

THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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*Dedicated in memory of
Bernice and Irby Cooper
by their Loving Family*

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Rabbi Reuven Brand

Mrs. Chaya Batya Neugroschl

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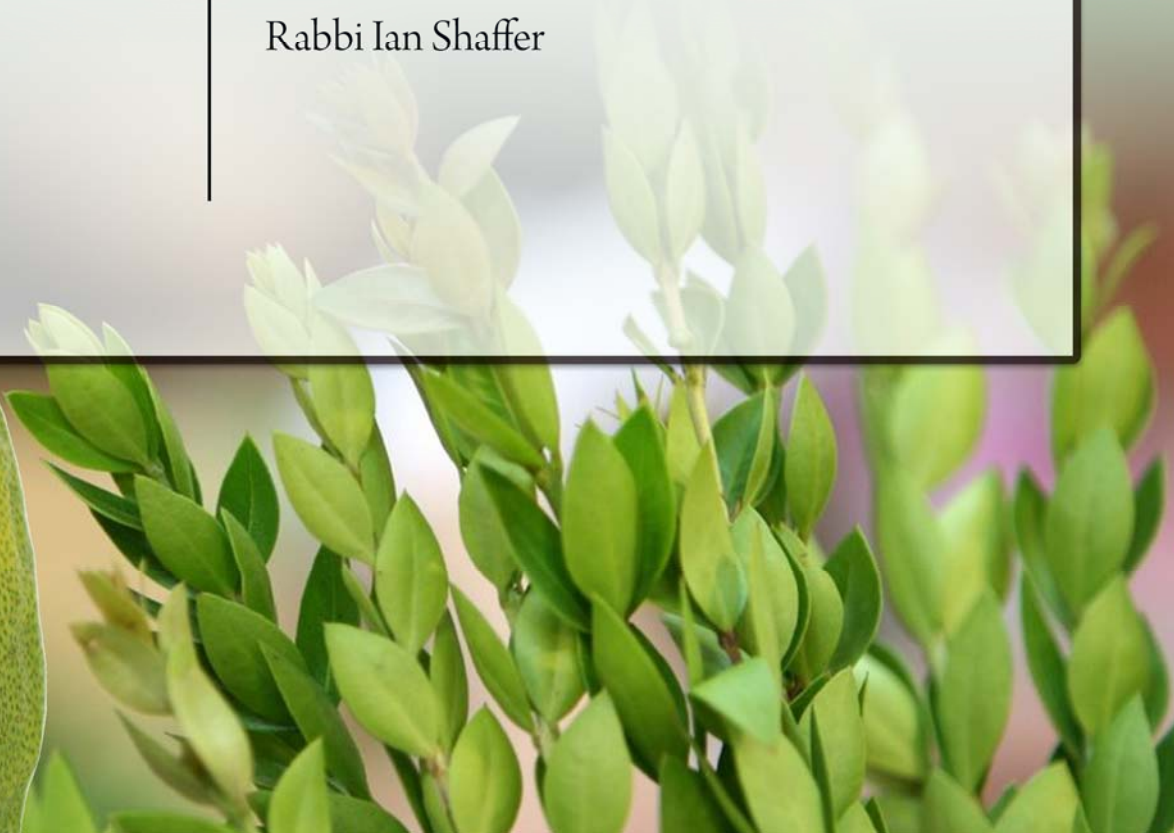


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Ushpizin: Our Sukkah Guests

Rabbi Reuven Brand¹

Rosh Kollel, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

On the eve of the holiday, one should go to the sukkah and bring a chair with a nice covering on it as a remembrance for the seven holy and exalted guests. The covering is similar to the one we place on Elijah's chair on the day of a circumcision and it states in the holy Zohar that if one does not set up a chair, he doesn't come. It has always been [the tradition of] God fearing people to set up a dignified chair for the seven holy and exalted guests. Each night, when in the sukkah, one should recite with purity "Enter guests ..."

Chida, Moreh B'Etzbah no. 9 (289)²

אור החג הקדוש ילך לסוכה ויצוה להביא כסא ומעיל מפורש על גבה לזכר שבעה אושפיזין עלאין קדישין מעיל דוגמא שעושים ביום המילה כסא לאליהו הנביא זכור לטוב וכתוב בזוהר הקדוש דאי לא מתקנין לה כסא לא אתי. זאת היתה להחרדים לדבר ה' להזמין כסא כבוד לשבעה אושפיזין עלאין קדישין וכל לילה יאמר בפה צח בסוכה "עולו אושפיזין וכו'." חיד"א מורה באצבע סי' ט' אות רפ"ט

In order to comprehend and appreciate this unique concept of *ushpizin* (Aramaic for “guests,” rooted in the Latin word “hospice”), we must begin with a metaphor about ourselves. When we think about ourselves as people, perhaps we should view ourselves as amphibians, as strange as that may sound.³ Amphibians are creatures that live on both land and water; hence, they earn their name, which derives from ancient Greek, meaning two modes of existence. While we don’t often think about our lives this way, we too have two modes of existence. We live in a physical realm with objects and places we can see and touch. We also live in another realm, one that is quite different, but just as real and perceptible as the physical world. This second realm is comprised of thoughts, feelings and experiences—concepts that are not measurable in size or weight—but are very real in our lives. Our connections with family and friends and our dreams and fears fill this realm, which we can call the spiritual world. This world is one that transcends physical boundaries. In our view of life as Torah Jews, it is in this second realm that we consider ourselves truly alive, for that which sustains our existence is the energy of our soul, a transcendent connection to Hashem. According to the Talmud (*Shabbat* 113b-114a), our physical body is just a cloak (*levush*) for the true self, the soul (*neshama*), which is an eternal Divine spark.

¹ I would like to thank *Avi Mori*, Mr. Etzion Brand; Professor Leslie Newman and Mrs. Andrea Polster for their help with the article.

² Chida is the acronym for Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, the 18th century Rabbinic luminary, who authored scores of works on all aspects of Torah.

³ This idea is presented and developed by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz in his work *Simple Words*, in the chapter entitled “Spirit and Matter.”

This basic principle of Judaism explains much of our practice that may seem odd to the onlooker. When we clasp a palm branch, some twigs, and a citron on a morning in October and wave them around, it might seem unusual from the perspective of the physical world. Yet this action, according to the Talmud (*Menachot* 62a) is primarily focused on the spiritual world, and its impact is difficult to measure in the physical world. This is true for all mitzvot. Similarly, in the same light we can appreciate countless Talmudic stories and teachings, which speak of realities that are completely foreign, or perhaps incredible to us. The sages of the Talmud lived their lives with an acute awareness and sensitivity to the spiritual realm. They experienced this spirituality in a way far beyond our understanding, which is why it can be challenging to connect with or appreciate the lives they led.

Perhaps now we may begin to understand why, according to the Chida's description above, one would arrange a chair in one's sukkah for guests that aren't visibly present. The Chida is referencing the welcoming of special spiritual guests to our sukkah. These guests are real; however, they exist in a spiritual, not physical, realm.

This presents us with many questions. What does it mean that there are unseen guests in our sukkah? Who are they? Why are they present and why specifically on Sukkot? If we cannot detect them, of what significance is it to us that they are present?

Guests in Our Sukkah

Let us begin with a general appreciation of welcoming guests on Sukkot. *Hachnasat orchim* (welcoming visitors) is a basic mitzvah of *chesed* (kindness) all year round and has increased significance during all of our holidays, not just Sukkot. The Rambam (*Hilchot Yom Tov* 6:17) teaches that one cannot experience the true joy of any Torah holiday without opening one's gates to welcome the underprivileged and downtrodden, providing them food and nourishment. Yet the practice of welcoming guests on Sukkot is unique. On one level, it can be traced to an allusion in the book of Zechariah (3:10):

On that day, said God, the Lord of Hosts, each person will call his friend under the grapevine and under the fig tree.

Zechariah 3:10

בְּיוֹם הַהוּא, נֵאָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת, תִּקְרְאוּ, אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ--אֶל-תַּחַת גֵּפֶן, וְאֶל-תַּחַת תְּאֵנָה.

זְכַרְיָה ג':

Historians note that during this period of Sukkot, the holiday of gathering, when farmers had concluded their harvest and were sitting beneath their vineyards and trees, was a time when they invited guests.⁴ It is also fitting to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* during Sukkot, for this mitzvah was the hallmark of Avraham Avinu and in many ways, the Sukkah represents and reflects the tent of Avraham.⁵ Hence legends abound of Chassidic Rebbes who insisted on

⁴ See "The Ushpizin in our Sukkah" by Professor Yom Tov Levinski in *Sefer Hamoadim*, volume four, p. 115; see also "On the Custom of Ushpizin that is Customary on the Holiday of Sukkot" by Zecharia Green in *Mechkerei Chag*.

