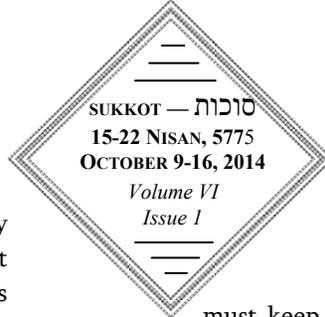


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Happiness for Dummies: Jewish Edition by Yisrael Friedenberg (MTA '15)



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 God.

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 it may be easy to say, we must deeply consider 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 God with joy and gladness of heart" (*D'varim* 28:47). Every *mitzvah* thus has two parts: the instruction itself and the joy one must feel while completing it.

Rabbeinu Bachya similarly uses Sukkot as an opening to discuss our obligation to rejoice in our service of God. 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, "*v'hayita ach same'ach*" (*D'varim* 16:15). This line is most simply translated as "and you shall be nothing but joyous." Rabbeinu Bachya finds this translation unsatisfying, as the word "*ach*" seems to be 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, this 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 *B'rachot* 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 he should be joyous. The Mishnah B'rurah, 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 *p'sukim* 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 God with joy? How are we to approach fulfilling this important aspect of our *avodat Hashem*?

S'forno explains that our obligation to be happy while serving God is that one should have the same feeling as the joy he gets from serving someone whom he loves (*D'varim* 12:7). Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, in his lecture entitled "2DS" (available at simpletoremember.com), gives a related example for what serving God 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 received 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

God. 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 God, i.e. by serving Him out of love. But this begs an even further question- what does it mean to love God? How can we love someone who we 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 Y'sodei 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 God? He proposes an answer that we must 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 our attention. We are drawn towards the 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 experienced, is the development of a deep love and appreciation for the art or the music, as one comes to appreciate the unreal complexity and genius behind it. This, Rambam says, is how we come to love God. By looking out at the world and observing the indescribable diversity and complexity of God's handiwork and actions, we will want nothing more than to understand God, to become close to God, and naturally, to love God.

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 God's miraculous actions. He comments that there is a natural progression when it comes to seeing the greatness of God's miracles. When one observes God's actions, Ramban says, he becomes more attuned to the finer, less obvious miracles that God performs for us on a constant basis. By looking for the great miracles that are blatantly obvious in the world around us, we will become more observant of miracles in general.

This sounds like a lofty, profound concept but it is truly 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 the great, vast miracles, as per Rambam's recommendation, we can become more

attuned to the myriad of tiny miracles that allow us to live each day. Through this we can come to appreciate and love God. 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 R'eih* the Torah says "[...] The blessing, that you will listen to the voice of Hashem your God" (*D'varim* 11:27). An obvious question arises: Shouldn't the blessing come *if* you listen to God? 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 God! If we do our *avodat Hashem* correctly, that gives us not only *s'char* in the next world but a great life in this one. May we all gain this great enjoyment through our *avodat Hashem*.

Just Glad to be With You

by Ariel Amsellem (YULA '15)

On Friday night a few weeks ago, I saw something, which caught my eye. Four men who had also just finished *arvit* were walking out of *shul* in front of me. Each one sported a unique wardrobe. One was wearing a black hat and a *gartel*; another, a spotless pinstripe suit complemented by a *Kipah Sruga*; another, dark indigo jeans and a white button-down shirt; and the last, a worn out V-neck with bright orange shorts. Yet, there was one commonality among this coterie's members: They were all dancing and singing a *niggun* as curious drivers on the busy road stared at them. The drivers probably had never seen such *simcha* before.

This event struck a chord with me, as I knew Sukkot, *zman simchateynu*, was approaching. In the times of the Bet Ha'Mikdash, this holiday brought throngs of people to Yerushalayim who watched the *anshei ma'aseh*, the most pious Jews, rejoice at the Simchat Bet Ha'Shoeva. In fact, the *Kuntris B'Inyanei Chag Ha'Sukkot V'Simchat Torah* by Rav Chanoch Karlinstein brings down a Netziv, which states that we have a physical obligation to dance in happy celebration on Sukkot, as opposed to other holidays when the obligation for Simcha is merely in the heart.

The question begs to be asked: Why is Sukkot the holiday when we focus on *simcha*? It does not seem to be an extraordinarily exciting time. Additionally, why did only the most righteous among Klal Yisrael dance at the Simchat Bet Ha'Shoeva? One would think that every Jew should be involved in the festivities that were taking place!

One answer to the initial question is quite logical: Sukkot follows the harvest season, and the Jewish farmers used this *Chag* as a time to joyously thank Hashem for their yields. However, a more profound answer requires that we look deeper into what Sukkot and the months of Elul and Tishrei as a whole are about. Approximately a month and a half ago, we

all embarked on a journey to ask for forgiveness from the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. Since then, we have had the pleasure of hosting the king, Hashem, in the fields with us. We then went through the long hours in *shul* on Rosh Hashanah, the arduous *teshuvah* process during the Ten Days of Repentance, and the final judgment on Yom Kippur. At the conclusion of this process, we felt cleansed and free of all our sins, and according to Rav Karlinstein this is the reason we are so happy.

Yet, is Sukkot's rejoicing an expression of relief that we made it through the "holiday gauntlet"? This intense happiness must penetrate deeper, and it does in Rav Karlinstein's answer to the question of why only the *anshei ma'aseh* dance at the Simchat Bet Ha'Shoeva. He answers that these righteous Jews have the most to be happy about, not because they merely have no more sins to worry about, but rather because they have emerged from the High Holidays in a state of deep connection with Hashem, a concept called *deveykut*. The other Jews look to the *gedolim* and see the potential relationship each and every Jew can build with *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*.

Deveykut pervades throughout all the rituals of Sukkot. We go out of our houses into the *sukkah*, which shows that we want to bond with our creator. We project the *Arbah Minim* out from our hearts to Hashem, another sign of our desire to become even closer to Him. After we have conquered all the trials and tribulations thrown at us from Rosh Chodesh Elul (and even as far back as Tisha B'Av) until Yom Kippur, we finally have the chance to enjoy a newfound connection with Hashem.

