

THE ULTIMATE SUKKOT CELEBRATION

DIY: YOUR SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVA GUIDE



**A Torah Thought and
Story to Share Each Night**

**Understanding the
Ushpizin Guests and What
They Mean to Us**

**DIY: How to Do Your Own
Simchat Beit Hashoeva!**

Free Music for Your Event!

INTRODUCTION

The Ultimate Sukkot Celebration

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

From the time King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem until the day it was destroyed by the Romans (with a brief interim for temporary exile to Babylonia), the can't-miss-it event-of-the-year for Jews was the Water-Drawing Celebration.

Envision streams of Jewish families—farmers, vintners, shepherds, merchants,

craftspeople, and scholars—streaming in from every part of Israel, Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, and other nearby lands, converging upon Jerusalem and celebrating day and night, non-stop for eight days. The hot spot was, of course, the Temple Mount.

At the close of the first day of Sukkot, Temple workers furiously began inserting

SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVA - THEN AND NOW



For most of a thousand years, the action on Sukkot was at the Temple in Jerusalem. From late afternoon until the light of morning, the Levite orchestra played and thousands of Jews sang in unison, distinguished elders would dance wildly, perform acrobatics and even juggle fiery torches. It was called Simchat Beit Hashoeva—the Water-Drawing Celebration.

Today, we no longer have a temple, but the joyous celebrations remain. Every night of Sukkot, we gather in Sukkahs to sing, dance, share Torah wisdom, and celebrate our own *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*.

sturdy poles into their brackets in the walls of the Temple courtyard. Over the poles they lay wooden boards, creating cascades of bleachers so that women could stand on the higher bleachers, with the men below—the original synagogue *mechitzah*.

Torch-laden boys scrambled up ladders scaling candelabras 75, perhaps 150 feet tall to light the thick wicks of the candelabras' four enormous lanterns so that all of Jerusalem was filled with light like day. The *kohanim* began sounding their trumpets, the *levi'im* played their flutes, lyres, cymbals, and every sort of instrument in thunderous,

heavenly music, while all the people joined in song.

The most wondrous spectacle of all was the sight of the distinguished elders, with their long white beards, singing at the top of their lungs, dancing wildly, performing acrobatic feats, and even juggling acts. **The most illustrious sage, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who presided over the supreme court of seventy elders, would juggle eight flaming torches—and never would one torch touch another.**

“If you never saw the celebration of the

DANCING IN THE STREETS



Forty years ago, in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, the dancing and singing of Sukkot spilled almost spontaneously onto the streets. The following night, the Rebbe remarked: “If you want to find G-d this Sukkot, you’ll find Him dancing on the streets.”

And so a new tradition was born, one that has been celebrated with zeal and zest ever since,

as Jews come from every part of New York and the tri-state area to sing and dance all night with some of the best Jewish bands at the Kingston and Montgomery Simchat Beit Hashoeva.

No matter where you are, you, too, can become part of this celebration, as you sing and dance (while staying safe, of course, by social distancing and wearing masks where told to by health officials), becoming part of our people’s celebration.

water-drawing,” Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would say, “you never saw a celebration in your life.”

Until dawn. Then came the water pouring.

What’s so exciting about pouring water? We can’t fathom. This is one of those things you just had to be there to understand.

The regular morning offering in the Temple was the meat of one sheep accompanied by a flour-and-oil mix, both thrown into the fire of the altar, along with one flask of wine poured by a *kohen* at the altar’s corner. But on the days of Sukkot, there was another flask, filled with water freshly drawn from a spring called *Shiloach* outside Jerusalem, poured by the same *kohen* together with that flask of wine.

That’s why the celebration was called *Simchat Beit Hashoeva* שמחת בית השואבה—literally, “The Celebration of the House of Drawing Water.” Somehow, as we will see in the *Thoughts to Share* later in this publication, water and celebration have much to do with one another.

After the morning offerings, the communal prayers, the priestly blessings, the additional offerings, and more prayers and priestly blessings, the people parted to the study halls to review their Torah knowledge and hear the talks of great scholars, then to homes throughout Jerusalem to feast, sing and celebrate some more until returning to the Temple Mount for the afternoon offerings, followed by, once again, a night of music, spectacles, and celebration.



WHO ARE THE USHPIZIN GUESTS?

“*Ushpizin*” is Aramaic for “guests,” a reference to the seven supernal guests, “founding fathers” of the Jewish people, who come to visit us in the sukkah. According to the Zohar, each day another guest leads the party.

Then there are the *Chassidic Ushpizin*. These are the founding fathers of the Chassidic movement, who taught us a joyous way of Jewish life. On Sukkot, the Rebbe would speak at length about that night’s *Ushpizin*, drawing parallels between the classic *Ushpiz* and his Chassidic counterpart.



HOW TO DO YOUR OWN SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVA

Print this guide before the holiday begins. Make more than one copy. See if you can convince some of your participants, whether family or friend, to prepare one of the stories or thoughts to share in advance.

To make it easy, we've collected seven Torah thoughts and seven stories, so that you and your gang will have plenty to share each night.

The sukkah is a good starting place, but the lawn, the driveway—anywhere safe and permissible—is a good place for simcha. Assign who is going to read (or say in their own words) which part. The rules are, everyone gets wild applause. Sing a Jewish song between each part. Play the music (we've provided some happy Jewish music—see below). Get your people up and dancing!

Every night for six nights—excluding the night of Shabbat—beginning as soon as the afternoon offering was complete, for around 15 ½ hours, until the morning offerings. As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya would say, “Our eyes never saw sleep.”

“But how is that possible?” the Talmud asks. “A person can’t go without sleep for even

three days!”

And the Talmud answers: They must have dozed off once in a while on each other’s shoulders while standing.

Despite the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, many Jews continued to make a kind of remembrance of the water-drawing celebration, gathering together on Sukkot to sing and tell stories. **Sukkot has always**

been the most joyous of the festivals—three times the Torah repeats that a Jew must rejoice and bring others to rejoice on Sukkot.