⁵ The holiday of Sukkot reflects the *middot* of Avraham Avinu. The 70 *korbanot* of Sukkot, which are connected with the 70 nations of the world, is one example of the universal character of this yom tov, as explained by Rabbi Shlomo Goren in his essay, "The Universality of the Holiday of Sukkot" in *Torat Hamoadim*; this universalistic view is closely associated with our understanding of Avraham Avinu's embracing relationship to the rest of the world of his time. This openness and love of Avraham ("Avraham *ohavi*" in Yeshaya 41:8) also correlates with the notion of

inviting guests and encouraged others to do so. Perhaps this is why, according to the *Sefer Yesod Veshoresh HaAvodah*, we invite spiritual guests to our sukkah: to strengthen our fulfillment of the mitzvah of inviting ordinary people, especially those who are less fortunate:

He sits in the shade of the sukkah and the holy ones who reside in the heavens, our holy forefathers, come to reside with him in the shade of the sukkah. They rejoice with him when he gives some of his bread to the poor and destitute, proper people who follow the Torah. He will bring the impoverished to his home and they will take the portions of those holy and exalted guests (ushpizin) and from their blessing, this God fearing individual will be blessed with seven blessings.

Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah 11:13

והוא יושב בצל סוכה וקדושי משכני
עליון האבות הקדושים באים
להתלונן עמו בצל סוכה והם שמחים
עמו כשנותן אז מלחמו לדלים
אביונים הגונים בעלי תורה, ועניים
מרודים יביא ואסף אותם הביתה והם
יקחו חלקם של הני אושפיזין עלאין
קדישין ומברכתם יבורך גבר ירא ה'
שבעה ברכות.
יסוד ושורש העבודה יא:יג

Spiritual Guests

The well-established origins of the practice of inviting spiritual guests can be traced to several passages in the *Zohar*, which appear in *Parshat Emor*. The *Zohar* describes that when people reside in their sukkah, they are joined by spiritual guests:

R. Abba said: Avraham, five righteous people and King David, establish their residence with him. This is what is stated "You shall dwell in Sukkot seven days." It states "seven days" and not "during those seven days" [a hint to the seven spiritual spheres] ... A person must rejoice each day and greet the guests who reside with him with a joyous countenance.

Zohar, Emor no. 276

אמר ר' אבא אברהם וחמשה צדיקייא
ודוד מלכא שוין מדוריהון עמיה הדא
הוא דכתיב בסכות תשבו שבעת ימים,
שבעת ימים כתיב ולא בשבעת ימים ...
ובעי ב"נ למחדי בכל יומא ויומא באנפין
נהירין באושפיזין אלין דשריין עמיה.
זהר, פרשת אמור אות רעו

According to this teaching, there are seven guests who arrive in our sukkah. These are spiritual guests of obviously great meaning and historic significance. The notion of seven great Jewish leaders is referenced in a verse in Micha:

And this will ensure peace. If Assyria will come into our land or trample on our palaces, we will stop them with seven shepherds and eight officers.

Micha 5:4

והנה זה, שלום; אשור כּי-יבוא בּאֲרָצְנוּ, וְכִי יִדְרֹךְ
בּאֲרָמְנוּתֵינוּ, וְהִקְמֵנוּ עָלָיו שְׁבַע רְעִים, וְשִׁמְנֵה נְסִיכֵי
אֲדָם.
מיכה ה:ד

Here, as in the Maoz Tzur poem, we refer to our seven great leaders specifically as shepherds. They guide their flock—the Jewish people—with the devotion, sensitivity and sense of purpose of a shepherd. Yet we may still wonder why we specify seven leaders from among the countless spiritual giants of our history. Why not six or eight? Perhaps, if we understand the significance of the number seven, we can appreciate why we refer to seven spiritual guides and why tradition has identified exactly these individuals.

Sukkot as a time of *teshuvah meahava*—return to Hashem with love, after the Yamim Noraim that are characterized by return with awe.

Seven

In life and in Judaism, the number seven is ubiquitous and has great significance. On a universal level, much of our existence is framed in patterns of seven, including the number of days in a week, notes of the common musical scales and the popular colors of the rainbow. In Torah life, patterns of seven appear in the mitzvot of Shabbat, *shemittah* and *sefirat haomer* as well as *minhagim* such as *hoshanot* and *hakafot*. This number is a nexus between the physical universe and the spiritual realm; both are governed by the same framework of seven. The root of these patterns, according to tradition, is a manifestation of seven Divine energies that power our world; they reflect different dimensions of life and aspects of our personalities. Hashem provides us with seven different energies that, when manifested in their ideal balance, create true accord between matter and spirit in our world. These qualities are referred to as: *chessed* (love), *gevurah* (restraint), *tiferet* (harmony), *netzach* (dominance), *hod* (submissiveness or empathy), *yesod* (continuity and foundation) and *malchut* (kingship). We allude to these Divine aspects in our daily tefillah, when we cite a Biblical verse:

Yours, God, is the greatness (chessed), the power (gevurah), the harmony (tiferet), the dominance (netzach) and the glory (hod) for everything is in the heavens and the earth (yesod). Your, God, is the kingship (malchut) and You are exalted as head above all.

Chronicles I 29:11

לְךָ ה' הַגְּדֹלָה וְהַגְּבוּרָה וְהַתְּפָאֵרֶת,
וְהַנְּצַח וְהַהוֹד, כִּי-כֹל, בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ:
לְךָ ה' הַמְּמֹלָכָה, וְהַמְּתַנַּשֵּׂא לְכֹל
לְרֹאשׁ.
דְּבַרֵי הַיָּמִים א' כ"ט י"א

Here, we acknowledge that Hashem is the source of all the seven aspects of our life.

Even the beginnings of a simple understanding of any of these *middot* or *sephirot* (aspects or dimensions) require a full exploration and study.⁶ However, for our purposes, we can note that while every individual contains all seven of these diverse aspects, different people emphasize various *middot* to varying degrees. Even one individual may, at times, employ a greater measure of love than restraint and at other times emphasize fortitude more than magnanimity.

While this is true on an individual level it is also true on a national level. There are leaders who capture, develop and reflect the essence of a particular *middah*; they model this ideal in their lives and in their actions. We, their disciples and spiritual heirs, learn from their example and incorporate the aspects of these *middot* into our lives. Therefore, we understand why we are visited by seven historic leaders, who serve as timeless models, exemplars of the seven qualities and sources of their energies in our lives. Our tradition identifies them as Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef and David.⁷

The following chart illustrates the unique characteristics of each of the *ushpizin*:⁸

⁶ For an explanation and introduction to these concepts, see "Lesson Twenty One" in *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chassidic Thought* by Rabbi Zev Reichman.

⁷ Although the Gemara (*Sukkah* 52b) relates the seven shepherds in the verse in Micha to seven other figures in Tanach.

⁸ The Biblical verses that parallel the seven attributes are found in many siddurim according to the seven circuits of *Hoshanot* on Hoshana Rabba. The seven verses of blessings each of the leaders manifests and represents in our world is developed in the *Sefer Hatodaa* (pp. 120-121) by Rabbi Eliyah KiTov.