If there is one sect that truly personifies this concept, it is certainly the Chassidic community, whose entire premise is based on *deveykut*. Chassidim tend to celebrate the Simchat Bet Ha'Shoeva in a way very similar to that of the Jews in the times of the Bet Ha'Mikdash. There are hordes of Jews singing, dancing, and rejoicing together. In many of our communities, this level of *deveykut* seems to be truly lacking on Sukkot. After the long High Holiday prayers and early Selichot services, we often, *chas v'chalilah*, just want to relax and take a break on Sukkot. Perhaps, we need to take a page out of the Chassidic handbook by outwardly displaying how happy we are to simply have an intimate connection with Hashem.

Sukkot: A Time of our Happiness

by Tali Greenberg (Central '15)

In the works of our Sages and many of the Shalosh Regalim prayers, we refer to Sukkot as "*zman simchateinu*," the time of our happiness. While it is easy to recognize the connection of the names for Pesach and Shavuot, it is harder to do so for Sukkot. Pesach is referred to as a "*zman*

cheiruteinu," the time of our redemption because it commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Shavuot is referred to as a "*zman matan Torateinu*," the time of the giving of the Torah because Bnei Yisrael received the Torah on that day. However, what is the special joyous occasion we are celebrating on Sukkot? What is the connection between happiness and dwelling in a Sukkah?

In answering these questions, the Vilna Gaon actually points out another question. There is an opinion in Masechet Sukkah (11b) that says the Sukkah represents the *ananei ha'kavod*, the protective Clouds of Glory. The clouds first appeared in the month of Nissan. The Vilna Gaon asks, why do we commemorate this gift in the month of Tishrei? It should be celebrated at the time it was granted to us – in Nissan! He answers that when Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, the Clouds were removed. Only when they achieved complete atonement with the building of the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle, did the Clouds return. Moshe came down from Har Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei, and the building of the *mishkan* began five days later, on the fifteenth of Tishrei. Therefore, we celebrate Sukkot on the fifteenth.

From this we learn that on Sukkot, we are not just celebrating the gift of the protective Clouds of Glory, but we are celebrating their return, an event that represents complete forgiveness from Hashem. It is then understandable why Sukkot is a joyous occasion; it celebrates the return of miraculous protection. We can also understand why we celebrate Sukkot right after Yom Kippur. On the Day of Atonement we were forgiven for all of our sins, and then we celebrate the *ananei ha'kavod*, which were returned to Bnei Yisrael after they were forgiven for their sins. It was a time of great happiness for the people in the desert, and therefore the holiday commemorating this time is named, "The Time of our Happiness."

But this leaves us with yet another question: if the Clouds were taken away because Bnei Yisrael sinned, why were they not returned when Bnei Yisrael were forgiven on Yom Kippur? Why was the return of the Clouds delayed by five days?

In the *sefer* Sha'arei Teshuva, the Rabbeinu Yona writes that there is more to forgiveness than we realize. One can beg and pray for forgiveness on Yom Kippur, receive it from God, and then proceed to forget all of the changes and corrections that he promised to make. Just because a person did not receive punishment for his wrongdoing does not mean he once again found favor in Hashem's eyes. On the contrary, real *teshuva* is showing one's devotion and desire to serve Hashem after sinning. An individual must work on regaining Hashem's kindness and mercy; he must continue to pray, do *mitzvot*, and show his devotion for Hashem. A person knows that Hashem has truly forgiven him only once he is given opportunities to do *mitzvot*. One knows that his repentance is

complete when he finds that God is helping him, decreasing his urges to sin, and increasing his desire to do good.

After Hashem forgave Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf, He wanted to complete their forgiveness. He gave them a commandment in which they could show their devotion to be close to Him. The *mishkan* itself is a representation of God's glory within their camp, and the willingness and excitement with which Bnei Yisrael built it demonstrated their *teshuva*. The building of the *mishkan* required donations of personal wealth and manual labor. Everyone was able to contribute something, and everyone did contribute. It was clear that Bnei Yisrael finalized their forgiveness, and it was at that point in time that Hashem returned to them the *ananei ha'kavod*.

Bnei Yisrael were overwhelmed with joy when the protective clouds returned. The opportunity to fulfill Hashem's commandments meant their *teshuva* was accepted, and the Clouds were given back to them. When we celebrate Sukkot, we are not merely commemorating the joy our forefathers felt, but we are also feeling the joy for ourselves. We too were just forgiven on Yom Kippur, and immediately afterwards we are commanded to start preparing for Sukkot. We begin building our Sukkot, picking out the nicest *etrogim*, and eventually sit in the Sukkah and sanctify the holiday. Right after we go through the process of repentance, we too are given opportunities to show our devotion and desire to do *mitzvot*. This is how we know we have done complete *teshuva* and found favor in Hashem's eyes. That is why Sukkot is a time of great happiness for all of us.

Embracing the Arava Jew

by Liat Fischer (DAT '15)

Every year, when Hoshana Raba rolls around, millions of questions scream at me in my head. Why is Hoshana Raba so important? Why do we say extra *hoshanot* while we wave around the *aravot*? What's the symbolism of the *aravot*? What should they mean to me? The list goes on and on.

To understand the *arava*, we need to examine the *lulav* itself and its symbolism. The Midrash explains that each of the four species (*lulav*, *etrog*, *hadassim*, *arava*) represents the different strengths a Jew can possess. The *etrog*, pleasant in both taste and smell, represents a Jew who is strong in both his learning and his actions. The *lulav*, which tastes delicious but is odorless, represents one who is extremely learned but not so outstanding when it comes to good deeds. The *hadassim*, which smells nice but is inedible, represents an individual who excels in *chessed* (good deeds) but is not so learned. Finally, the *arava*, which is neither edible nor fragrant, represents the ordinary Jew, who is not so strong in learning or actions. Each of these could stand on their own, however,

when we hold all four species together during Sukkot, we are creating *achdut* within our nation.

