holiday of Sukkot both occur mere weeks after the conclusion of the seventh year.

However there is one more phrase that the Torah uses to delineate the scheduling of this unique *mitzvah – bimoad shinat hashimettah* (ibid). How can we reconcile this phrase, “at the time of the year of release”, with the other timing necessities? If *hak'hel* must transpire during Sukkot, how can we say it is “at the time of the year of release” – doesn't Rosh Hashanah mark the end of the *shemittah* year? Surely it is some time before that!?

The Netziv in concurrence with a *gemara* in Rosh Hashanah (12b) attempts to explain how the Sages rendered *moed shinat hashimettah* to refer to Sukkot, and especially Sukkot of the 8<sup>th</sup> year. The Netziv says: “[The Torah] refers to the eighth year as the *shemittah* year [even though it is the seventh year in which work in the field is forbidden] because the reality of the prohibitions are more apparent during *chol hamoad* Sukkot of the eighth year, when one feels the absence of the harvest season, rather than during Sukkot of the seventh year when the granaries are full.” It is apparent that *moed shinat hashimettah* and subsequently *hak'hel* do not occur during the actual year of *shemittah*, but rather they are early in the eighth year when the effects and implications are actually starting to be realized and felt.

This seemingly simple idea teaches us many things. It conveys the message of gratitude, to be thankful of what we have. This is another message of Sukkot and the reason why we live in huts for seven days – “*ki basukkot hoshavti*

*et Bnei Yisrael bihotzi'ee otam mei'eretzMitzrayim*” “for in booths [God] caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell when [He] took them out of the land of Egypt.” We are grateful to God for the past, and we want to ensure that we know that everything comes from Hashem, lest we say “*kokhi ve'otzem yadi asa li et hakhayil hazeh*” “My might and the strength of my hand has accumulated this wealth for me,” and turn away from God.

In addition, we can garner insight about inspiration and timing. The Torah was very particular with the timing of *hak'hel*, so much so that it provided no less than three qualifications and parameters for when it should take place. Why is this so? It is because humans get inspired easily but they also lose their inspiration quickly – unless the motivation is funneled toward action. This is exactly what the *mitzvah* of *hak'hel* is. While we still feel the effects of the *shemittah* year, and directly after the *yamim nora'im*, inspiration is abundant. However as a nation we must get together and make that inspiration meaningful and channel it through Torah. May we have the opportunity to fulfill *hak'hel* this year, and take all of the encouragement and motivation we received from Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and attend *hak'hel* this year in a rebuilt Jerusalem, with the coming of *mashiach*, *bimheira b'yameinu, amen*.

## The Special Miracle in the Desert

by Justin Glickman (HAFTR '16)

When describing the festival of Sukkot, the Torah says: “You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period, every native in Israel shall dwell in booths, 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; I am Hashem your G-d” (23:42-43). In this paragraph, the Torah relates that we celebrate the holiday of Sukkot by building huts as a remembrance of the miracle that Hashem provided us with shelter when we left Egypt. The halachic authorities point out that we must have this idea in mind when we sit in the sukkah, since the Torah is providing a specific reason for this commandment. The later commentaries add that one must concentrate on two distinct miracles while in the sukkah in order to fulfill his obligation. That is, the sukkah represents the physical shelter that served to protect from the elements, as well as the spiritual protection of the Divine presence that enveloped us.

By no means was the miracle of Sukkot the only one of its kind! We learn about three great miracles performed in the desert for the Jewish people, each of which came about because of a different merit. For example, Moshe was responsible for the manna, and Miriam merited the well of water.

The commentators question why we only celebrate the miracle of the Sukkot, which commemorates the shelter that Hashem provided for us in the desert, but we do not have

festivals to commemorate the other miracles in the desert. Why do we not celebrate the manna that was sent from heaven to feed our nation for 40 years? Why do we not memorialize the well that brought forth water in the merit of Miriam? What makes the miracle of Sukkot so unique that it is granted such a distinguished holiday?

In his sefer Rosh Dovid, the Chidah brings down in this *parashah* several answers to these questions. The answers are based in the relative interpretations of the original statement: “... 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; I am Hashem your G-d” (ibid.). We must delve deeper into this verse.