Leader	Source of blessing	Divine attribute	Source for attribute
אברהם Avraham	אב המון גויים <i>A father of many nations.</i> (Bereishit 17:4)	חסד Love	כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה <i>For I said, the world is built on kindness.</i> (Tehillim 89:3)
יצחק Yitzchak	והתברכו בזרעך כל גויי הארץ <i>And I bless the nations of the world through your progeny.</i> (Bereishit 22:18)	גבורה Restraint	לך זרוע עם גבורה תעז ידך תרום ימינך <i>Yours is the arm with power, Your hand is strengthened, Your right arm is raised.</i> (Tehillim 89:14)
יעקב Yaakov	יעבדוך עמים וישתחו לך לאומים <i>Nations will serve you and states will bow to you.</i> (Bereishit 27:29)	תפארת Harmony	תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם <i>Give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham.</i> (Micha 7:20)
משה Moshe	יצב גבולות עמים למספר בני ישראל <i>He set the borders of the nations according to the numbers of the Jewish people.</i> (Devarim 32:8)	נצה Dominance	נעימות בימינך נצה <i>The pleasures are in Your right hand for eternity.</i> (Tehillim 16:11)
אהרן Aharon	כשמן הטוב על הראש יורד על הזקן זקן אהרן ... כי שם צוה ה' את הברכה חיים עד העולם <i>Like the good oil on the head that runs down the beard, the beard of Aaron ... for there, God has commanded blessing and life forever.</i> (Tehillim 133:2-3)	הוד Submission or Empathy	ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הודך על השמים <i>God, our master, How mighty is Your name in all of the land, Who places Your glory on the heavens.</i> (Tehillim 8:2)
יוסף Yosef	ויוסף הוא השליט על הארץ הוא המשביר לכל עם הארץ <i>And Joseph is the ruler of the land, he is the provider for all people of the land.</i> (Bereishit 42:5)	יסוד Continuity or Foundation	צדיק ה' בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו <i>God is righteous in all of His ways and pious in all of His actions.</i> (Tehillim 145:17)
דוד David	אף אני בכור אתנהו עליון למלכי ארץ <i>I will make him the firstborn, the supreme leader of the kings of the world.</i> (Tehillim 89:28)	מלכות Kingship	לך יהוה הגדלה והגבורה והתפארת, והנצח וההוד, פי-כל, בשמים ובארץ: לך ה' הממלכה, והמתנשא לכל לראש <i>Yours, God, is the greatness, the power, the harmony, the dominance and the glory for everything is in the heavens and the earth. Your, God, is the kingship and You are exalted as head above all.</i> (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11)

Our Ushpizin

Perhaps now we can understand the concept of *ushpizin*. On Sukkot, we leave the comfort of the homes we have built for ourselves in the physical world and focus on living our spiritual lives with greater focus, having just completed the realignment process of the Yamim Noraim. During this time, we live in the shade of Hashem, taking in the rays of spiritual light. According to Rabbi Eliezer (*Sukkah* 11b) our sukkah reminds us of the clouds of glory, with which Hashem enveloped us during our sojourn in the desert. According to tradition, there were seven clouds surrounding us completely on all sides, above and below, with the seventh paving the way ahead of the camp. The seven clouds reflected the seven energies into the desert camp and continue to do so as we sit in the sukkah.

Each day, we enjoy all seven aspects of this light, personified by the seven spiritual guests in our sukkah. Yet each day of Sukkot is unique and has one guest that receives special attention, because each day of Sukkot has its own unique character and sanctity. This idea is expressed in the Talmud which explains why we recite a full Hallel each of the seven days, while on Pesach, we only recite full Hallel on the first of the seven days (outside Israel we recite it on the first two days):

Why do we recite [full] Hallel on each day of Sukkot, and on Pesach, we don't recite it each day? On Sukkot there is a unique sacrifice each day and on Pesach, the same sacrifice is offered each day.

Arachin 11a-11b

מאי שנא בהג דאמר' כל יומא, ומאי שנא בפסח דלא אמרינן כל יומא? דהג חלוקין בקרבנותיהן, דפסח אין חלוקין בקרבנותיהן.
ערכין יא.-יא:

The fact of a distinct number of *korbanot* on each day is a manifestation of the individuality of each day, a uniqueness that requires its own recitation of full Hallel and its own guest in our sukkah.

Today, practices vary regarding the tradition of *ushpizin*. Some designate a special chair, as mentioned in the Chida above. Others light special candles in the guests' honor, a practice recorded in the commentary of the *Shaarei Teshuva* to *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 625). Most who observe this tradition are careful to invite the *ushpizin* with a declaration; one such text is found in the *Siddur Beit Yaakov* of Rabbi Yaakov Emden (page 453):

Enter, exalted and holy guests, enter exalted and holy fathers and sit in the shade of the exalted Faithful One. Enter Abraham the compassionate and with him, Isaac who was bound on the altar and with him, Jacob, the complete one, and with him, Moses the faithful shepherd and with him, Aaron the holy priest, and with him, Joseph the righteous one and with him David the king and messiah. You shall dwell in Sukkot, dwell exalted guests, dwell, dwell, my faithful guests, dwell.

עולו אושפיזין עלאין קדישין עולו אבהן עלאין קדישין למיתב בצלא דמהימנותא עלאה. לעול אברהם רחימא ועמיה יצחק עקידתא ועמיה יעקב שלמתא ועמיה משה רעיא מהימנא ועמיה אהרן כהנא קדישא ועמיה יוסף צדיקא ועמיה דוד מלכא משיחא. בסוכות תשבו תיבו אושפיזין עלאין תיבו תיבו אושפיזין מהימנותא תיבו.

Whatever one's specific practice regarding the tradition of *ushpizin*, the concept is profound and relevant. Whether one contemplates the specific middah of a specific spiritual guest on a given day, or studies the relationship between this guest and the holiday of Sukkot in general, *ushpizin* can help connect us with a more meaningful experience of the mitzvah of Sukkah specifically, and our relationship with Hashem in general.

Sukkat Shalom: Paradigms for Peace

Mrs. Chaya Batya Neugroschl

Head of School, Yeshiva University High School for Girls

With the escalation of dangerous events in Eretz Yisrael during this past summer, we've all felt the yearning for peace with increased intensity. While peace in the world remains a universal hope, when Klal Yisrael is endangered, we are more contemplative about the absolute need for peace and the cost of its absence. Our frequent recitation of the tefillah "Oseh Shalom, He Who makes peace" at the end of our daily Shemoneh Esrei is a place of comfort where, in prayer or song, we beseech Hashem to do what we seemingly can't manage to do on our own:

He Who makes peace from His high places, He should make peace for us and for all of Israel, and let us say Amen.

עשה שלום במרומי. הוא יעשה שלום
עלינו ועל כל ישראל. ואמרו אמן:

In this context the peace we seek is the product of heavenly intervention. This is expressed by the opening words of the paragraph *Sim Shalom*, which describe peace as a gift bestowed upon a deserving or needy people. Certainly this type of peace has its place, in its ultimate sense, but universal peace is beyond the scope of our individual efforts. This image leaves us without specific direction.

The uptick in communal prayer this past summer combined with the creative efforts to increase *chesed* (kindness) and expressions of unity allow us to enter the month of Tishrei with a new perspective on the need for peace. How do we lead lives that increase the chances for peace in the world? What paradigms for peace can we find and use for guidance in this season of renewed hope and prayer?

Peace is not a new theme—it is a universal dream, and indeed it is a part of our daily prayers. Not only is it the concluding blessing of each Shemoneh Esrei in the form of *Sim Shalom*, but there is a unique formulation that relates specifically to Sukkot as well. Each night, as we reflect on the completion of a day and recognize the symbolic and realistic dangers of night, we seek the protection and assurances of Hashem in the Maariv prayer. The fourth berakha before the Amidah begins with Hashkiveinu—Lay us down to peace (ful rest), and introduces this image of the sukkah as a protective shelter of peace:

Help us lie down, O Lord our God, in peace, and rise up, O our King, to life. Spread over us Your canopy of peace. Direct us with Your good counsel, and save us for the sake of Your name ... Guard our going out and our coming in, for life

השכיבנו ה' אלקינו לשלום, והעמידנו
מלפני לחיים.
ופרוש עלינו סכת שלומך. ותקננו בעצה
טובה מלפניך... ושמור צאתנו ובוואנו

and peace, from now on and for ever. Blessed are You, Lord, who guards his people Israel for ever.¹⁷

לְחַיִּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' שׁוֹמֵר עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַד

As we prepare for the festival of Sukkot, this phrase—from our nightly Maariv prayer—resounds with hope and expectation. In the context of our nightly prayer, the metaphor conveys an image of a heavenly peace that is benevolently confirmed as a protective shield upon the hopeful People of Israel. As we look toward the positive potential for a future day we hope that Hashem's guidance is there, as well as His protection, in the form of a *sukkat shalom*.

How do the sukkat that we build on the festival connect with this sense of security, peace and protection? Furthermore, we see this phrase *ufros aleinu sukkat shelomekha*—slightly altered as we examine the same Maariv prayer that welcomes in Shabbat. Here we read:

Spread over us Your canopy of peace. Blessed are You, Lord who spreads the canopy of peace on us and on all of the nation of Israel and on Jerusalem.