The Sfat Emet deepens our understanding of this Midrash by bringing in another Midrash, which explains that along with the four types of individuals, the four species also represent different organs in the body. The *etrog* resembles the heart; the *lulav*, the spine; the *hadassim*, the eyes; and the *aravot*, the lips. Hashem loves each of us and every part of us. He shows us this every Sukkot when He commands us to take all four species *together*.

But what about the Jews who feel disconnected? The individuals who struggle with learning and good deeds, the *arava* Jew?

Hoshana Raba comes to remind us about the individual who struggles to find that connection. Everyone takes their *aravot* with them to pray to Hashem, reminding us that we are all there to support one another and to raise ourselves to the highest possible level. The shape of the *arava*, the lips, remind us of the power of our words *bein adam l'chavero* and how important *tefila* is *bein adam l'makom*.

In today's world, in a sense, many of us are "arava Jews", only learning when our teachers tell us, only doing good deeds when our friends can "like" them on Facebook.

Hoshana Raba, gives us the chance to look at the *arava* in our hands, sensitizing us to our spiritual needs and increasing the amount of Torah learning and good deeds we can do to get closer to Hashem. It is an opportunity to ask Hashem for a connection and to ask Him to guide us through life. This is the message of the *arava*, that all Jews should try to reconnect to Hashem using all parts of their body.

You Don't Need to See It to Believe It

by Eitan Kaszovitz (DRS '16)

On Sukkot it is well known that we have the *mitzvah* to basically live full-time in the *sukkah*. There is a very basic question one can ask regarding this *mitzvah*: Why do we associate ourselves with a hut like structure? What is the symbolism behind it?

There are many complex ways to answer this fundamental question. However, there answer is a relatively simple answer learned from a *gemara* in Sukkah. There is a dispute as to what the Torah means when it says that the Jewish people lived in "sukkot". Rabbi Eliezer maintains that these "sukkot" were the *ananei hakavod* (Clouds of Glory), which protected the Jews in the desert. On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva explains that these were actually huts which the Jews lived in. According to Rabbi Akiva, what are we commemorating by dwelling in these huts nowadays?

The answer is quite simple. When one thinks about times when Hashem helps him out, he can only imagine the physical aspects of Hashem's greatness. For example, during



the splitting of the sea, the Jewish people actually saw God assisting them. Similarly, by the Clouds of Glory, we knew Hashem was assisting us because we could *see* it happening before us. However, when Hashem helps us out without performing clear, visible miracles, it can be hard to know that he is really helping us. Our human nature demands that we see events in order to believe them.

This is a tremendous flaw within us. We need to understand that Hashem's greatness should be witnessed with the mind- not necessarily with the body. We need to think about how fortunate we are to have everyday miracles from Hashem even though He does not do them in such an open, obvious fashion.

This idea is shown in many areas throughout the Torah, including the *chet ha'egel*, the Sin of the Golden Calf. Why did Moshe go up to Har Sinai and break the *luchot*, the tablets? What kind of a reaction is that? We answer that the Jews at that time got too caught up and focused on the physicality of religion. They felt that they needed to worship a physical entity. Moshe basically told them: "You are all too focused on the physical things in this world. They are not important. You see what I can do to these physical tablets? I can break them in a heartbeat. I can shatter these physical connections." He was showing them that they should not always be so focused on what they are doing physically, but rather why they are doing it, and who it is being done for. The spirituality is what we need to truly focus on. We need to focus on the content of the tablets not the stones themselves. Idol worship is such a grave sin because Hashem wants us to understand that we do not need something physical to know that there is a God. Faith alone is more than enough.

This is the answer to the original question. Why do we sit in huts on Sukkot? What do they represent? They represent how Hashem performs miracles for us each and every day. When the Jews were in the desert, all they had were temporary booths, which could have never protected all of them. However, they had faith that Hashem would protect them, and He did.

This is the message that we need to understand on the holiday of Sukkot. We cannot just look at the physical miracles that Hashem does. We need to look at the *sukkah* and remember that Hashem saved the Jews in the desert and that he has continued to save our nation until this day. Even though there were not many clear physical miracles performed over time, the biggest miracle is the one that we cannot see: The existence of the Jewish people. We must be reminded that Hashem is protecting us each and every second of our lives, even though we cannot see Him or His deliberate actions. May we let this lesson make our experience of living in the "hut" on Sukkot more meaningful.

The Simcha of Sukkot

by Shira Levie (Frisch '15)

Yom Kippur is often said to be among the happiest days in the Jewish calendar. While this day of atonement may mark a day of great joy for the Jewish people, we often overlook the glee associated with the holiday following it, Sukkot. Within the actual text of the Torah, Sukkot is mentioned as the happiest holiday of the year. In fact, Sukkot is the only holiday which is called "*zman simchateinu*," the time of our happiness.

In Devarim, the word *simcha*, happiness, is mentioned two times in relation to Sukkot, once in reference to Shavuot, and not at all when discussing Passover. By this measure, Sukkot seems to be, in the text, the holiday of the most happiness. What uniqueness does Sukkot contain, which earns it the title as the ultimate holiday of joy?

When addressing this, one must look at the historical aspect of Sukkot in relation to the progress of the Jewish nation. Historically, Sukkot has been the high point of the *Shalosh Regalim*. First, there was Passover, the holiday that celebrates physical freedom from oppression. While this is cause for celebration in itself, our freedom, void of purpose, lacks happiness. During Shavuot, the time when the Jews received the Torah, the nation gained purpose. By then, they existed as a free people whose sole function was to serve God, bringing a degree of happiness to their lives. Finally, we come to Sukkot, the time of complete, unadulterated joy. This occurred when the Jewish nation was able to maintain meaningful lives throughout the everyday life in the desert. The festivities of Sukkot celebrate sustained faith through utter happiness, which goes beyond direct revelation and large-scale miracles. It is for this reason that Sukkot possesses the greatest amount of *simcha*.