Our first insight is based on our understanding of Hashem’s magnanimous kindness. While the miracles of the *manna* and of Miriam’s well both produced items that were necessary for the survival of our people, the clouds of Hashem’s presence were a bonus. Of course, we must understand that a person’s obligation to show appreciation for a kindness is not diminished by the fact that “it was coming to him;” we must show the same appreciation for a kindness that a person was supposed to do as we would show for an extra kindness. However, when it comes to making a holiday to commemorate Hashem’s kindness to His nation, that extra measure of kindness is what receives special honor. When Hashem showed abundant kindness by comforting us with the special clouds, it was an extra measure for which we cannot determine any reason. Hashem commanded us to recognize this extra love and celebrate it with joy.

The Bnei Yissaschar offers a second insight as to why we celebrate the miracle of the special clouds out of the three miracles, explaining that the clouds were so holy that people who were unclean and impure were forced to live outside of them. In fact, the Egyptians known as the Eirev Rav, who had left Egypt together with the Jewish people, were not allowed inside the clouds because they were not on the highest level. Yet, when it came to the food, everyone benefitted; even the Egyptian outsiders were fed bread and water. Therefore, when we want to show the great holiness of Hashem, we celebrate only the miracle that was unique to the Jewish people.

As we have seen, we should be learning important lessons from the various nuances in this Torah verse. If we were learning in simple terms about the laws of Sukkot, we would say that the Torah was only telling us the reason to build a sukkah and to sit inside of it. But when we think a little beyond the text, we can see the relationship between this festival and the miracle of the clouds, and we can discover more about ourselves and about our interpersonal dealings with others.

## Happiness for Dummies: Jewish Edition

by Yisrael Friedenber (K.H Editor Emeritus)

Happiness. A term we use but rarely dare to define. A concept we so often discuss, but something so few manage to attain. This mysterious virtue is something the religious Jew must contemplate, particularly at the time of year when he is commanded to be joyous.

What is happiness? The psychologist has his definition, perhaps a complex and intriguing one. He may mention security, significance, contribution, and various other prerequisites to this end goal. The theologian will likely agree, but he will focus on one thing the psychologist is wont to neglect. This aspect does not disagree with the psychologist’s definition; rather, it suggests the best venue for meeting it. It does not wish to negate the psychologist’s point – it rather makes the point more approachable. This venue is connection to G-d. Judaism lays clear guidelines of how to be happy, why to be happy, and when to be happy. These can all be achieved through our connection with our Creator. But while this may be easy to say, we must consider more deeply what it means to derive pleasure from this connection.

The last section of Rambam’s *Hilchot Lulav* is about our obligation of happiness on Sukkot. Rambam finishes on a general note, commenting that *simchah*, happiness, is not only required of us for these few days each year; rather, it is a necessary component of every mitzvah we do (8:15). He quotes *the* pasuk from Moshe’s rebuke of the Jewish people: “[These curses will come upon you] because you have not served Hashem your G-d with joy and gladness of heart” (*Devarim* 28:47). Every *mitzvah* thus has two parts: the instruction itself and the joy one must feel while following it.

Rabbeinu Bachya similarly uses Sukkot as an opening to discuss our obligation to rejoice in our service of G-d. He goes even further than Rambam, saying that *simchah shel mitzvah* is in fact its own commandment, not merely an aspect of every other *mitzvah*.

But Rabbeinu Bachya qualifies his statement, based on the words we read in reference to Sukkot, “*vehayita ach samei’ach*” (*Devarim* 16:15), a line most simply translated as “and you shall be nothing but joyous.” Rabbeinu Bachya finds this translation unsatisfying, however, as the word “*ach*” seems extraneous. He therefore points to a concept, which is universal within Torah, namely, that the words “*ach*” and “*rak*” are always used to limit a prior statement (see Rashi and Ramban to Vayikra 23:27). The *pasuk* should therefore be understood as “you shall be only so joyous;” in other words, we should be happy, but not unboundedly so. This is reflected too by Rabbi Yosef Caro in *Shulchan Aruch*, where he writes that while we are instructed to be happy on *yom tov*, we must keep our joy to *simchah shel mitzvah* and not let it turn into

unregulated frivolity (O”C 529:3).

In *Hilchot Dei’ot*, Rambam writes about the importance of achieving a healthy balance between extremes of personality. In reference to happiness, specifically, he writes that one should not be giddy and frivolous, but that he should certainly maintain a happy demeanor (1:4). We see, yet again, the idea of being happy, but not too happy.