וּפְרוֹשׁ עֲלֵינוּ סוּכַת שְׁלוֹמְךָ ... בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה
ה' הַפּוֹרֵשׁ סוּכַת שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל עַמּוֹ
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

The mainstay of this tefillah is essentially the same, and is presumably also about invoking Hashem's protection as night begins to fall and as our week draws to a close. We see in this formulation a redoubled emphasis on peace that is highlighted by the concluding blessing. In this way we find that the same prayer for a personal peace, and a personal security, that we wish for every one of our kin has been transformed, elevated and expanded. On Shabbat, we reconsider our nightly focus during the week and consider the need to secure our own needs and our own safety as insufficient. On Shabbat, we ask for more. We ask for a type of peace that includes the destiny of our people, our national sovereignty. On Shabbat, the prayer for peace is presented as part of the national dream. The cornerstone of this prayer becomes more about peace than about security, and is expanded to include a prayer for more than just a personal form of protection; rather, it adds a national and political aim for peace and sovereignty for all of Israel and Jerusalem. Thus, the closing blessing that usually summarizes the key feature of a prayer concludes with the addition of peace for all of Israel and Jerusalem.

Why does our Shabbat tefilla make this, ever so slight and yet clearly significant, shift in this way?

Prayer for a Communal Experience of Peace

Shabbat as a model for communal peace is well-rooted in our tradition. Many customs of Shabbat emphasize the effort to create unity and build up our community. As we refrain from commerce, we are able to move away from the competitive nature of weekly business and avoid its inherent interpersonal strife. In recognizing Hashem's mastery over creation, we remove ourselves from being active agents in the creative process and are “at peace” with the natural order that God has granted us. In spending our day focused on both basic physical and spiritual matters, we bring together the needs of both our body and soul, which for many hours of our busy week may be neglected, at best, or actively competing with one another. Lighting Shabbat candles is one custom that helps to bring peace to one's home. Having formal meals suffused

¹⁷ Translation from Koren Siddur.

with prayer and song even elevates the mundane physical needs and embraces a Shabbat quality in our homes and throughout our communities.

This emphasis is reflected in the reoriented *Haskiveinu* prayer and in the three main stanzas of *Shalom Aleikhem* as we welcome Shabbat into our homes and set the context for peace, in singing:

Peace onto you ... Come in peace, angels of peace, angels of high ... Bless me for peace, angels of peace, angels of high ... Leave in peace, angels of peace, angels of high.

שלום עליכם...בואכם לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי
עליון...ברכוני לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי עליון...
צאתכם לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי עליון...

On Shabbat, the day of rest, we find that our prayers, customs and songs reflect this broader contemplation of our place in this world. On this day we remind ourselves of our ability to make a difference by increasing the peacefulness in our homes and in our communities; we thereby embrace our dream for a universal peace and recognize that we can model that peaceful engagement with nature, with those closest to us, and with those who are “others” too.

Why then does the refrain *ufros aleinu sukkat shelomekha* appear in the Maariv prayer of each weeknight and then retain its prominence on Friday night? In what way does the sukkah reflect a peaceful paradigm that inspires these prayers?

The notion that a sukkah is a metaphor for peaceful protection deserves some critical attention. Rav Avraham Kook reflects on the unusual metaphor and suggests that indeed the hope for peace might be better served by a metaphor for a fortress of peace. In his commentary on the verse “You protect them in a sukkah from the strife of tongues” (Ps. 31:21), Rav Kook highlights the special features of a sukkah as a flimsy and temporary structure.¹⁸ The notion of a *sukkat shalom* raises very reasonable questions: In what way does the sukkah, a temporary and often flimsy dwelling, reflect our hopes for an enduring and permanent peace? How do we understand the paradigms of peace that this holiday offers? What type of peace are we invoking in this formulation?

Rav Kook explains:

Jewish law validates a sukkah even when it has gaping holes, when it is built from little more than two walls, or has large spaces between the walls and the roof. Even such a fragile structure still qualifies as a kosher sukkah. The same is true regarding peace. Peace is so precious, so vital, that even if we are unable to attain complete peace, we should still pursue a partial measure of peace. Even an imperfect peace between neighbors, or between an individual and the community, is worthwhile. "How great is peace!" proclaimed the Sages (VaYikra Rabbah 9:9). The value of peace is so great that we pray for it even if it will be like a sukkah—flimsy and temporary, rendered fit only by special laws.

מצינו בסוכה שנשנו בה הלכות מיוחדות שהן מכשירות אותה, לא רק כשאיננה בשלמותה, אלא גם כשחסרים בה חלקים גדולים- "שתיים (מחיצות) כהלכתן ושלישית אפילו טפח," "דופן עקומה עד ארבע אמות" לבוד, גוד אחית וכו' והוא הדין- מידת השלום, השלום הוא כל כך יקר, וכל כך חיוני, שגם הוא לא ניתן להשיגו בשלמותו, ראוי להשתדל להשיגו גם בצורה חלקית, גם בצורה מקוטעת, ובלבד שיהיה שלום בין איש לרעהו, ובין יחיד לצבור וכו'." "גדול השלום," ואנו מבקשים ומתפללים על השלום, גם אם יהיה רק בבחינת סוכה, שרק

¹⁸ Adapted from *Ma'amarei HaRa'ayah* vol. I, pp. 149-150.

The very vulnerability of the sukkot that we build demonstrates our faith in man and in Hashem that peace is more valuable than assurances, and that in valuing even partial peace we become deserving of Hashem's blessing for a fuller peace.

Alternatively, I would like to suggest that the sukkah is an apt paradigm of the type of peace that reflects not a minimalist peace but rather a maximal approach. The sukkah can be seen as the apex of our aspirations for peace. On Sukkot we connect our personal hopes present in the nightly *Haskiveinu* with our communal aspirations and experiences of the Shabbat *Haskiveinu*. On an individual level, we show our personal security by placing ourselves in the sukkah, a semi-vulnerable place. On a communal level, Sukkot unites all Jews in the peace of Yerushalayim for the festival celebrations. While the description of the requirement to sit in sukkot seems to include only current members of Bnei Yisrael, there is a reference to the implication for the future saliency of the Jewish people's mission.

You shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths so that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Vayikra 23:42-43²⁰

בַּסֹּפֶת תֵּשְׁבוּ, שְׁבַע יָמִים; כָּל-הָאֶזְרָח,
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, יֵשְׁבוּ, בַּסֹּפֶת. לַמַּעַן, יֵדְעוּ
דֹרֹתֵיכֶם, כִּי בַסֹּפֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
אֲנִי, ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
ויקרא כג:מב-מג

Additionally, Sukkot's unifying force is also reflected in the Hakhel ceremony, which describes a national experience of great significance:

When all of Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and your stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.

Devarim 31:11-12²¹

בָּבוֹא כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְרֹאֹת אֶת-פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ,
בַּמָּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר: תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת,
נֶגֶד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם. הִקְהֵל אֶת-הָעָם,
הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂימ וְהַטַּף, וְגֵרְךָ, אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ--
לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלַמַּעַן יִלְמְדוּ, וְיִרְאוּ אֶת-ה'
אֱלֹהֶיכֶם, וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה
הַזֹּאת.
דברים לא:יא-יב

Furthermore, Sukkot also highlights our national destiny to bring about universal peace. The *korbanot* of Sukkot unite the 70 nations of the world in the recognition of the glory of Hashem's benevolence in this world. In describing the effects of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the Gemara describes the loss of the Beit HaMikdash as a loss to the Nations of the world as well; *Rabbi Elazar said: The 70 bulls—to what do they correspond? They correspond to the 70 nations ... Rabbi Yochanan said: Woe to the heathens who have lost out, but*

א"ר (אליעזר) הני שבעים פרים כנגד מי
כנגד שבעים אומות ... א"ר יוחנן אוי
להם לעובדי כוכבים שאבדו ואין יודעין

¹⁹ <http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SUKKOT62.htm>.

²⁰ Adapted from JPS translation.

²¹ Adapted from JPS translation.

know not what they have lost. During the time of the Temple, the altar atoned for them, but now what atones for them?

Sukkah 55b

מה שאבדו בזמן שבהמ"ק קיים מזבח
מכפר עליהן ועכשיו מי מכפר עליהן.
סוכה נה:

Furthermore, Zecharia describes a time when peace among all nations is exemplified by their participation in the festival of Sukkot:

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.

Zecharia 14:16

וְהָיָה, כָּל-הַגּוֹתֵר מִכָּל-הַגּוֹיִם, הַבָּאִים,
עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם; וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה,
לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַמֶּלֶךְ ה' צָב-אוֹת, וְלַחֹג, אֶת-
חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת.
זכריה יד:טז

Without the Sukkot offerings that united the fate of the 70 nations with the destiny of the Jewish People, we are a fractured world. The ultimate “sukkah of peace” has the promise of a universal peace embedded within it.