How are we, as a nation, supposed to achieve this increased amount of *simcha*? One may suggest that this happiness is connected to a Sukkot custom mentioned in the Sha'arei Teshuva, "One should increase giving charity on the eve of Sukkot" (Orach Chayim 625). Rabbi Yehuda Assad offers an insight into this *minhag*. He explains that after Hashem split the Red Sea and rescued the Jews from the pursuing Egyptians, Klal Yisrael turned to God in praise. They sang "This is my God, and I will adorn Him" (Shemot 15:2). The Talmud in Shabbat 133b offers two possible meanings to this passage. One interpretation postulates that the Torah is telling us to adorn ourselves before Hashem by fulfilling His *mitzvot*, namely by building and decorating our *sukkah* in His honor. On the other hand, one may interpret this passage as, "This is my God, and I will be like him," meaning we should be like Hashem; just as He is gracious and compassionate, so too we should be gracious and compassionate.

On the Holiday of Sukkot we must internalize both messages connected to this passage. Not only must we praise Hashem by performing his *mitzvot with happy hearts, but we also must* mimic God, striving to be compassionate and gracious. It is through acting in accordance with these virtues that one can accomplish the purpose of Sukkot, *simcha*. Through generosity and kindness as well as a full dedication to Hashem and his commandments, one can celebrate Sukkot as the Torah commands, making it a “*zman simchateinu*,” time of happiness.

The Sukkah and Simple Faith

by Miriam Weintraub (RKYHS '15)

There is a story told about a young boy walking to the Kotel with his father to pray for rain in the land of Israel. The father explained to his son the reason for their journey: The Jewish people truly believe that if they all come together to pray, a miracle can occur. The boy then quizzically turned to his father and asked, “Father, do you truly believe this is true, that it really can rain?” “Of course,” came the quick response. The boy then innocently interjected, “Then where is your umbrella?”

This story is one that can put a smile on one’s face, but the message is a powerful and important one. In his book, *Nefesh Shimshon: The Gates of Emunah*, Rav Shimshon Pincus explains the idea that “What is lacking today is simplicity. The simple, clear awareness that Hashem exists and is here with us.” Rav Pincus continues to elucidate that this simple *emunah*, faith, is something that only a child naturally possesses, and is generally lost as the child gets older and becomes submerged in the world of logic.

At a young age, a child is taught the famous song, “Hashem is Here; Hashem is There,” and the child has no doubt in his or her mind that this is truth. As can be seen, the little boy in the above story obviously had this pure faith. It was so real to him that Hashem did exist; therefore, he clearly believed that prayer would indeed bring rain. However, for many of us, even if we have practiced Judaism all of our lives, this simple faith is lacking.

Now is our chance to renew this elementary *emunah*. We have come upon Sukkot, which is right after the High Holidays and their ongoing praying and fasting. This is our opportunity to show G-d that during Yom Kippur, we were not just “fooling Him” into giving us a good year, but we really meant it. We have the chance to prove that we really believe in Him and want Him to be involved in our lives. For many of us, this is difficult, for that childlike faith has vanished. There are many more complexities that we face in our lives, and at the end of the day, do we truly believe that God exists? Do we truly recognize at all times that He is

always with us, guiding our lives?

On Sukkot we have the opportunity to get back to the basics and recognize that “Hashem is here, there, and everywhere.” When the Jews were in the *midbar*, they sincerely believed there was a God, for they were entirely reliant on Him for all of their needs. Moshe describes how Bnei Yisrael felt this dependency so clearly as Hashem “fed [you] with *manna*, which you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, so that He would make [you] know that man does not live by bread alone, but rather by whatever comes forth from the mouth of God does man live” (Devarim 8:3). The miraculous nature of the *manna* left no room for doubt as to who was responsible for Bnei Yisrael’s daily nourishment. In addition, following verse continues with this theme when it states, “Your clothing did not wear out upon you.” Rashi explains this to mean that Hashem ensured that their clothing was freshly laundered daily, and He caused their clothing to grow with them.

During our time in the *midbar*, Hashem revealed Himself in a way that was conducive to helping the Jews be constantly aware of His presence. However, in the 21st century, it is more difficult to see Hashem involved in our daily lives. As we make ourselves dependent on Him for a week in the *sukkah*, we should strive to recognize His existence in our everyday life. Like the boy in the story, Hashem’s presence should be so clear to us that if we pray to Him for rain, we should bring along an umbrella.

Sukkot: A Universal Holiday?

by Yosef Coleman (Mizrachi '15)

The *haftarah* for the first day of Sukkot describes that in the future Sukkot will be a universal holiday, as it says in Zecharia 14:16, “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (JPS Translation).

Another interesting universal aspect of Sukkot is that 70 bulls are offered over the course of the *chag*, corresponding to the 70 nations. As Rabbi Eliezer states in Masechet Sukkah 55b: “Why are 70 offerings brought on Sukkot? For the merit of the 70 nations of the world.” Rashi immediately comments that when the Gemara says that the 70 offerings are for the nations of the world, it means that those offerings are to atone for those nations so that they can merit the gift of rain. This source, along with the verse from Zecharia, demonstrate that Sukkot is definitely a universal holiday. Therefore, my question is: What universal message can be learned from the holiday, and if it is supposed to be a universal holiday, why does the average non-Jew not know about it?

I will first discuss my second question of why non-Jews are unfamiliar with Sukkot. One answer I would like to

suggest is that in the past the Jews would offer sacrifices on the non-Jews' behalf without their knowledge, allowing them to merit rainfall. In the future, it will be a truly universal holiday as the non-Jews too will celebrate it.

The other answer I would like to suggest is that non-Jews have no knowledge of the *chag* because the holiday does not commemorate an event that the world can relate to. Passover is about freedom from slavery; Shavuot is about getting the main text of the Jewish religion; Rosh Hashanah is about looking back at our past and striving to be better in the future; Yom Kippur is about trying to become better people and repenting for our past mistakes. Many nations have similar holidays, and many individuals endure similar stages in their lives. They can understand the message of those holidays. However, Sukkot celebrates the journey out of Egypt into the land of Israel. It symbolizes that just as one must celebrate the end result one must celebrate the process. Most people do not think about celebrating the journey, and therefore the average non-Jew does not know about the universal holiday of Sukkot.