The references to the necessity of reducing our happiness also abound in the central works of our heritage. For example, Chazal tell us that we must carry a constant sense of sadness because of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The Gemara and Halachic literature reflect this idea in many places. (For a simple example, see *Berachot* 30b-31a.) The *Shulchan Aruch* writes that this is an obligation on every Jew (O”C 560), but he does not stop at this instruction. He continues by noting that this is untrue when one is doing a mitzvah, at which point one should be joyous. The *Mishnah Berurah*, though, adds that even this happiness should be restricted to a moderate measure (ibid. 16). (See also Shabbat 30b, which relates this idea to two apparently-contradictory *pesukim* from *Kohelet*.) And thus we see the dichotomy, the balance between happiness and the oft-necessary lack thereof.

Being unhappy does not come as a difficult task to most people. It is something to which everyone can relate. But the thinking Jew must be plagued by the question: What exactly does it mean to serve G-d with joy? How are we to approach fulfilling this important aspect of our *avodat Hashem*?

Seforno explains that our obligation to be happy while serving G-d is that one should have the same feeling as the joy he gets from serving someone whom he loves (*Devarim* 12:7). Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, in his lecture entitled “2DS” (available at [simpletoremember.com](http://simpletoremember.com)), gives a related example for what serving G-d with joy means. He tells of an incident when his wife asked him to do a complex, almost bizarre set of tasks without explaining her intentions. Rabbi Kelemen describes the great joy he experienced from obeying her instructions – not because they were enjoyable in and of themselves, but because of his deep love for his wife. Such, he explains, should be our service of G-d. If we serve Him out of love, we will not only be willing to do His bidding, but we will naturally do it with joy. At this point the core question to be addressed becomes clear. We now know how to derive pleasure from our service of G-d, i.e. by serving Him out of love. But this begs an even further question – what does it mean to love G-d? How can one love someone he can barely relate to?

Many suggestions may be proposed in response to this question, but we shall focus on just two of them. The first is from the writings of Rambam in *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, the first section of his magnum opus, *Mishneh Torah*. In the second halachah of chapter 2 he poses the very question with which we now grapple: How does one come to love G-

d? He proposes an answer that we should all work to integrate into our outlooks.