And then came Sukkot of the Hebrew year 5741—the fall of 1980—in Brooklyn, N.Y. On the first night of Sukkot that year, in the large prayer hall of Chabad-Lubavitch World Headquarters, 770 Eastern Parkway, the Rebbe turned to speak to the crowd after the evening prayers.

The Rebbe *spoke about Simchat Beit Hashoeva*. He was discussing how the celebration only began in the Temple on the second night—because they couldn't use musical instruments on Yom Tov. He continued explaining how, when there is no Temple and no Levite orchestra, we actually have a certain advantage, because the celebration can start on the first night. We can sing and dance accompanied by our own voices. And some understood that's what they had to do.

About ten of them started dancing in a circle in front of the building. Eventually, they continued singing down Kingston Ave., the main street of the neighborhood. People came out of their sukkahs to join. They wound back and forth through the streets of the neighborhood gathering more and more until several hundred joyous, singing Jews found themselves at the intersection of Kingston and Montgomery, where a failure in the traffic lights had brought out some police cars. Delighted to have the protection, many hundreds of Jews continued dancing and singing there until the light of dawn.

The next night, the Rebbe spoke again. He

was obviously very pleased. "If you want to find G-d this Sukkot," he said, "you'll find Him dancing on the streets."

A new institution of Jewish life was born—in a way, reborn. Every year since then, Jews come from every part of New York and the tri-state area to sing and dance with some of the best Jewish bands at the Kingston and Montgomery *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*. A little taste of the celebration in the Temple had returned.

In that year and the coming years until 1991, the Rebbe spoke publicly every night of Sukkot. A common theme of those talks was the *Ushpiz*—the special guest to the sukkah that night. Every night of Sukkot, the Zohar tells us, a party of special guests arrive in every sukkah, each night led by a different member of the party, beginning with Abraham, ending with David. The Rebbe discussed another tradition that the previous Rebbe, his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory, had divulged—that there's a party of *Chassidic Ushpizin* as well. In each talk, the Rebbe would discuss the similarities and differences between the Zohar's Ushpiz of that night and the Chassidic ushpiz, and most importantly, what we need to learn from them in our times.

It's not just the streets of Brooklyn that need that *Simchat Beit Hashoeva* divine energy. And no one has tabs on the Ushpizin either. Wherever a Jew is found, he or she has a holy mission to zap the streets with the light of the sukkah celebration. And wherever there's a sukkah, two sets of heavenly guests await us to greet them with song, words of Torah, and inspiring stories about them,

about Sukkot and about the Jewish spirit.

Which is why we've put together this guide to help you create your own *Simchat Beit Hashoeva* celebrations with your family. We provide a story, a Torah thought, and joyous

Jewish music (when it's not Shabbat or *Yom Tov*, of course). You provide the singing, the dancing, the soul, and the fire.



WHERE TO GET MUSIC FOR YOUR SIMCHAT BEIT HASHOEVA

Download our Free Jewish Music App

Download Chabad.org's free Jewish music app and get 24/6 music for your celebration.

www.chabad.org/MusicApp

75 minutes of non-stop dance music

Get 75 minutes of non-stop dance music

www.chabad.org/Dance



DAY ONE

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

ABRAHAM אברהם אבינו

AND RABBI YISRAEL "THE BAAL SHEM TOV"

In Abraham's time, people wanted bigger idols, more idols, and more expensive idols. As for the original Creator, whoever heard about Him figured He was just too awesome and removed to deal with. Abraham went against the stream and taught that the one Creator of Heaven and Earth could be found anywhere by anybody and at any time.

In the Baal Shem Tov's time, the trend for Jewish preachers was to get Jews to obey G-d out of fear of punishment. The Baal Shem Tov went against the stream and taught that every Jew could connect to G-d with love and joy, because He's found everywhere, speaking to us in every detail of our lives.



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

Tonight is not just the first night of this seven-day joyous celebration, but it's the wellspring from which we draw joy for the entire year.

A THOUGHT TO SHARE

On Sukkot, the Baal Shem Tov would exclaim, "Where is the *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*? Rabban Gamliel would juggle torches, and their eyes never saw sleep. How could it be that we've been sleeping all these hundreds of years? Wake up, you sleeping people!"

Wake up from your slumber!”

You see, since the Temple was destroyed, it's like the entire Jewish people fell into a deep sleep. When you're sleeping, you're still alive, breathing, digesting, pumping blood. But your eyes don't see, your ears don't hear, and your mind doesn't understand anything—it just dreams crazy dreams.

That's how we have been since the Temple was destroyed. In the Temple, we saw open miracles. We felt we were standing in G-d's presence. We understood clearly that there is a G-d in the world and He is everywhere—within all things and beyond all things at the same time.

So losing the Temple is not just losing a nice building. It's a deep spiritual loss. At our Simchat Beit Hashoeva we can make up some of that. We're tapping into a deeper reality to get a tiny taste of what we lost. The celebration is meant to wake us up, so that we won't be satisfied with life as it is, so we'll do all we can to repair this world and merit to see the times of Moshiach now!

—*Keter Shem Tov, siman 345. Torat Menachem, vol. 10, pp. 69–75.*



A STORY TO TELL

THE UNPOPULAR TZADDIK

Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was a spiritual giant in his generation. At first, his greatness was mostly unknown to his contemporaries, but he had no regrets; indeed, it suited him just fine. He spent his days and nights in Torah-study, prayer and meditation. Rarely was he interrupted.

But then, the word began to spread, perhaps from fellow disciples of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, that Rabbi Pinchas was very, very special. People began to visit him on a regular basis, seeking his guidance, requesting his support, asking for his prayers and beseeching his blessing. The more he helped them, the more they came. The trickle to his door became a stream and the stream became a daily flood of personal stories and requests for help.

Rabbi Pinchas was overwhelmed. He felt he was no longer serving G-d properly, because he no longer had sufficient time to study, pray and meditate as he should. He didn't know what to do. He needed more privacy and less distraction, but how could he turn away dozens and even hundreds of people who genuinely felt that he could help them? How could he convince them to go elsewhere, to others more willing and

qualified than he?