The fact that Sukkot is the holiday when Hashem judges the entire world's water supply relates to the all-encompassing nature of the *chag*. Without water, civilization would collapse, and all life would die. This means Jews and non-Jews alike require water to survive, giving Sukkot another facet of universalism.

Another possible reason that Sukkot is a universal holiday is that the command of Sukkot is to live in *sukkah*. In other words, we have a commandment to go outside and live in harmony with nature. This aspect of the holiday is relatable to all humans as we can all appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature; therefore, Hashem chose Sukkot to be the universal holiday.

An additional message in Sukkot that makes it a universal holiday is that the *sukkah* is a temporary dwelling and teaches us about the fragility and vulnerability of our lives. Just as the *sukkah* is temporary, so is our life on Earth. This message is universal because everyone's life is fragile, whether or not he or she likes to think about it. Understanding that life is fragile allows us to move on with our life and enjoy it, and that is why Sukkot is known as the time of our happiness.

Sukkot and Kohelet: What's the Connection?

by Liat Clark (Maayanot '15)

Megillat Kohelet, a seemingly depressing *megillah* authored by Shlomo Ha'Melech, is read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed of Sukkot. What relationship does this text have to the *chag*? Perhaps a closer look at the nature of Sukkot, and

more specifically the *halachot* of the *sukkah*, will lend itself to a deeper understanding of the relationship and relevance of Kohelet to Sukkot.

Rabbi Akiva, in Sukkah 23a, states the *halacha* that the *sukkah* must be a temporary dwelling, a "*dirat ara*" (as opposed to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, Beit Shammai, and others, who hold that the *sukkah* should be permanent, a "*dirat keva*"). Though it is a topic of heated debate amongst the *rishonim*, most *acharonim* felt that one should try to build a *sukkah* whose *schach* would not be fully impermeable to rain. The Talmud Yerushalmi and Mishnah Berurah cite the idea that *schach* should not be so thick to prevent seeing the stars through it (though the inability to view the stars through the *schach* would not invalidate it), further indicating the transitory nature of the *sukkah*.

According to Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivitofsky of Bar-Ilan University, these two *halachot* regarding the thickness or substantiality of the *schach* contain philosophical implications as well. As he writes, "Seeing the stars while in the *sukkah* emphasizes the ephemeral nature of existence and highlights the idea that we are sitting under God's watchful eye. Similarly, the *sukkah* provides inadequate protection from the elements so that one realizes that just as the Jews in the desert relied on God's protection from the elements, we must rely on that protection today."

This implication of the *sukkah's* exercise in faith is echoed by Rabbi Akiva Tatz, author of Letters to a Buddhist Jew. "The tempting illusion is that our security derives from the material; the *sukkah* teaches that if there is security it comes from elsewhere." Rabbi Tatz aptly refers to the *sukkah* as a "shelter of faith." Rather than commemorating Sukkot in the pleasant weather of spring, Sukkot is celebrated in Tishrei, which will hopefully be the beginning of the rainy winter season. This, as the Rosh states, is exactly the reason Sukkot is not celebrated in the spring or summer months; sitting in the *sukkah* in potentially unpleasant weather is a statement of faith. There is the possibility that the weather will be unfavorable, but our faith in God is displayed through our willingness to risk that chance in order to follow His *mitzvot*.

A similar message of faith can be found in Megillat Kohelet. Initially, each lifestyle is analyzed by Kohelet, and its flaws are exposed. Does being righteous rather than being evil ensure that a person will live longer? Does being a God-fearing person ensure that man will have bread to pass on to his son? Can increasing wisdom help man spurn death? There is no proof that being wise or foolish, righteous or evil, God-fearing or not will benefit man in any way; in the end, all people meet the same end. However, despite the inability to prove that any of these paths is worthwhile and beneficial, Kohelet undermines the very premise with the question: Does man need concrete proof in life? As Kohelet challenges in

Chapter 11, a farmer plants each season though there is no guarantee that rain will fall that season. Man and wife still attempt to have children though it is possible she will not conceive. Although we lack assurance that we will be successful and prosperous, we still live our lives with faith; faith that there is a God who will reward those who fear Him; faith that He will bring rain and prosperity. Man has no control, but that does not stop him from living his life in the hope that God will make things in his favor. By reading Kohelet on Sukkot, the intention is that we will be reminded, while we are in our *sukkot*, that the control is not in our hands; all we need is to have faith.

We Need the Sukkah on Shabbat

by Eitan Jeselson (Maimonides '17)

Sukkot is arriving, and you are looking forward to waving the *lulav* and *etrog* on the first day of the *chag*. When you look at the calendar, however, you realize that the first day of the *chag* is on Shabbat, which means you will not be able to shake the *lulav* and *etrog* until the second day. Although this scenario is not the case this year, this unique *halacha* begs the question: Why do we not shake the *arba'at haminin* on Shabbat?

In Masechet Rosh Hashanah (29b), Rabbah states that the Rabbis prohibited us from shaking the *lulav* and *etrog* on Shabbat because they feared that someone might carry them to his or her rabbi's house to ask him how to fulfill the *mitzvah*. Such a person would be carrying in a public area on the holiday – an *isur*. Yet, this answer seems strange, since the Torah commands us to shake the *lulav* and *etrog* on the first day of Sukkot and does not command us to shake on any of the other days. How can the Rabbis forbid us from shaking on the only day the Torah considers it a *chiyuv* to do so? As an aside, we seem to have a similar case when Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat: The Rabbis tell us to not blow the *shofar* for similar reasons. The difference between these two cases, however, is that Rosh Hashanah is a *yoma arichta*, one long day. This is expounded to mean that blowing the *shofar* on the second day is as if you blew it on the first day.