Thus the sukkot we build today are symbolic of both the booths that the Jews of the desert lived in and the clouds of Divine Glory and Providence that guided them through their travails.²² As a nation in the desert, the need for shelter and protection was defensive and reflected our vulnerability. On the festival of Sukkot, we reflect on our bounty and remind ourselves of the source of all this blessing by leaving the “real” shelters and “real” luxuries and instead becoming vulnerable to nature, open to our community and inviting the other nations of the world to join our celebration of the ultimate form of peace—united in celebrating the bounty we have been granted in this majestic world of Hashem.

Therefore, it is specifically with these shelters, in our sukkot, that we publically demonstrate a measure of our meager efforts to construct a representation of what it means to be a people with a grand destination and to confront the many many obstacles we face along the way. Our sukkot by design must be something between permanent and temporary, must be durable but without assurances, must be able to offer shelter and still open to the elements. In this way, our sukkot reflect our practical initiatives and our theological commitments while they recognize our dependence on Hashem and interdependence on each other. In this way, when we invoke the notion of *ufros aleinu sukkat shelomekha*, the peace of Sukkot, we beseech Hashem to grant us a peace that connects to each of these elements: the personal, the communal and the universal, all of which are present on the festival of Sukkot. This offers up the promise of a world in which each of us experiences the fulfillment of peace in its fullest sense.

²² TB: *Sukkah* 11b.

The Sukkah of Redemption

Rabbi Yona Reiss

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS • Av Beth Din, Chicago Rabbinical Council

In the Grace after Meals (*Birkhat Hamazon*) recited during the holiday of Sukkot, there is a special prayer inserted—הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת—beseeching G-d for the restoration of “the fallen sukkah of Dovid.” The reference is to a verse in the prophetic book of Amos (9:11) that states, in connection with the redemption of the Jewish people, “ביום ההוא אקים את סכת דויד הנופלת”—at that time, I shall erect the fallen sukkah of David.” Many of the classical commentators, such as Rashi and the Radak, explain that this is a reference to the re-establishment of the Davidic monarchy. But what does that have to do with the holiday of Sukkot, in which we sit in huts to commemorate the clouds of glory that protected us in the desert after we departed from Egypt?

In the recent treatise *Inyano Shel Yom* by Rabbi Dovid Falk (*Moadim*, page 27), the author writes that he posed this question to the great sage Rabbi Chaim Kaniefsky of B’nei Brak. Rabbi Kaniefsky responded in characteristically succinct fashion that since the word sukkah appears in this recitation, it is therefore an appropriate prayer for the holiday of Sukkot.

While this response may indeed explain the origin of the insertion of this prayer on Sukkot, there is a well-known principle that “*minhag yisroel Torah hi*” (see Tosafot, *Menachot* 20b, s.v. “*nifsal*”)—established customs become part of the corpus of Torah. The special insertion for Sukkot in the Grace after Meals has been an established custom for hundreds of years (as demonstrated by R. Tzvi Ron, *Hamayan*, Tishrei 5773). Accordingly, a number of commentators have probed other Torah sources in order to suggest a deeper connection.

The Maharal, in the book *Netzach Yisroel* (chapter 35), offers two explanations of the connection between the sukkah and the Kingdom of David. First, he observes that a sukkah needs to be a temporary dwelling, impervious to the physical permanence of this world. In this sense, the sukkah parallels the Kingdom of David, which is linked to Divine providence and to the supernatural destiny of the World-to-Come, as opposed to having its permanent place in this world. Upon fulfilling the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah and being freed from the shackles of the mundane world of our physical houses, we can aspire for the time when the Messiah will emerge from the Davidic dynasty and elevate us to spiritual majesty. Along these lines, the Talmud actually describes the Messiah as “*bar nafli*” (the fallen one) and explicitly links the Messiah in this regard to the “fallen sukkah of David” (*Sanhedrin* 96b).

What emerges from this insight of the Maharal is a counter-intuitive message pertaining to the Sukkot holiday. Only in impermanence can there be an appreciation for genuine permanence. All too often in the hullabaloo of daily life we can lose sight of the teaching in *Pirkei Avot* (4:16) that “this world is akin to an antechamber before the World to Come.” The sukkah reminds us that what appears permanent in this world is truly fleeting, and that which has no permanence in this world, namely the spiritual structures that are primarily intended for the World to Come, are the only matters that have eternal significance. In the same way that the sukkah serves as a reminder of the antechamber nature of this world, so too the “sukkah of David,” representing the eternal Kingdom of the House of David, awaits its ultimate realization in the future world of salvation and deliverance.

In his second explanation, the Maharal explains the comparison in a different manner. The distinguishing feature about the sukkah is that even when it falls down, it is easy to reassemble precisely because it is built in a slipshod fashion. Thus it never loses its identity, but remains the same sukkah, waiting to be propped up again. In this sense, a fallen sukkah is somewhat reminiscent of the old-time commercial jingle “weebles wobble but they don’t fall down.” So too, argues the Maharal, the Kingdom of David, even when it is in the current state of being “the fallen sukkah of David,” retains its identity as the “sukkah of David” and remains poised to be resurrected at any moment. Furthermore, just as a fallen sukkah still contains usable *schach* (sukkah covering materials) that can be re-employed, so too the Kingdom of David has continued to keep its “pieces” through significant communal leaders in every generation who descend from the tribe of Judah.

According to this explanation of the Maharal, the sukkah is the symbol of Jewish resilience. By virtue of its simplicity, the sukkah represents the elasticity of our survival. Even when the sukkah falls down, it maintains its components and its character. Thus, the sukkah serves as a reminder that no matter how many times the Jewish people have been exiled and persecuted, the essential components of our legacy and our people have survived, and our sovereignty can therefore be easily and naturally restored at any moment. In this sense, the recent events of the restoral of the Jewish nation to the land of Israel validate and reinforce this optimistic national perspective. Even when there are continuing setbacks in our path to redemption, we remind ourselves through the message of the sukkah that salvation is always within our grasp.

Interestingly, the Mahari Kara offers a different explanation of the meaning of “the fallen sukkah of David” in his commentary to Amos. According to the Mahari Kara, the sukkah is a reference to the Beit Hamikdash, to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed. Accordingly, our prayer denotes a yearning toward the restoration of the Holy Temple. Is there a clear connection between the sukkah and the Holy Temple?

Perhaps the connection can be gleaned from a passage in the Talmudic tractate of *Sukkah* (11b) indicating that the clouds of glory originated at the time of the creation of the world, when a “mist arose from the earth” (Bereishit 2:6; Targum Yonatan *ad locum*) forming the clouds above that “watered the whole face of the ground.” Inherent in creation itself were these clouds, established from the purity of the earth, thus providing the Talmudic basis for the law that the sukkah covering must similarly be made from items from the earth that cannot contract

impurity. It would seem, based on this passage that the sukkah, which commemorates the clouds of glory, symbolizes the pristine state of pure reliance upon the Almighty that existed at the time of creation.

The Talmud states that the Heavens rejoiced on the day of the building of the Tabernacle as if the world was created on that day (*Megillah* 10b). The Holy Temple, which represents a fulfillment of the mitzvah to build a tabernacle in the Land of Israel (see Rambam, *Mitzot Aseh* 20, *Hilkhot Beit HaBechira* 1:1, and *Kesef Mishneh ad locum*), serves as a manifestation of the return to a state of spiritual perfection that existed at the time of creation. The sukkah, through its evocation of the original clouds of glory that hovered over the world during that time, provides the same opportunity to connect to that state of spiritual perfection as the Holy Temple itself. Hence the association of the sukkah with the “sukkah of David” representing the Holy Temple becomes perfectly understandable.

This association of the sukkah with the Holy Temple also helps to explain why the sukkah structure is endowed with Divine sanctity (*Sukkah* 9a), and why the mitzvah of “living” in the sukkah precludes any kind of activity that is not respectful or dignified (*Orach Chaim* 639:1), similar to the requirement of maintaining dignity in the area of the Holy Temple (see, e.g., *Yevamot* 6b). Through the observance of the mitzvah of sukkah which enables us to relive the pure, unadulterated state of devotion to G-d at the time of the creation of the world, we are able to focus our aspirations upon the rebuilding of the “sukkah of David”—the Holy Temple—which represents the spiritual pinnacle of creation.