Then he had an idea. He would pray for heavenly help in the matter. Let G-d arrange it that people not be attracted to seek him out! Let G-d make him be despicable in the eyes of his fellows!

"A tzaddik decrees and Heaven agrees," they say. Rabbi Pinchas prayed and so it became. No longer did people visit him. Not only that, on those occasions when he went to town, he was met with averted heads and a chilly atmosphere.

Rabbi Pinchas didn't mind at all. Indeed, he was delighted. The old pattern was restored; rarely was he interrupted.

Then the "Days of Awe" of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur passed, and there remained only four brief busy days to prepare for the Sukkot festival. In previous years, there had always been some yeshiva students or local townspeople who were only too glad to help the pious rabbi construct his sukkah-hut. But this time, not a single soul arrived. No one liked him, and no one even thought to help him.

Not being handy in these matters, the rabbi didn't know what to do. Finally, having no choice, he was forced to hire a non-Jew to build his sukkah for him. But the hired man did not possess the tools that were needed, and Rabbi Pinchas could not get a single Jew in the neighborhood to lend him tools because they disliked him so much. In the end, his wife had to go to borrow them, and even that was difficult to accomplish due to the prevailing attitude towards her husband. With just a few hours remaining till the onset of the festival, they finally managed to complete a flimsy minimal structure.

As the sun slid between the forest branches and the Rebbetzin lit the festive candles, Rabbi Pinchas hurried off to shul. Despite his solitary ways, he always made a point to attend the congregational prayers on the holidays; besides he didn't want to miss the opportunity to acquire a guest for the festival meal, something so integral to the essence of the holiday.

In those days in Europe, people desiring an invitation to a meal would stand in the back of the shul upon the completion of the prayers. The householders would then invite them upon their way out, happy to so easily accomplish the mitzvah of hospitality. Rabbi Pinchas, unfortunately, did not find it so simple. Even those without a place to eat and desperate for an invitation to a sukkah in which to enjoy the festival meal,

turned him down without a second thought. Eventually, everyone who needed a place and everyone who wanted a guest were satisfied, except for the tzaddik, Rabbi Pinchas.

He trudged home alone, saddened and a bit shaken up at the realization that he might never have another guest, not even for the special festive meal of the First Night of Sukkos. Alas, that too was part of the price of his freedom.... It was worth it, wasn't it?

Pausing just inside the entrance to his sukkah, Rabbi Pinchas began to chant the traditional invitation to the Ushpizin, the seven heavenly guests who visit every Jewish sukkah. Although not many are privileged to actually see these exalted visitors, Rabbi Pinchas was definitely one of the select few who had this experience on an annual basis. This year, he raised his eyes and saw the Patriarch Abraham—the first of the Ushpizin and therefore the honored guest for the first night of the festival—standing outside the door of the sukkah, keeping his distance.

Rabbi Pinchas cried out to him in anguish: "Father Abraham! Why do you not enter my sukkah? What is my sin?"

Replied the patriarch: "I am the embodiment of Chessed, serving G-d through deeds of loving-kindness. Hospitality was my specialty. I will not join a table where there are no guests."

The crestfallen Rabbi Pinchas quickly re-ordered his priorities. He prayed that everything be restored to as it had been, and that he should find favor in the eyes of his fellows exactly as before. Again his prayer was answered. Within a short time, throngs of people were again finding their way to his door; seeking his guidance, asking his support, requesting his prayers, and beseeching his blessing. No longer could he devote all or even most of his time to his Torah-study, his prayer, and to his meditation. But thanks to his holy Sukkot guest, this was no longer seen as a problem.



DAY TWO

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

ISAAC יצחק אבינו

AND THE GREAT MAGID OF MEZRITCH

Although his father had made many journeys to publicize his teachings, Isaac never left the Land of Israel. People came to him, and he brought out the best in them, as one who digs wells to find living waters within the earth.

The Maggid of Mezritch did the same. Learned tzadikim came to him from many lands. He showed them that they were true leaders of the people. He planted them all across the Jewish settlements of Eastern Europe, and that way secured the light of the Baal Shem Tov firmly within the hearts of the Jewish people.



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

Tonight is special because it's the second night. In Torah matters, you always have to go higher as you go along, so the joy tonight has to surpass the joy of the previous night—a "double portion" at least.



A THOUGHT TO SHARE — FROM THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH

The Talmud tells us that when Hillel the Elder came to celebrate in the Temple on Sukkot, he would say, “If I am here, everyone is here. If I’m not here, no one is here.”

Now that’s very strange. The Talmud tells many stories about the extreme humility of Hillel, describing how he had the patience for every person and never saw himself as greater or more important than others. But this statement of his seems quite the opposite!

Until we take into account a short passage of the Jerusalem Talmud:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Do you know why it was called ‘The Celebration of the House of Drawing Water?’ Because from there they drew divine inspiration.”

Rabbi Jonah said, “The prophet Jonah ben Amitai was one of the holiday pilgrims to the Temple. He walked into the Simchat Beit Hashoeva and the divine spirit rested upon him.”

From this we understand that the divine spirit only rests upon a joyous heart. As the verse says, “As soon as the musician began to play music, the spirit of G-d rested upon the prophet.”

So Hillel came to this celebration and he felt this awesome spirit of divine inspiration. When he said “If I am here, everyone is here,” he meant that if he could feel it, certainly everyone else could feel it.

But what about his next words: “If I am not here, no one is here.” He certainly didn’t mean that if he can’t feel it, nobody else could. That would be a contradiction to what he just said.

So here’s a solution: Consider the way we think about relative wealth. For a person who deals with dimes and nickels, every nickel or dime is significant. But for a person who carries around hundred-dollar bills, there’s no need to bother with dimes and nickels. Nevertheless, for both of them, a precious, flawless jewel makes nickels, dimes, and hundred-dollar bills all seem the same.

That’s what Hillel meant—that the divine spirit there was so awesome, everyone was

equally small in comparison. So much so, that if he could not feel it, he couldn't imagine that anyone else could—because relative to this awesome experience, the smallest and the greatest were all the same.