Additionally, a second question arises when considering the Rabbis' ruling: Why are we forbidden from shaking the *lulav* and *etrog* on the first day of Sukkot if it falls out on Shabbat, but yet we are allowed to sit in the *sukkah*? Why do the Rabbis allow us to sit in the *sukkah* on Shabbat, if part of the *sukkah* might fall, tempting us to fix it?

In the Torah, there are seven commandments associated with Sukkot. Four of them concern the *arba minim*, and the other three are sitting in the *sukkah*, celebrating, and being joyous. Each of these commandments coincides with one of the seven *ushpizin* whom we invite into our *sukkah* during Sukkot. The *lulav* stands tall and is an

encouragement of hope, just like Avraham was a paradigm of hope. (For example, even though Hashem asked him to sacrifice Yitzchak, Avraham still had faith and held out hope that Hashem's promise of becoming a great nation would be realized.) The *aravot* thrive because of their deep roots; similarly, Yitzchak's roots were deep in Torah study. The *hadassim* are shaped like the eye and stand for prosperous growth; correspondingly, Ya'akov stands for study — an activity done with the eyes — and for the growth of family. The *etrog*, which has both a nice smell and taste, stands for Moshe, the embodiment of both learning and good deeds. The *sukkah* stands for Yosef, since Yosef, a forgiving person, tried to include everyone. The celebration stands for Aharon, who was in charge of the celebration done in the temple during the time of Sukkot. Finally, David Ha'Melech was known for his joy and thereby represents the *mitzvah* of *simchah*. On every day of Sukkot, we invite each of these characteristics into our *sukkah*.

Shabbat is often considered the day for us to strengthen ourselves. On Shabbat, we concentrate on hope, learning, family, and good deeds, just like Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, and Moshe did. We do not need the *lulav* and *etrog* on Shabbat since Shabbat already conveys to us the ideas of the *lulav* and *etrog*. Shabbat, however, does not teach us about the ideals of Yosef — that we must forgive and include everyone.

On Shabbat, we like to focus on the Jews that keep Shabbat and not on the rest of the Jews in the world. We want to be strengthened and not necessarily be involved with other people. On Sukkot, we want to be attached and include everyone. Even the Jews who do not keep Shabbat must be included in the holiday of Sukkot. On Sukkot, not only do we pray for the Jewish nation, but we also pray for all the nations of the world. When Sukkot falls out on Shabbat, we do not need the *lulav* and *etrog* to remind us of the good deeds our ancestors did, but we do need the *sukkah* to remind us that Sukkot is a holiday when we must include everyone because only then can we enjoy the complete happiness of Sukkot.

Divine Protection

by Olivia Mittman (Ramaz '15)

"In sukkot you shall dwell for seven days, every resident of Israel shall dwell in sukkot, in order that you shall know that it was in sukkot that I made the Children of Israel dwell when I took them out of Egypt; I am Hashem, your God" (Vayikra 23:42-43).

The exodus of the Jewish People from Egypt was arguably the greatest miracle performed by God; it was the beginning of the redemption and unification of our people. It is a strange request, therefore, that we set aside a holiday simply to commemorate the housing in which we dwelled while in the desert. It is a seemingly insignificant aspect of such a

monumental event.

The Talmud tractate of Sukkot brings a debate between Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Akiva on the exact nature of these *sukkot* and their greater significance. Rabbi Elazar asserts that the *sukkot* were temporary forms of shelter, ones similar to those of nomads. They remind us that we ultimately depend on God for protection and that our fate is in His hands (Sukkot 11b). Rabbi Akiva suggests that the *sukkot* were not physical entities but rather the spiritual Clouds of Glory. He maintains that God's commandment to live in *sukkot* alludes to the divine clouds, which guided us through the desert and served to protect us from the wind and sun.

The overriding emphasis on God's protection can help explain why we celebrate Sukkot in the fall rather than the spring, the time of year when the miracle took place. Fall brings the New Year, a period of heightened awareness of God's presence. Sukkot furthers our recognition that our future depends on God's will. We leave the comforts of our homes and venture out into the brisk and often-unpredictable weather that autumn brings. We increase our vulnerability by living among the elements, and we trust that God will guide us on the correct path.

The Vilna Gaon, in his insightful commentary on *Song of Songs* (1:4), provides another answer for Sukkot's seemingly unusual placement on the Jewish calendar. He suggests that there were two sets of *ananei ha'kavod*, one in the spring immediately after the exodus from Egypt and one in the fall (*Song of Songs* 1:4). The clouds that accompanied us upon leaving Egypt disappeared following the Sin of the Golden Calf. According to the Vilna Gaon, the Clouds of Glory reappeared upon the commencement of the building of the *mishkan*, God's temporary "home". The first day of Sukkot marks this return of God's presence amongst the people.

Just as the construction of the *mishkan* brought the return of the Clouds of Glory, the building of *sukkot* and our fulfillment of all of God's commandments will hopefully allow us to merit His protection and reward. Let us keep this in mind this Sukkot holiday and throughout the entire New Year!

Chag: What Makes Sukkot so Unique?

by Yael Marans (SAR '16)

Among the Five Pillars of Islam is the Hajj, the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. It shares a name and meaning with one of the pilgrimages in Jewish tradition, Sukkot, sometimes referred to as *chag*. While *chag* is sometimes interpreted as "festival" or "holiday," it often refers to a

festival of pilgrimage in particular. In addition, it is one of the several names for Sukkot in the Torah and the Talmud.

What is peculiar about the name *chag* for Sukkot is that, unlike the Hajj, which is the only major pilgrimage in Islam, Sukkot is one of *three* festivals of pilgrimage. Each one occurs on its own as a holiday, but none boast the singular title of *chag* besides Sukkot. Of course, a question arises regarding the nomenclature: Why is Sukkot any more special as a festival, or any more important as a pilgrimage, than Shavuot and Pesach?