In similar fashion, Rabbi Meir Zvi Bergman writes (*Sha'arei Orah* 1:318-319) that the comparison of the sukkah to the Holy Temple is a reference to the spiritual essence of the Holy Temple. The proof is that the Temple is described as the “sukkah of David” when in fact the Temple was built by his son King Solomon. The reason the Temple is attributed to King David rather than to his son is because, as indicated in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 30a), the gates of the holiest chambers of the Temple only opened up for Solomon in the merit of his father, who conceived the idea of building the Temple during his lifetime. King David thus represents the spiritual essence of the Temple, as opposed to King Solomon who represents its physical manifestation. When we pray for the restoration of the sukkah of David, we demonstrate our yearning for the spiritual closeness with the Almighty that is achieved through the essence of the Holy Temple.

The connection with the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple also helps to explain the timing of the celebration of Sukkot. The Vilna Gaon (commentary to Shir Hashirim 1:4)- in response to the question posed by the *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 625) regarding why Sukkot is celebrated in Tishrei as opposed to Nissan when the exodus from Egypt took place and the clouds of glory began to protect the Jewish people- explains that the holiday of Sukkot was timed to coincide with the date of the beginning of the construction of the Tabernacle. Moses delivered the second set of Tablets to the Jewish people on the 10th of Tishrei and taught them the laws of the Tabernacle on the 11th of Tishrei (Rashi, *Shmot* 35:1). Afterwards, the Jewish people gathered materials for construction on the 12th and 13th of Tishrei (based on *Shmot* 36:3 that the donation period consisted of two days), and Moses then dispensed the materials on the 14th of Tishrei to the

artisans who would engage in the construction. Thus, the actual construction of the Tabernacle commenced on the 15th of Tishrei, which is the first day of Sukkot. Similarly, the Bible recounts that the dedication of the Holy Temple by King Solomon took place immediately prior to the time of the Sukkot holiday (Melachim 1, 8:2, 65-66).

There is also another possible connection between the sukkah and the Holy Temple. The Talmud (*Sukkah* 27b) states:

[The verse states] “All the residents of the Israelites will sit in the sukkah” (*Vayikra* 23:42); this teaches us that all of the Jewish people are eligible to sit in the same sukkah.

כל האזרה בישראל ישבו בסוכת – מלמד שכל ישראל ראויים לישב בסוכה אחת.

The *Sefat Emet* (*Sukkot*) explains that this is meant to refer to the unity of the Jewish people that exists after Yom Kippur when the entire nation becomes an “*agudah achat*,” a united assembly. The Second Holy Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b). In order to restore the Holy Temple, it is necessary for the Jewish nation to rectify this sin and join together in unconditional love for each other. The concept of sukkah is intertwined with the notion of everybody being able to join together in one sukkah, much in the same way that the Holy Temple is the central place of worship for the entire nation. In order to merit the rebuilding of the Temple, it is necessary to create an atmosphere where the entire Jewish people will feel comfortable sharing one sukkah in a spirit of mutual respect and affection.

With this understanding we can appreciate why Sukkot is the holiday of the “*ushpizin*”—of the inviting of the honored guests (*Zohar, Emor* 103-104). The purpose of the sukkah is to create a spiritual haven that is open and welcoming to all members of the Jewish nation in a demonstration of unified spirit. This may also explain why the classical sukkah of the Torah only has three walls (*Sukkah* 2a, 6b)—in order to ensure that one side always be open to an endless stream of guests.

Perhaps in this sense, all of the various explanations regarding the sukkah of David coalesce. Through the *ushpizin*, in which we usher in the forefathers from the time of creation through the building of the Holy Temple, beginning chronologically with Abraham and ending with King David (and according to some traditions, ending with King Solomon), we connect the sukkah not only to the entirety of the Jewish people in our time, but to the entirety of the Jewish people throughout history. The rebuilding each year of the sukkah, which evokes the clouds of glory of creation, and the Holy Temple as the spiritual pinnacle of creation, propels the Jewish nation to become united and worthy of the future redemption that will usher in the Kingdom of David for eternity. Furthermore, as the Maharal indicates, we are blessed with the ability to bring about this ultimate sukkah of redemption in a heartbeat. All we need to do is come together, click our heels, and acknowledge that there is “no place like the sukkah” to cast aside the artificial walls of this temporal and tempestuous world and to unite as a people of eternal destiny.

Sukkot in the First Temple Period

Rabbi Ian Shaffer

Adjunct Professor of Bible, Stern College for Women

This article is dedicated in memory of my father, Mr. Max Shaffer zal - Mordechai ben Nechemiah, who passed away on 11 Iyar 5774 in London. Thanks also to my son, Rabbi Yechiel Shaffer who edited and offered thoughts on this essay.

The obligations of Sukkot are prominently presented in *Parashat Emor* (Vayikra ch. 23), and are publicly read as part of our Sukkot *laining*.

39 Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of the LORD seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. 40 And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. 41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year; it is a statute forever in your generations; ye shall keep it in the seventh month. 42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths; 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

לֹט אֶף בְּחַמְשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
הַשְּׁבִיעִי, בְּאַסְפְּכֶם אֶת-תְּבוּאֹת הָאָרֶץ,
תַּחֲגוּ אֶת-חַג-ה', שְׁבַעַת יָמִים; בְּיוֹם
הָרֵאשׁוֹן שְׁבַתוֹן, וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי שְׁבַתוֹן.
מִוּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרֵאשׁוֹן, פְּרֵי עֵץ
הַדֶּר פֶּתַת תְּמָרִים, וְעֵנָף עֵץ-עֵבֶת,
וְעֵרְבֵי-נָחַל; וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱ-
לֹהֵיכֶם--שְׁבַעַת יָמִים. מֵא וְחַגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חַג
לַיהוָה, שְׁבַעַת יָמִים בְּשָׁנָה: חֻקַּת עוֹלָם
לְדוֹרֹתֵיכֶם, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי תַחֲגוּ אֹתוֹ. מִב
בְּסֹכֶת תֵּשְׁבוּ, שְׁבַעַת יָמִים; כָּל-הָאֲזֻרָה,
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, יֵשְׁבוּ, בְּסֹכֶת. מִג לְמַעַן, יִדְעוּ
דוֹרֹתֵיכֶם, כִּי בְסֹכֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
אֲנִי, ה' אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם

As is well established, once the mitzvot were transmitted to Moshe at Sinai, they were to be maintained in their entirety, for all time. This is explicitly conveyed in the *Torah Shebichtav* (written Torah) and expounded within the *Torah She'Bal peh* (oral tradition). [For a thorough exposition of this idea, see Rambam's *Introduction to the Mishnah*].

An unusual source that bolsters our commitment to the eternity of mitzva observance is found in *Sefer Melachim* 1 ch. 8. The inaugural celebrations of the opening of the First Bet Hamikdash are recorded in this chapter, and they seem to override the communal mitzva to observe Yom Kippur. The commentaries are troubled that the observance of Yom Kippur can be overridden in this instance (see Redak ad. loc. for an explanation), thus showing that even during the unique historical moment of inaugurating the First Bet Hamikdash, an explanation is required for the changing of mitzva observance. In context of this and many other sources, it is fair to conclude

that the Biblical mitzvot are eternal in their nature and thus were always being observed from the days of Moshe onwards.

This axiom of belief is challenged by the following verses found in the Book of Nechemiah (ch.8 v.17-18):

17 And all the congregation of them that were come back out of the captivity made booths, and dwelt in the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. 18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the ordinance.

יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל-הַקְהָל הַשְּׂבִיִּים מִן-הַשְּׂבִי
סֻכּוֹת, וַיָּשְׁבוּ בְסֻכּוֹת--כִּי לֹא-עָשׂוּ מִיָּמֵי
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן כֵּן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַד הַיּוֹם
הַהוּא; וַתְּהִי שִׂמְחָה, גְּדוֹלָה מְאֹד. יח וַיִּקְרָא
בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים, יוֹם בְּיוֹם--מִן-הַיּוֹם
הָרִאשׁוֹן, עַד הַיּוֹם הָאַחֲרֹן; וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-הֵם
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֻרַת
כַּמְשָׁפֶט.

In describing the renewal of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael at the beginning of the Second Bet HaMikdash period, Nechemiah seems to indicate that Sukkot observance was renewed because it had not been observed "from the days of Yehoshua until now." Does this mean that the festival of Sukkot was not celebrated during the whole of the First Bet Hamikdash time period? Did David Hamelech not sit in a sukka? How do we understand this difficult statement of Nechemiah?

There are many approaches in explaining the pesukim in Sefer Nechemiah, and we will examine a number of them, from ancient to modern sources.