—*Ohr Torah, siman 431.*

A STORY TO TELL

THE DRY SUKKAH AND THE HOLY BAGEL SELLER

“Zalmanyeh,” called the Maggid of Mezrich to his youngest student, using his nickname for Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. “It’s time for you to go out for a trip.”

Rabbi Schneur Zalman didn’t ask any questions. Gathering his few possessions, he began his journey. With no destination to guide him, he slowly traversed sprawling forests and small towns, hoping to finally encounter what his rebbe had in mind.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman spent the holy day of Yom Kippur in a small village and continued on his way until he reached Amdur, Western Belarus, where he secured a lodge for himself hours before Sukkot. After the festival prayers were concluded, someone approached Rabbi Schneur Zalman with an invitation to dine in his sukkah.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman accepted the offer and, together with a few other guests, followed his host home. Noticing his guest’s scholarly air, the host asked that he share some Torah thoughts. Like a sea with no end, Rabbi Schneur Zalman began to expound upon



the rich, inner meaning of Sukkot. Drafts of wine punctuated the beautiful words of Torah. A warm and close bond spread over all the guests, who pushed to huddle closer around Rabbi Schneur Zalman.

The pitter-patter of a fresh drizzle drummed outside the sukkah for a few minutes before turning into a roaring downpour. Yet, not a drop spoiled the special atmosphere contained inside the sukkah, as though some miraculous canopy repelled the rain. As the evening progressed into late night, the wine supply began to run low. Fearing the lively mood would be cut short by the lack of spirits, one of the participants volunteered to hunt for some more.

Stepping outside the sukkah, he found himself pelted by the cascading rain. It had been raining for quite a while too, as clearly evident by the puddles of mud in the sopping grass. Pressing his coat collar tighter for protection, the volunteer sprinted through the deluge to the house of the local rabbi. He saw the rabbi standing at his window, watching the storm with unease. One of the holiday's chief observances was dining in the sukkah, and the rain hadn't abated enough to allow him to do so.

"What in the world are you doing outside during such a downpour?" asked the rabbi.

The man explained in wonderment that there was a guest—a young rabbi—in their sukkah teaching sublime Torah thoughts, mesmerizing everyone gathered. They had been enjoying themselves for so long that he was now on a hunt for some more wine.

"But the rain?" spluttered the rabbi.

"Our sukkah doesn't have rain!" the man shrugged.

The rabbi accompanied the man back to the sukkah where the mysterious rabbi sat. Indeed, the sukkah was as dry as his house!

Respectfully, Rabbi Schneur Zalman fell silent at the rabbi's entrance. He motioned to the new arrival to begin speaking, but the rabbi waved it off, choosing to listen instead. Rabbi Schneur Zalman honored the request and continued speaking.

The following day, the rabbi invited Rabbi Schneur Zalman to sit in his sukkah as a guest. For three days, the pair discussed a range of Torah topics.

"Who are you?" the rabbi finally burst out.

“I am Schneur Zalman,” Rabbi Schneur Zalman said. “I’m a student of the Maggid of Mezeritch.”

“You have a rebbe as well?” The local rabbi failed to understand why such a great man needed a rebbe to guide him.

He then asked, “Do you have friends—students of the Maggid—that are perhaps interested in a match? I have a daughter who would like to get married, and we are looking for an appropriate Torah scholar.”

As the two deliberated over the subject, the chants of a peddler slowly grew louder through the open windows.

“Bagels for a kopek! Bagels for a kopek! Bagels for a kopek, kopek for bagels!”

“And what’s wrong with the bagel peddler?” Rabbi Schneur Zalman inquired, speaking up over the hollers.

“Our family comes from a long line of Torah scholars,” responded the rabbi, sounding wounded at Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s suggestion. “His, on the other hand . . . Well, he’s a bagel peddler!”

Rabbi Schneur Zalman sighed. “You can now understand why a rebbe is required even for scholars. If you were to travel to the Maggid in Mezeritch, such a sentence would have never left your mouth. The Rebbe teaches us how to value each and every individual soul.”

The words, said with such honesty, entered the rabbi’s heart. It was sometime later when he decided to travel to Mezeritch. He quickly developed a love for Chassidic teachings and a love for the Maggid. In time, he became one of the Maggid’s greatest students. Future generations remember him as Rabbi Chaim Cheikel, Rebbe of Amdur.

When Rabbi Chaim returned home, he followed Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s suggestion and pursued a match between his daughter and the bagel peddler. His perception of simple Jews had gone through a transformation.

With his fresh perspective, he soon discovered that the groom, beneath his seemingly simple and coarse exterior, possessed a lofty and sensitive soul.



DAY THREE

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

JACOB יעקב

AND RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN "THE ALTER REBBE"

While Jacob lived with his father and grandfather, he sat in his tent and studied and contemplated the divine wisdom of the Torah. When he ran from there to save his life from his brother, he fled to the yeshivah of Shem and Ever. When he dwelt with Laban for 20 years, he sat in the field with the sheep reviewing and contemplating Torah wisdom. When he was forced to go down to Egypt, he sent his son Judah ahead of him, to establish a place for Torah learning.

The life of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, known as the Alter Rebbe, was also all about Torah. He demonstrated how everything the Baal Shem Tov taught was deeply grounded in Torah traditions. At the request of his teacher, the Maggid, he composed a new edition of the Code of Jewish Law that made the knowledge of halachah much more accessible. He authored the Tanya, and taught thousands of teachings, called maamarim, to teach every Jew how to serve G-d with love



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

The number three represents strength and stability, so we're on solid ground for celebrating tonight. Tonight is also the first night (after nightfall) that we will be able to bring out musical instruments, including drums and tambourines, which always makes things happier!

and joy as the Baal Shem Tov had envisioned. And he accomplished all this both in times of great hardship and during times of relative peace.

A THOUGHT TO SHARE—FROM THE ALTER REBBE

The whole year long, all the offerings in the Temple were accompanied with wine. Only on Sukkot was water poured on the altar—and then the joy was much greater.