One popular theory explaining the name notes that Sukkot is the only holiday to which the Torah specifically attributes *simchah*. The Torah commands us to rejoice on Sukkot, "*v'samachata b'chagecha*" (Devarim 16:14). There is no such commandment in the text by Pesach and Shavuot. Therefore, it is evident that neither of the two *regalim* are as joyous as Sukkot. After all, the Simchat Beit Ha'Shoevah, a celebration whose light, in the words of the Mishnah, lit up "every courtyard in Jerusalem" (Sukkah 5:3), occurs on Sukkot. It is no coincidence that yet another name for Sukkot is *zman simchateinu*, the time of our happiness.

Perhaps further establishing its unique *simchah*, Sukkot, unlike Shavuot and Pesach, is not associated with negative moments in the biblical narrative. Although Pesach is about redemption, it begins with the period of enslavement in Egypt, which is not a generally happy event. On a similar note, Shavuot focuses on *matan torah*, a glorious moment in Jewish history, but at the same time includes the egregious *chet ha'egel* and the consequent deaths of countless members of the community.

The Netziv affirms the idea that Sukkot has a higher level of *simchah* than Pesach. His commentary on Chumash, Ha'Emek Davar, compares Sukkot and Pesach in reference to the introduction of Pesach in the twelfth perek of Shemot. Since Pesach and Sukkot both require sacrifices on their first days, he notes that one might think that they are of equal importance. However, he refutes this point by illustrating the differences between the two holidays. According to Jewish law, the Netziv explains, one is permitted to make a sacrifice on the first day of Pesach and then return to his home in the seven remaining days. Sukkot, however, was celebrated in Jerusalem for a full week, and the people made *shlamim* sacrifices on each day of Sukkot, filling each day with festivities and *simchah*. Commenting on Devarim 16:13, the Netziv notes that Sukkot is the only *regel* that the Torah calls a "*chag*" for all seven of its days, including *chol hamoed*.

As modern Jews, it probably would not be consequential to employ the logic of the Netziv and conclude that Sukkot is on a higher level than Pesach and Shavuot. Today, we no longer travel to Jerusalem for all the *regalim*, so our perspective on them is different than in the time of the Beit Hamikdash. Regardless, the Netziv may suggest that Sukkot is

a unique festival according to biblical law, which is perhaps another reason it is called, *Chag*.

Guests Above, Guests Below

by Moshe Pahmer ('15) and Matthew Wexler ('15)

One of the least understood practices of Sukkot is that which is colloquially referred to as "*ushpizin*," an Aramaic term for guests. With no mention in the Gemara, *rishonim*, or Shulchan Aruch, the practicing of this *minhag* is a rare occurrence in many families. However, *ushpizin* has firmly grounded roots in the Zohar, and can help us better understand the overall message of Sukkot.

The Torah states, "*Ba'sukkot teishvu shivat yamim kol ha'ezrach b'Yisrael yeishvu ba'sukkot* – "You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all natives of Israel shall dwell in *sukkot*" (Vayikra 23:42). There are a few glaring issues which arise from this *pasuk*. Firstly, what is the reason the *pasuk* gives us the commandment us to dwell in *sukkot* twice? Secondly, why is there a shift in the form of the commanding word ("*teishvu*" to "*yeishvu*")? Lastly, the *pasuk* in its current grammatical state means, "In booths shall seven days dwell"; the Torah should have used the phrase "*b'shivat yamim*" had it intended to say "You shall dwell in booths for seven days."

The Zohar in *Parashat Emor* (3: 103b) quotes Rabbi Abba who states that, in fact, the strange phraseology of *shivat yamim* serves as a reference to *shivat ha'roim* – Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe, Aharon, David, and Yosef – our seven spiritual shepherds and guides. *Yamim*, days, refers to *tzadikim* because had *tzadikim* not been in this world, then the whole world would be comparable to night time (see Bava Metzia 83b). Furthermore, the apparent redundancy in the *pasuk* as well as the change from "*teishvu*" to "*yeishvu*" is no longer an issue. The first half of the *pasuk* is a command to the *shivat ha'roim* to leave Gan Eden, their dwelling place, and join us in our dwelling place. The second half of the *pasuk*, though, is Hashem's statement to us, almost as a fact rather than a command, that we will dwell in *sukkot*.

The obvious question is what is the purpose of *ushpizin*, and how does it further our understanding of the holiday of Sukkot? If we understand that the *shivat ha'roim* serve as our spiritual guides, then they are by definition here in order to facilitate the fostering of a connection with Hashem. This point is further evidenced by the fact that, according to Kabbalistic tradition, each of the Seven Shepherds represents one of the seven *sefirot*, or attributes, with which Hashem interacts with this world.

When Bnei Yisrael dwelt in *sukkot* for their forty years in the *midbar*, they were not only out of their element, but they also felt as if they were in constant danger and distress. Nevertheless, they had faith in Hashem that He would protect and provide for them. Similarly, Hashem

commands us to dwell in these booths for seven days. Sometimes eating and sleeping in *sukkot* can be difficult, but we must understand that we have to put our faith in Hashem and trust that what He is doing is not just for our benefit, but it is also to serve as a learning experience for us and our families.

Perhaps this is why the *pasuk* states, "*yeishvu*," as a statement, rather than "*teishvu*," as a command. When Hashem tells us to do something, we should do it automatically to the extent that Hashem can state what we will do rather than what we are commanded to do. We should serve Hashem in such a way that His commandments and our actions are identical. As a result, as the Zohar teaches, Hashem reciprocates the deep devotion, connection, and commitment we have to Him by sending the *shivat ha'roim*, His representatives, to visit our *sukkot* and show His continued connection to us.

I Open at the Close

by Baila Eisen (WYHS '15)

In a way, Sukkot seems like one of the most confining holidays. Though we all appreciate the good food and company, we have to enjoy them while sitting in that small, enclosed, and often rickety structure known as a *sukkah*, scooching in our chairs to let our guests and family members pass. Talk about claustrophobia!