A. Talmud Bavli: Erchin 32b

"What is the rationale to say that the 'first sanctity' of the land was only for its time and not for the future? It says in the book of Nechemiah: 'And all the congregation of them that were come back out of the captivity made booths, and dwelt in the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.' Is it possible that (as this verse implies) David Hamelech did not celebrate Sukkot and it was only kept properly now at the return of the Jews to Eretz Yisrael (with Ezra)? The verse is actually to be understood as follows: The verse is comparing the return of the Jews in the time of Ezra to the arrival in the times of Yehoshua: Just as in the time of Yehoshua they established certain mitzvot which are dependent on the land (e.g. shemittah) so too in the times of Ezra were these laws reestablished in Eretz Yisrael."

מאי טעמא דמ"ד קדושה ראשונה
קידשה לשעתה ולא קידשה
לעתיד לבא דכתיב (נחמיה ח)
ויעשו בני הגולה השבים מן
השבי סוכות וישבו בסוכות כי
לא עשו מימי יהושע בן נון כן
בני ישראל וגו' ותהי שמחה
גדולה מאד אפשר בא דוד ולא
עשו סוכות עד שבא עזרא אלא
מקיש ביאתם בימי עזרא
לביאתם בימי יהושע מה ביאתם
בימי יהושע מנו שמיטין ויובלות
וקדשו ערי חומה אף ביאתן בימי
עזרא מנו שמיטין ויובלות וקדשו
ערי חומה.

The Talmud is clearly dividing the verse in Sefer Nechemiah into two distinct parts.

- 1) "All the congregation that came back out of captivity made sukkot and dwelt in them" (referring to the festival of Sukkot, which was now renewed after the exile and which had been practiced in Israel during the First Bet Hamikdash period prior to the *Churban Habayit* in 586 BCE).

- 2) ... "For since the days of Yehoshua . . . the children of Israel had not done so" (referring to the renewal of the *mitzvot ha'teluyot ba'aretz* (agricultural mitzvot such as *shemittah* etc.), which had not been celebrated with such joy during the whole of the First Bet Hamikdash period.

The Talmud creates a division in the verse that is not evidently there. This methodology is commonly utilized in Talmudic exegesis to explain difficult juxtapositions found in various verses. For our purposes this does not explain the verse in its entirety, especially within the terms of our question. We must seek other interpretations for a more complete explanation of our original problem in terms of the actual text itself.

B. Malbim (1809-1879) on Sefer Nechemiah (ch 8 v.14-17)

"This verse is very strange (as pointed out by the Talmud in Masechet Erchin). . . . I would suggest an explanation based on the halachic ruling of Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema) in Orach Chaim ch.637, that one should not construct a sukka in a public thoroughfare. Furthermore, Jerusalem was not divided up amongst the tribes and there was no status of a private thoroughfare anywhere in Jerusalem. Consequently a sukka could not be built in Jerusalem during the First Bet Hamikdash period. This changed when Ezra gathered in the exiles and a new condition was established that a sukka could be erected in a public domain (Tosefta Bava Kama ch.6). This now enabled sukkot to be built in Jerusalem. This allowance was only in Eretz Yisrael and not in the Diaspora where gentiles use the public domain (Magen Avraham on the Rema ad loc). This condition was not enacted by Yehoshua and was only put into place later by Ezra. Therefore, one can suggest that David Hamelech and Shlomo Hamelech did NOT have sukkot in Yerushalayim, and this is true to the literal meaning of the verse in Sefer Nechemiah. . . ."

זה דבר זר מאד שישראל לא עשו סכות מימי יהושע ועד עתה כמ"ש לקמן כי לא עשו מימי יהושע בן נון כן, וכמו שהתפלאו ע"ז בערכין (דף ל"ב). ונראה לפמ"ש הרמ"א בא"ח סי' תרל"ז שאין לעשות סוכה ברה"ר, א"כ כיון דקיי"ל שירושלים לא נתחלקה לשבטים, לא נמצא שם רה"י כמו דאין משכירים בתים בירושלים מפני שאינו שלהם, א"כ לא יכלו לעשות שם סוכה, ובאשר בימי עזרא קנו שנית את א"י בחזקה וקדשוה התנו הב"ד שיעשו סכות בירושלים ובשאר רה"ר, וכמ"ש בתוספתא (דב"ק פ"ו) שתנאי ב"ד שיהיו מסככים ברה"ר, ור"ל שזה התנו ב"ד של עזרא באותו זמן שאל"כ לא היו יכולים לעשות סכות בירושלים, ומבואר בפ"י שעשאוהו בחצרות בית האלהים וברחוב שער המים שהוא רה"ר, ממש, והתוספתא מדברת בא"י ששם היה תנאי ב"ד של עזרא בעת שקדשו את הארץ, אבל בחו"ל לא הותנה, בפרט במקום עכו"ם. וכמו שחקר בזה במג"א שם, והנה גם יהושע היה יכול לתקן תקנה זו בעת שקדש את הארץ בפעם הראשון שאז היה ביד ב"ד להנחיל את הארץ ע"מ כן שמקום הסוכה תהיה רה"י תמיד, ויהושע לא עשה כן ומימי עד עזרא לא עשו כן בני ישראל היינו לא ישבו בסוכה הנעשית ברה"ר, וכן בימי דוד ושלמה לא נעשו סכות בירושלים מטעם הנ"ל ...

This is a very novel approach and certainly disturbs our sensibilities regarding the observance of this mitzva by David Hamelech and others during the First Bet Hamikdash period. The Malbim does not offer an explanation as to why Yehoshua did not make the *takana*/enactment regarding the building of sukkot in public domains. One could argue that this would not have been a priority for Yehoshua, who was absorbed in fighting against the prevailing tribes in Canaan in order to subjugate them and drive them out of Eretz Yisrael.

Maybe we can also suggest that the image of the "*sukkat David Hanofalet*," the fallen sukka of David (Sefer Amos ch.9 v.11), which we mention in the *bentsching* on Sukkot, is to be taken

literally as “fallen.” According to the Malbim, David HaMelech never had the opportunity to erect a sukka in Yerushalayim and this mitzva was “fallen” at that time.

C. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (d.1935), as presented by Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who heard this explanation in a *drasha* given by Rav Kook in the late 1920's:

Rav Kook noted that we must understand the verses in Nechemiah in the context of the previous verses:

15 and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying: “Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and branches of wild olive, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.” 16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the broad place of the water gate, and in the broad place of the gate of Ephraim.

טו וְאָשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּ, וַיַּעֲבִירוּ קוֹל
בְּכָל-עָרֵיהֶם וּבִירוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר--צֵאוּ
הַהָר וְהָבִיאוּ עָלַי-זֵית וְעָלַי-עֵץ שִׁטָּה,
וְעָלַי הַדָּס וְעָלַי תְּמָרִים וְעָלַי עֵץ
עֵבֶת: לַעֲשׂוֹת סֹכוֹת, כַּכְּתוּב. טז וַיֵּצְאוּ
הָעָם, וַיָּבִיאוּ, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם סֹכוֹת
אִישׁ-עַל-גַּגּוֹ וּבְחִצְרוֹתֵיהֶם, וּבְחִצְרוֹת
בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים--וּבְרַחֲבוֹ שַׁעַר הַמַּיִם,
וּבְרַחֲבוֹ שַׁעַר אֶפְרַיִם.

Rav Kook, as quoted by Rav Goren, suggests the following:

This verse does not mean that Sukkot was not observed during the whole of the First Bet Hamikdash period, but it is referring to the preparation for the mitzva . . . such as chopping the wood or putting up the sukka and not just sitting in the sukka . . . and in the days of Ezra this element of preparation was restored to its proper place in terms of the performance of the mitzva. This is seen from verses in the book of Nechemiah which state: and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities . . . It is with reference to this concept of preparation that the verse continues by saying: “for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.”

אין הכוונה שעם ישראל לא קיים מצות סוכה מאז יהושע בן נון עד ימי עזרא ונחמיה, אלא שבמשך כל הדורות לא החשיבו את ההכנה של האדם לקיים מצוה, ולא ידעו את החשיבות שהועידה התורה גם להכנת המצוה כגון לכרות את עצי הסוכה ולהקימה, ולא רק לשבת בה בהג כפי שעשו זאת ברוב עם ובהדרת מלך בימי עזרא ונחמיה. ככתוב שם "ואשר ישמעו ויעבירו קול בכל עריהם . . ." ועל זה כתוב "כי לא עשו מימי ישוע בן נון . . ."