What is the connection between water and such great joy?

The answer is that wine brings its own joy—and that limits how much joy it can provide. Water doesn't impose any limits.

“Wine,” the Psalmist sings, “gladdens the heart of man.” Wine has intrinsic taste, energy and certain other properties that, when used the right way, can enhance a celebration—some wines more than others.

Water is simple and tasteless. That's why, unless you are thirsty, you don't say a blessing on drinking plain water.

Yet it's that simplicity of water that allows it to carry an even greater joy. Water doesn't paint that joy any color or squeeze it into any form. So the celebration that goes along with the pouring of water knows no limits.

That's the difference between the other festivals and Sukkot. On the other festivals, the joy is mainly according to the person's understanding. But the joy of Sukkot far transcends comprehension.

That's also the difference between the joy of doing a mitzvah that's limited to your understanding of the deep meaning of this particular mitzvah and the joy of a mitzvah done out of the simple knowledge that this is what G-d wants of you. Understanding is sweet, but the joy carried in simplicity is unbounded.

—Based on *Likutei Torah, Netzavim 48c*, further explained in *Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, Sukkot (s'if 17ff)*.



A STORY TO TELL

THE STRANGER WHO WANTED TO GO TO HEAVEN

The etrog shortage that hit Berditchev troubled its famed rabbi, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, giving him no rest. Determined to celebrate Sukkot with an etrog, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak



instructed his messengers to fan out and search the roads for any traveler who might be carrying the coveted yellow fruit.

One of the messengers approached a traveler and asked him whether he was carrying an etrog. The man said yes. However, the traveler explained to the messenger that he needed to continue onward to his destination. He did not relent even when the messenger pleaded with him to spend Sukkot in Berditchev to allow Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and his community to fulfill one of the holiday's vital mitzvahs. After all, the traveler said, he was just returning

from a lengthy journey and had plans to be home by the holiday, and he did not desire to spend it in Berditchev.

Meanwhile, word of the traveler's etrog quickly reached Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Not waiting for the etrog to arrive at his doorstep, the rabbi quickly made his way to the traveler. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began to lay his community's predicament before the traveler, but the latter refused to hear of it until Rabbi Levi Yitzchak offered the stranger a portion of his own reward in the World to Come.

Hearing this, the traveler agreed. He arrived at a local inn in Berditchev, intending to stay there for Sukkot. The townspeople of Berditchev, triumphant about the etrog, were ecstatic.

Sent by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, a messenger hastily crossed the town to inform the innkeeper of the rabbi's instructions: the man with the etrog was not to be given entry to the inn's sukkah. The same instructions were disseminated throughout the town: all householders were to refuse the man with the etrog entry into their *sukkahs*.

The traveler, oblivious to this instruction, returned from the synagogue and appeared at the entrance of the inn's sukkah, ready to chant Kiddush and settle down for the festive meal. But the innkeeper, as per Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's request, barred the traveler from even setting foot inside the hut. The traveler began to shout at the innkeeper, who stood his ground, ignoring the man's protests. Realizing that his screaming was useless, the traveler hopped over to the neighbor and asked him if he could celebrate the holiday night inside his sukkah. To the traveler's bewilderment, the neighbor said no. And when

he continued to walk about the town looking for a place to make Kiddush, the answer was always no. The traveler had a growing suspicion that some sort of concerted effort was afoot. How could everyone refuse him use of their *sukkah*?

And so the traveler decided to ask some of the residents, pestering them until they revealed the instruction from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Armed with this information, the traveler ran to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, forcibly voicing his thoughts:

“Is this how you repay me?”

But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak interjected, saying, “Here’s the deal. If you disregard my earlier promise of sharing my portion of the World to Come with you, I will allow you to enter my *sukkah*.”

The traveler stood rooted to his spot, a battle waging inside of him. But in the end, the choice was obvious. As much as he wanted to delight in the rewards of the World to Come, his desire to observe the significant mitzvah of sitting inside the *sukkah* was more important.

“Fine,” the traveler acquiesced.

The following day, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak invited the traveler, along with other Jews of Berditchev, for the festive meal in his *sukkah*. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then turned to the traveler and remarked:

“Now I once again assure you that you will indeed have a part of my reward in the World to Come. When I first made the promise to you, you did not deserve it. Now that you were willing to give it up in order to do a mitzvah, you are indeed deserving of that lofty reward.”



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DAY FOUR

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

MOSES משה רבינו

AND RABBI DOVBER, "THE MITTLER REBBE"

Moses brought us to Mount Sinai and gave us the Torah, with all the explanations and education he could provide in 40 years. He could have simply found out from G-d what He wanted and transmitted the instructions. But instead, he did all he could to bring us face-to-face with G-d. He wanted us to have the experience of making the Torah our own by opening it wider through analysis and discussion.

Rabbi Dov Ber, known as the Mittler Rebbe, took the teachings of his father, the Alter Rebbe, and showed people how to open them wider. He took a few words his father taught and expanded them in so many ways so that we could digest them all and make those teachings real in our lives.



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

At night number four out of seven, we've got a majority of the days on our side. Beginnings are hard, but that's what makes the rest so sweet. A further cause for celebration that will last all year.



A THOUGHT TO SHARE — FROM THE MITTLER REBBE

“When someone lowers himself with true humility,” the sages taught, “G-d raises him up.”

Why is that? Because if someone truly has that quality of sincere humility, that person can handle greatness without it getting to his head. David, for example, even when he was a great hero and king of Israel, still danced and sang with joy like a commoner when the Holy Ark was brought to Jerusalem.

Or take Hillel the Elder, who was extremely humble. When he came to the Simchat Beit Hashoeva, he declared, “If I am here, everyone is here. If I’m not here, no one is here.” Such extreme haughtiness that would seem to be the opposite of Hillel’s extreme humility.

But in truth, quite the contrary. The only reason he could say this is because he was so humble, it didn’t affect him.

Hillel felt the intense divine light in this great celebration and felt like nothing before it. He felt that before this light, the greatest and the smallest were all the same. So he said, “If a nobody like me could be here, then all these nobodies can also be here!”