Yet although it seems confining, the *sukkah* turn out to be surprisingly open. Halachically, only three walls are required for a *sukkah* to be *kosher*. The fourth side can be completely exposed to the elements. In Masechet Avodah Zarah (2a-3b), we learn that in the end of days, Hashem will give idol worshippers one last chance to repent: He will give them the *mitzvah* of living in a *sukkah*, and if they keep it, they will be forgiven. Understandably, the heat and discomfort of living outside will get to them, and they will give up, kick their *sukkot*, and walk away. But how about the more rugged idol worshippers, those who *can* withstand the heat and less-than-ideal conditions? What makes this *mitzvah* so difficult for them?

The reason this is really such a tough *mitzvah* is because, at its core, it involves opening ourselves up, making ourselves vulnerable, and trusting completely in Hashem. Every Sukkot, we must deliberately open ourselves to the elements, believing that Hashem will keep us safe. This physical experience is symbolic of our spiritual experiences every day. Sukkot is one of the only holidays that includes a time period, a *moed*, in which Jews can continue to go to work. Every day, when we face the outside world, we open ourselves up to a barrage of spiritual attacks. As long as we have trust in Hashem and keep His *mitzvot*, we are able to survive the spiritual chaos of our world unscathed, just as we can survive the physical exposure to the outside world that a

sukkah provides.

But the walls are not the only part of the *sukkah* that can be open. If we lean back for a moment, we can just glimpse the night sky peeping through the *schach*. Our guests' laughter and conversation seem to bubble up through the gaps in the leaves straight to Heaven's gates. Indeed, by abandoning our houses for a few days, we are also abandoning our ordinary point of view. In return, we take on a new one – God's. We look in at our homes from the outside, just as He does, and we try to see what He sees. If we can truly manage to open ourselves up to this experience, we may find ourselves wincing at more than the toys strewn across the floor; we all have things we can work on, spiritually as well as physically. By moving out into the *sukkah*, we are able to catch a glimpse of our homes from an outsider's perspective. Hopefully, by the time we move back into our houses, we will have gained something from the openness of living outside, an insight into how to bring some of that godliness back inside with us.

And that is the final and most important openness of Sukkot, the act of opening ourselves to personal growth. Sukkot is a holiday of strange and intricate demands, such as waving the *arbah minim* and living outside. Perhaps some would see this as limiting, but we Jews understand that by giving us more *mitzvot*, which we cannot do during the rest of the year, Hashem is giving us a special opportunity. We see this as a bonus, not as a burden. By following God's commandments in relation to Sukkot as well as everywhere else in life, we are free to achieve a high level of spirituality, which we could never reach without His specific instructions. The more *mitzvot* we do – the more we seem to restrict ourselves – the freer we become. So by enclosing ourselves in a *sukkah*, we open ourselves to more opportunities to serve Hashem and improve our own spiritual lives in the process.

Our Actions, Our Prophecies

by Jake Stern (JEC '15)

One of the most amazing holidays of the year, Simchat Torah, is also in many ways one of the strangest. From dancing on Yom Tov to *aliyot* for children, Simchat Torah is definitely an interesting *chag*. In fact, the one of the oldest defining *minhagim* of Simchat Torah night, distinguishing it from simply being a second day of Shmini Atzeret is the giving of donations to the *shul*, which dates back to the thirteenth century (Tur; Shulchan Aruch). The strangeness of the holiday is perhaps best exemplified by *leining* at night, possibly the strangest *minhag* of all. Why do we do this? Where does this *minhag* come from? In truth, the history of leining on Simchat Torah night is a fascinating journey through Jewish history.

Leining on Simchat Torah night is often very misunderstood. Many believe that the reason for the *minhag* is that you cannot take out a *sefer Torah* without some form of *kriya*, so *leining* was instituted to excuse the practice of taking out the *sifrei Torah* to dance with them. This, however, cannot be the real source, since the *rishonim* and *achronim* never mention it, and rather give an alternate explanation. With that footing gained, we can now begin our journey through our history.

Up through the time of the *mechaber*, Rav Yosef Karo, in the middle of the 15th century, the *minhag* seemed to not exist. The Shulchan Aruch makes no mention of any kind of reading on Simchat Torah night. The Rema is the first to mention any such *minhag*, and his version of the practice seems a bit unusual. He says that different communities would read from the Torah “known *psukim*”, which the Mishnah Berurah explains to be verses like “*ha'malach ha'goel*” and “*ma tovu*” (O"C 769). What is strange is that these readings were not *aliyot*- no *oleh* was called and no *bracha* was made- but there was still *kriyah* from the Torah. The next mention of the *minhag* is by the Vilna Gaon nearly two hundred years later. He specifically states not to read, but to roll the *parshiot* to “known *psukim*” and read them outside of the Torah (Biar Ha'Grah to above).

Through the 1700s, the *minhag* was to read a few *psukim* here and there with no *leining* included. The strangest part of the story is that around the year 1800 the Chayei Adam brings down that it is rare for any community to *not* to *lein* on Simchat Torah night (153:7). Apparently, by his time most *shuls* were *leining* with a *Bracha* rather than the earlier custom of just reading *psukim*. Although it would not seem so from the Chayei Adam, this *minhag* was not actually universal; for example, the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch quotes the Rema's *minhag* as *halacha* (138:8). The only Achron to address the reasoning for this strange *minhag* is the Aruch Ha'Shulchan who says “*v'ain la'zeh sod*” – “And this has no reason” (769:2).

There is a concept in Judaism that the *minhagim* of Klal Yisrael are like *nevuah*, prophecy (intro to Sefer Ha'Minhagim). The fact that it has become so widespread to *lein* on Simchat Torah Night can be seen as proof that it was the will of Hashem. How else could it be that within fifty years of it being such an obscure custom, to the extent that it was outside the realm of mainstream Halachic sources, could the Chayei Adam so confidently write that it was rare for anyone to not have accepted this *minhag*? It would not be a stretch to say that this *minhag* has uplifted many peoples' Simchat Torahs. How many young children are fascinated by this oddity, and how many adults do you see crying as *ba'al korei* reads in the beautiful tune of the Yamim Noraim? The lesson here is quite clear: If Klal Yisrael works together, the *Boreh Olam* will make our visions into reality.



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