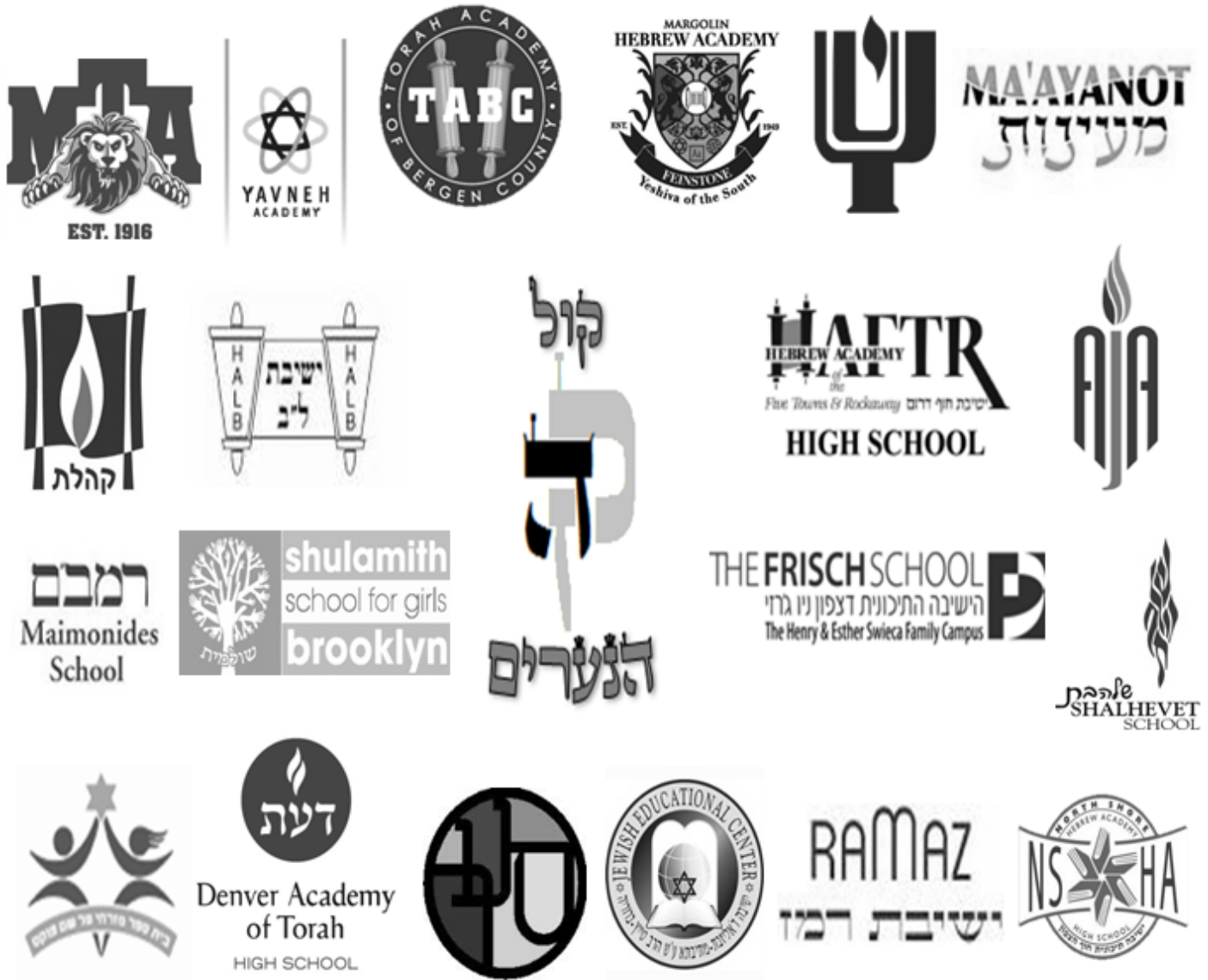
When one sees something incredibly complex, Rambam says, he is naturally drawn towards it, enthralled by its sheer magnificence. He immediately becomes fascinated by it, wishing to observe it in order to gain a grasp of its complexity. This is something many of us can relate to through things like art, music, mathematics, or other subjects that may captivate us. We are drawn towards the particular pursuit, and come to passionately want to gain an understanding of its finest mechanics and details. The natural step from here, as many of us have surely experienced, is the development of a deep love and appreciation for the art or the music, as one comes to appreciate the almost-unreal complexity and genius behind it. This, Rambam says, is how we come to love G-d. By looking out at the world and observing the indescribable diversity and complexity of G-d’s handiwork and actions, we will want nothing more than to understand G-d, to become close to G-d, and naturally, to love G-d.

The second approach, in a sense, can be understood to qualify the first. Ramban, towards the end of *Parashat Bo*, writes about the importance of observing G-d’s miraculous actions. He comments that there is an observable natural progression when it comes to seeing the greatness of G-d’s miracles. When one observes G-d’s actions, Ramban says, he becomes more attuned to the finer, less obvious miracles that G-d performs for us on a constant basis. By looking for the great miracles that are blatantly present in the world around us, we become more observant of miracles in general.

This sounds like a lofty, profound concept, but in truth it is quite simple. Most of us have learned to tune things out, to ignore anything that does not seem directly pertinent and important to us. In order to see fine detail, we must first accustom ourselves to see the obvious things. As we get better in this basic level, we will advance to the point where we see even life’s less obvious details.

By learning first to see great, vast miracles, as per Rambam’s recommendation, we can become more attuned to the myriad of tiny miracles that run throughout our lives every day, as Ramban notes. Through this we can come to appreciate and love G-d. This synthesis of ideas – Rambam’s and Ramban’s – can guide us in our pursuit of *simchah shel mitzvah* in our *avodat Hashem*.

At the beginning of *Parashat Re’eih* the Torah says “[...] The blessing, that you will listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d” (*Devarim* 11:27). An obvious question arises: Shouldn’t the blessing come if you listen to G-d? Why does the Torah say “that you will listen”? Rabbi Moshe Feinstein gives a beautiful answer, which fits perfectly as the ending to the topic at hand. The blessing, he says, is our connection with G-d! If we do our *avodat Hashem* correctly, that gives us not only *sechar* in the next world, but a great life in this one as well. May we all gain this great joy through our *avodat Hashem*, this Sukkot and for the rest of our lives.



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