To say that, you have to really believe you are a nobody.

—*Shaarei Teshuvah, Shaar Hatefillah, end of chapter 4 (pg. 25c).*



A STORY TO TELL

THE ALUMINUM SUKKAH

By Avraham Berkowitz

After seventy years of Communism, building a sukkah in public in Russia is like the thawing of the snow at the end of the winter. Even in the farthest reaches of Siberia it warms the Jewish heart.



In the last decades, Judaism has come to life across Russia—and when it comes to the festival of Sukkot it is really a open miracle, since this holiday was almost completely forgotten because of the dangers and risks of attempting to put up a sukkah or obtain a lulav and etrog.

I want to share with you a story I heard a few weeks ago, while I visited Kazan, Russia, a city in the largely Muslim Tatarstan region.

After a beautiful morning prayer service in synagogue led by the Chief Rabbi of Kazan, Yitzchok Garelik, I was introduced to Moshe Adinov, a middle aged dentist and a regular participant in the daily minyan (prayer quorum). I asked him how it came to be that he comes to synagogue every day. He told me the following remarkable Sukkot story that I must pass on to you here, as I remember him telling it to me:

"My father was R' Nachum Eliyahu Adinov. He was a sofer (Torah scribe) in Kazan before World War II. He kept the traditions in our home, but of course there was no Jewish school. I went to public school even on Shabbat. A lot of tradition was weakened. Nevertheless, I remember growing up with as many Jewish traditions and holidays as were possible.

"My father was afraid for my future. He always warned me not to repeat to others what we did at home. 'Be a Jew at home and a Russian in the street,' he said. I would have never been accepted at university had I been a practicing Jew.

"We lived in a small wooden home—not in an apartment building like most people. We had a besedka, basically a porch, in the back of our home. Every year we'd celebrate Sukkot. My father would cover the roof with leaves and foliage. We'd invite over many Jewish friends. The secret was that the only sukkah in town was in our house. My father would make kiddush on wine, tell stories and gently speak to us, and this memory of Sukkot always stayed with me.

"My father died in 1965, and I inherited the house. I wanted to keep that Sukkot tradition

alive, to continue the tradition for my children. I thought that, due to his limited means, all my father was able to do was put up trees and foliage. I wanted to do better than him! I had friends in the steel industry, and every year since 1965, I put up a sturdy aluminum roof on the besedka. I was proud that I continued my father's tradition."

"In 1998, Chabad-Lubavitch sent Rabbi Yitzchok Garelik and his wife Chana here. It was so beautiful to have a young Jewish family celebrating in public what I always did secretly. It was incredible for me. That year, Rabbi Garelik said to me, 'Reb Moshe, tomorrow night is Sukkot—I want you to come to the beautiful sukkah we built.' When I walked into the sukkah, I saw Rabbi Garelik in his holiday finest, holding an overflowing glass of wine, candles shining in his face—and foliage, branches and trees above his head!

"I couldn't contain my emotions. I began to cry. I suddenly realized that what my father did was the way it's supposed to be, and for the last 30 years, by placing an aluminum roof, I wasn't doing it the right way. I had only meant to make the sukkah more beautiful!

"Rabbi Garelik asked me to tell my story, and then he said to me: 'Your father is looking down from Heaven with all the great Jews of the past and smiling—and I promise you, G-d had the utmost pleasure from the beauty of your sukkah with the aluminum roof more than any sukkah in the world with the appropriate foliage, because you did it with such love and sincerity!' Since then, I have continued to learn and understand our traditions. Since then, I and my family are involved as part of the community and today celebrate all the holidays with their rich fullness."

In Russia today, sukkahs are mostly built at the synagogues, since it is very difficult to build near apartment buildings. So Sukkot becomes this incredible community event. Despite the cold, everyone comes out—with so many people all singing, spending family time, laughing and talking, and enjoying words of Torah, the sukkah keeps us all warm.

This is the true story of Sukkot in Russia—how, like the spark of Jewishness itself, Communism never was able to truly stamp Sukkot out.



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DAY FIVE

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

AARON אהרן הכהן

AND RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL "THE TZEMACH TZEDEK"

"Be of the students of Aaron," Hillel taught. "Love all people and bring them close to Torah." Aaron was beloved to the people because he loved them all. In that way, he held the Children of Israel together as a single family.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, known by the name of his collection of halachic responsa, Tzemach Tzedek, represented the Jews of the Russian Empire in government affairs during the rule of Nicholas I, a ruthless anti-Semite. He bought land to establish entire communities for Jews who had been displaced by government restrictions. He put himself and his family in mortal danger



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

The Kabbalah teaches that the joy on the holiday of Sukkot comes directly out of the five prayers of Yom Kippur. The five prayers correspond to the five levels of the soul. We became closer to G-d on Yom Kippur, reaching the highest levels of our soul with five prayers on the highest day of the year. On Sukkot we celebrate that bond. Day five of Sukkot, therefore, expresses that relationship more than any other day. Tonight, we reach higher than ever before!

many times by standing up against the government regulation of Jewish practice, all the while saving thousands of Jewish children abducted by the army. He brought leaders of Jewish movements that had been in conflict to work together with mutual respect for the sake of the entire community.



A THOUGHT TO SHARE—FROM THE TZEMACH TZEDEK

Who are the Ushpizin, really?

They are the modalities with which G-d created the world.

When G-d created the world, on the first day He created with Kindness. On the second day, He created with Judgment. On the third, with Beauty. The fourth day was Victory. The fifth was Splendor. The sixth, Connection. And the seventh was Majesty.

So that on every Sunday, the modality of Kindness reigns. And on Monday, Judgment reigns. And so the week continues, according to that very first week of creation.

The Ushpizin are lofty souls who brought those seven divine modalities of creation into reality in this world during their lifetime. Abraham reflected G-d's kindness in the world. Isaac reflected divine judgment. Jacob was all about divine beauty. Moses' life reflected victory. Aaron reflected divine splendor. Joseph connected heaven and earth. And David was the embodiment of divine majesty.

On the three festivals, a higher light shines through each of these modalities, a joyous light. But the highest, most joyful light is that which shines through them on Sukkot. It is like the joy of a person who is reunited with a long lost close friend. So too, these modalities of creation are reunited with their source above.

—Based on *Ohr HaTorah, Sukkot*, pg. 1748.



THE BROKEN ETROG

It had been a difficult year. Poor weather, dangerous travel conditions and high tariffs had made it almost impossible for the Jews of Ukraine to import etrogim (citrons) for the holiday of Sukkot. The etrogim—waved together with the lulav bundle every Sukkot after the recitation of special blessings—were normally brought from faraway Italy or even the Holy Land, but that year there were almost none to be found.

In the city of Berditchev, home to tens of thousands of Jews, there was but one etrog. Of course, it was given to the town's rabbi, the famed Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, for safekeeping.

Everyone knew the plan. On the first day of the holiday the rabbi would rise early in the morning, immerse himself in the purifying waters of the mikvah, and then make the blessing while holding the etrog and lulav. Then the etrog would be passed from hand to hand, allowing every Jewish person to fulfill the biblical obligation to take the “Four Kinds.”



Now, the rabbi had an assistant, a simple fellow who was tasked with overseeing the proceedings. “I know what will happen,” said the assistant to himself. “First, the rabbi will make the blessing and wave the lulav and the etrog. Then the learned men will come for their turn to do the mitzvah. They will be followed by

the respectable householders. Next will be the simple folk, who will all get their glorious moment. Then, when the sun is about to set and the day is about to fade away, I'll be the very last one to finally say the blessing over the lulav and etrog. Why must I always be the very last?

“I know what I'll do,” he thought. “Early in the morning, on the first day of Sukkot, when the rabbi is out immersing in the mikvah, I'll take the lulav and etrog and recite the blessing over them. No one will know but me.”

And so, just after the sun rose, he sneaked into the rabbi's study, took the lulav and etrog

in his trembling hands, and was about to chant the required blessings. But then—disaster struck.

Maybe it was because his palms were sweaty. Maybe it was because he was shaking nervously. But for whatever reason, the etrog slipped from his grasp onto the hard wooden floor below. To the attendant's horror, the etrog's pitom (wood-like protrusion) cracked right off its crown, rendering the fruit invalid.

Oh, he would have given all he had to be swallowed up by the earth. How would he face the crestfallen rabbi? How would he face the disappointed city? How would he face himself?

Every minute seemed like eternity as the attendant waited for his master to return. When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak entered his home, ready to do the mitzvah, the attendant had no choice. Gazing downward, in a trembling whisper, he told the rabbi what he had done.

“Master of the World,” cried the rabbi in a booming voice filled with love and wonder, “look how precious Your children are! Even this simple, unlearned son of Yours is so eager to fulfill Your commandment that he risked his job to fulfill Your will at the earliest opportunity!”



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DAY SIX

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

JOSEPH יוסף הצדיק

AND RABBI SHMUEL, "THE REBBE MAHARASH"

Joseph was taken to Egypt as a slave and ended up ruling the land. How did he do it? Because wherever he was, whether in a slave's chains, in his master's house, or even in a dungeon, he took charge of the situation, because he knew G-d was with him.

Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, known as "the Maharash," had to deal with a Czarist policy of deflecting revolution by inciting violence against Jews. He summed up his strategy in one simple teaching. "The world," he said, "says that if you can't work through a problem, you'll have to find a way to leap over it. I say, to begin with, just leap over it." In other words, when you know G-d is with you, take charge without fear.



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

Day three celebrated strength. In Judaism, a series of three creates a legal presumption and therefore represents strength. Day six, being double that, therefore represents a double portion of that strength. Which means we've got double energy tonight to put into the singing and dancing!



A THOUGHT TO SHARE—FROM THE REBBE MAHARASH

What's the great joy of Sukkot? It's the kind of joy you feel when you meet a close friend you haven't seen in years, and you run to him and hug him tight. The longer you were apart, the tighter the hug, and the greater the joy.

You see, on Yom Kippur, we did teshuvah. Because there might have been some time in our past when we put the energy of our holy souls into something or some place where holy souls don't belong. Then we regretted that, and on Yom Kippur, we returned to G-d with love, and G-d accepted us and forgave us for everything. That's one reason for celebration.

But what happens to those wrong things we might have gotten involved with in the past? They return as well. Because everything has some spark of good in it, some purpose for which G-d created it. Just that some things lose their purpose. It's like their spark went out, and they became dark and ugly.

But when we return to G-d on Yom Kippur, the good in those things returns as well. In a certain way, the past is changed. And that's a very great celebration for G-d. When we return, well, He expects us to return. But those sparks of goodness are to Him like long lost friends that He had given up on. It gives Him great joy to see the works of His creation return to Him.

The schach of the Sukkah is that hug, brought about by the returning souls and sparks of goodness. We celebrate in the Sukkah, and do the mitzvah of Lulav in the Sukkah, to bring that hug into ourselves.

—Based on *Hemshech V'chacha 5637*, chapter 97



A STORY TO TELL

THE DAY I WAS AN ANGEL

As told by Menachem Posner

Tradition tells us that angels visit us in the sukkah, and every year I think about the time more than 10 years ago that I was that angel. Memory is not perfect, and some details may not be exact, but the following is my account of that long-ago encounter.

It had been a drizzly Chicago morning, gray and overcast, and I stood like a soldier manning the public sukkah we'd set up outside a local bagel shop. As each patron



passed, I offered them the chance to make a blessing over the lulav and etrog and perhaps enjoy their meal under the bamboo and pine covering of the sukkah.

She appeared to be hurrying as she brushed past me, almost as if she did not see me or the unusual “bouquet” I held in my arms. No matter, I comforted myself, she wasn’t the first and she probably wouldn’t be the last.

A few minutes later she emerged with a steaming paper cup and a small brown bag. This time, she slowed down and approached thoughtfully.

“Rabbi, may I ask you a question?”

“Sure,” I said, “answering questions is a rabbi’s job.”

“How about an unusual question?”

“No problem,” I replied.

At that time, I was working several hours a day replying to queries on Chabad.org/AskTheRabbi and I assured her that no question was off limits.

“Tell me,” she countered, “What do you know about Angel Michael? Is that an unusual question?”

Off the top of my head I could tell her that Angel Michael is one of the only archangels mentioned by name in scripture, he is an advocate for the Jewish people, and he is associated with the right side, kindness, and water, as opposed to Angel Gabriel, who represents the left side, severity, and fire.

“Is that a usual thing for a rabbi to talk about at a sermon?” the woman probed, a hint of urgency creeping into her voice.

“Hmm, I don’t think it’s the most usual thing, but neither is it the most unusual thing,”

I hedged, not quite sure what she wanted to hear. “Why? Where did you hear a rabbi talking about Angel Michael in a sermon?”

Her entire tale then tumbled out like a torrent of thought churning around in a mind tortured by grief.

She had been at a bar mitzvah in the Boston area a month earlier. The Chabad rabbi who officiated spoke of the Chassidic tradition that on Simchat Torah morning Angel Michael and his team of angels “clean up” heaven, which is littered with the worn out soles and torn shoelaces of Jews who danced with abandon the night before.

“As the rabbi told the story, he was looking right at me, even though he had no idea who I was,” she continued. “Then he said, ‘Angel Michael’s message to us is that there is nothing more important than being happy, celebrating, dancing, and rejoicing in the life we are given.’”

“What the rabbi did not know,” she confided, “Is that my only son, Michael, died in an accident earlier this year. When he said that Angel Michael was telling us to keep dancing, I understood that he was conveying a message to me from my ‘Angel Michael’: It’s time for me to start living again, to find a way to be happy and make peace with the life I have.

“I went home and decided to enter therapy to process the debilitating grief I’ve been experiencing. Today is my first session and I am on my way there now. As I passed by the bagel store, I felt I wasn’t ready yet. So I stopped in here—even though I don’t normally keep kosher—to pick up a cup of coffee and give myself a few more minutes.

“Then I met you, also a Chabad rabbi, offering me the opportunity to do a mitzvah. You must have been sent here by my ‘Angel Michael’ telling me that I am on the right path.

“I’m ready to start living again.”



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DAY SEVEN

EVENING, SEVENTH NIGHT OF SUKKOT / HOSHANA RABAH

TONIGHT'S MAIN GUEST:

DAVID דוד המלך

AND RABBI SHOLOM DOVBER, "THE REBBE RASHAB"

David was a shepherd boy who composed beautiful songs and became King of Israel. Through his Book of Psalms, he taught us to speak to G-d from the heart, like a child to a parent, like a close friend, one that will never leave you, as though He were your heart itself. He gave every Jew that opportunity of inner closeness with G-d.

Rabbi Shalom Dovber, known as the Rebbe Rashab, served the Jews of Russia at a time when young men were abandoning yeshivah to join the Bolshevik party. So he offered these young men a revolutionary yeshivah, one in which boys at the age of 15 would begin a study of the inner soul of Torah, and learn to serve G-d with all their heart through deeply focused meditation and prayer.



WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT TONIGHT?

There's a Talmudic saying that all sevenths are cherished. The seventh day of Sukkot, besides holding the unique quality of closure, also has the benefit of being cherished. And let's not forget that, tonight's celebration serves as a segue into the climax of the Simchat Torah celebrations. Let's give it all we got!



A THOUGHT TO SHARE—FROM THE REBBE RASHAB

What does water have to do with joy? Wine, we understand. But water?

But that's just the point: Even the water is celebrating here!

You see, wine represents understanding. Wine, it says in David's psalms, makes people happy. The same with understanding. When you work hard to understand something, and you finally get it, you smile.

But you never really get all of it. The most you can understand is only what can fit within a human mind. The real truth as it truly is, that remains beyond us.

Water represents that kind of truth. Water has no color, no form, no way to grasp it. Water represents the wisdom that is beyond understanding.

But on Sukkot, in the Temple, that wisdom, in its deepest, purest sense, came out into the open, accessible to all. If understanding brings joy, imagine what joy that wisdom brought when it burst into our world.

That's why all those who came walked away with a spirit of divine inspiration. They soaked up that light of pure wisdom that shone there in that celebration.

And so should we!

—Based on the conclusion of the maamar Ushavtem 5669.



A STORY TO TELL

THE REWARD

Once upon a time there lived a very charitable man. One day—it was Hoshana Rabbah—his wife gave him ten shekels and asked him to go and buy something for their children. At that moment a collection was being made in the market place for a poor orphaned girl who was about to be married. When the collectors saw this charitable person they



said, "Here comes a very charitable man." They addressed themselves to him saying, "Will you take a share in this worthy cause, for we want to buy a present for the poor bride?"

The good man gave them all the ten Shekels he had. Now

he was ashamed to return home empty handed, and so he went to the synagogue. There he found children playing with etrogim, for it was Hoshana Rabba (the seventh day of Sukkot) and there was no more need for the etrogim. The good man collected a sack full of etrogim and went out to seek his fortune. Arriving in a strange land he sat down on his sack of etrogim, wondering what he was going to do next. Suddenly he was approached by the king's officers, who asked him what he had in that sack.

"I am a poor man and have nothing to sell," he replied. They opened his sack and found it was full of etrogim. "What kind of fruit is this?" the officers asked. "These are etrogim, a special fruit used by Jews during their festival of Sukkot."

When the officers heard that, they grabbed him and his sack and carried him all the way to the palace. It was then that our good man learned what all the excitement was about: The king was very ill and he was told that only the fruit used by Jews during their festival of Sukkot could cure him. A very intensive search had yielded nothing, and just when all hope seemed to be gone, this good man arrived with a sack full of etrogim, and thus saved the king's life. The king recovered his health and ordered the sack emptied of the etrogim to be filled with golden dinars. Our good man now returned home richly rewarded for the charity he had been giving all his life.



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