The joy described here is that of “*hachanat hamitzva*,” preparation for the mitzva, which had not been carried out in this way during the entire First Bet Hamikdash period. Rav Kook examines the context of the pesukim in Sefer Nechemiah and illustrates that the verses refer to a different focal point in the description of the mitzva. As we shall see, other modern commentaries take Rav Kook's approach and try to explain the verse in a similar way.

d) Rav Shlomo Goren (d.1993) *Sefer Moadei Yisrael* (republished in 1997)

The reason given in the Torah for Sukkot is:

43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

מג לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם, כִּי בַסֹּכוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי
אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: אֲנִי, ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

This implies that in future days there will be an exemption from this mitzva, as the verses state in Sefer Yirmiyahu (ch. 23:7-8):

7 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say: "As the LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt"; 8 but: "As the LORD liveth, that brought up and that led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them"; and they shall dwell in their own land. The exodus from Egypt will be superseded by the future exodus, and this will override the reason for observing Sukkot as a remembrance for the dwelling in sukkot, which we did when leaving Egypt.

ז לְכֹן הִנֵּה-יָמִים בָּאִים, נְאֻם-
ה'; וְלֹא-יֵאמְרוּ עוֹד חַי-ה',
אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. ח כִּי אִם-חַי-
ה', אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלָה וְאֲשֶׁר הֵבִיא
אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ
צִפּוֹנָה, וּמְכֹל הָאָרְצוֹת, אֲשֶׁר
הִדְחִיתִים שָׁם; וְיָשְׁבוּ, עַל-
אֲדָמָתָם.

However, we are then challenged by the prophecy of Zechariah (14:16), which states:

16 And it shall come to pass, that everyone 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.

טז וְהָיָה, כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם מְכַל-הַגּוֹיִם, הַבָּאִים,
עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַיִם; וְעָלוּ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה,
לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַמֶּלֶךְ ה' צְבָאוֹת, וְלַחֹג, אֶת-חַג
הַסֻּכּוֹת.

This is referring to messianic days when the festival of Sukkot will be celebrated by all nations in Yerushalayim. Zechariah is not referring to the original festival of Sukkot but to a future international celebration of this festival.

When Ezra returned with the exiled Jews to Israel, this was meant to be a "messianic" time, as explained in Talmud Bavli (*Berachot*: 4a); but their "sin" caused this not to happen.

In Sefer Nechemiah (9:1-2) this "sin" is explained further. The Jews had indulged in intermarriages to an alarming degree and this future prophecy of Yirmiyahu was not to be fulfilled with that generation, and the complete redemption, as prophesied by Yirmiyahu, was not going to happen. Therefore Sukkot reverted to its original designation as found in the Torah as explained above.

It is this failure to elevate the festival to a new spiritual dimension that Nechemiah is referring to in the enigmatic verse with which we began this analysis.

כי לא-עשו מימי יְשׁוּעַ בֶּן-נְוּן בֶּן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַד הַיּוֹם הַהוּא is referring to the dismal lack of response to the call to return to Israel at the time of Ezra (only 40,000 Jews returned with Ezra). This pasuk is not stating that the people did something positive in Ezra's days but, in fact, did not do then what they had done originally in the time of Yehoshua, to enter/return to Israel in such a way as to bring about a new existence for the Jewish people and the world. This reality is yet to come, and is what is referred to in this enigmatic verse. The question of the observance of Sukkot in the First Bet HaMikdash time is not the subject of this verse at all, and of course it was observed by David Hamelech during the First Bet Hamikdash period.

E. A final example of modern interpretation can be found in the writings of Rabbi Z.H. Ferber (d.1966) (*Sefer Hamaodim* pp. 116-117).

Rabbi Ferber was a Lithuanian *gaon* who came to England in 1910 and was the Rav in London's West End district for nearly 50 years. He suggested an array of interpretations, and one in particular offers tremendous insight.

There are two types of *simcha* in life: 1) Natural joy such as at the birth of a child, and 2) an obligatory joy, such as at the time of yom tov as expressed by the Torah, with a heightened emphasis on *simcha* at Sukkot time.

The joy on Sukkot in fact becomes challenging because there is also the “natural” joy of having secured the harvest and all the benefits this brings with it. In order to maintain the spiritual dimension of the *simcha* we leave our homes to enter temporary dwellings. This will ensure that we do not dwell on our material gains but on the deeper spiritual joy that this festival represents. In the days of Shlomo Hamelech the ability to rejoice was easier, as we were living in the land in complete peace and prosperity and our joy may not have been fully for the “sake of heaven” as it was supposed to be. However, when we entered Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua, the land was exposed to war and devastation and our rejoicing at Sukkot time was purely on a spiritual level, as the land was not yet producing the wonderful crops that it would do in later years.

When Ezra returned with the exiled Jews to Israel the land was again desolate, so therefore any joy at Sukkot time was purely spiritual. As this was a time of uncertainty and difficulty, especially in rebuilding the Bet Hamikdash, which was hampered for many years by negative voices from within and without, material *simcha* could not be achieved.

This is now the explanation of the pasuk in Sefer Nechemiah. Our celebration of Sukkot at the time of Ezra was so great (on such a spiritual level) that it had not been experienced on this level since the days of Yehoshua. We entered a desolate land and rejoiced in a pure form without any material motivation, during both the times of Yehoshua and Ezra.

Rabbi Ferber adds that: “Following the Holocaust, when so many nations turned their backs on the Jewish people and we found ourselves again in Eretz Yisrael in a situation of material difficulty, the observance of Sukkot as an act of pure joy should be a true merit for us so that we will arrive at the future observance of Sukkot as referred to by the prophet Zechariah. Our joy should be totally for the sake of heaven to bring about the final messianic redemption speedily in our days.”

In attempting to explain the enigmatic verse in Sefer Nechemiah, we have undergone an exegetical journey from the Talmud to the present day. The consensus of opinions is that the verse does not rule out actual dwelling in sukkot in the days of the First Bet Hamikdash (except for the approach of the Malbim), but see in the verse a longing for a higher level of mitzva observance and connection to God as initiated by Ezra.

In our days, when over seven million Jews now live in Israel, let us hope that the fullest expression of joy on Sukkot will take place to usher in the final redemption and the future celebration of Sukkot as seen in Sefer Zechariah (which we read in the haftara *on* Sukkot), and may we soon see the true realization of the “raising of the fallen sukka of David” for which we pray every year on Sukkot.



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At Yeshiva University, a remarkable career begins with a remarkable education.



OPEN HOUSE
FOR WOMEN
November 16, 2014

Julie SCW '09 | Associate Engineer Con Edison

The only thing more remarkable than what our students accomplish in the classroom is what they achieve in their professional lives. They gain valuable experience through internships at prestigious top-tier institutions and continue on remarkable journeys that take them to the highest levels of every professional field. *90% of our latest graduates are professionally employed, in graduate school, or both, and tens of thousands of our alumni are succeeding worldwide. **Call our Office of Admissions at 212.960.5277 to begin your remarkable journey. Visit www.yu.edu for more information.**

**Results according to a recent YU survey*



Yeshiva University



500 West 185th Street | New York, NY 10033 | 212.960.5277 | yuadmit@yu.edu



"The dual degree program applies world-class expertise in education to the subjects of Jewish education. Students leave our program with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach Bible, prayer, Hebrew language, Talmud, Jewish law and more."

– Dr. Moshe Krakowski
 Director of Masters Program
 Assistant Professor, Azrieli Graduate School
 of Jewish Education and Administration

"By benefiting from the faculty in both Azrieli and Revel, the students in the dual degree program learn from master teachers of pedagogy, and synthesize the latest advances in scholarship in both the Jewish education and Jewish studies realms."

– Dr. Mordechai Z. Cohen
 Professor of Bible and Associate Dean,
 Bernard Revel Graduate School of
 Jewish Studies

AZRIELI-REVEL DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM

Scholarship and Teaching

The Program

The Azrieli-Revel Dual Degree is a joint program through which students earn an MS at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration and an MA at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies concurrently. The dual degree program draws from the best of both graduate schools to provide aspiring Jewish educators with high-level professional preparation by combining the pedagogical skills focusing on Jewish education that are taught by Azrieli with the expertise in academic Jewish studies offered by Revel.

Azrieli offers an array of programs, including a master of science in Jewish education degree and a doctor of education degree, as well as New York State professional certification programs in both childhood and adolescent education.

Revel offers a master of arts degree in six concentrations: Bible, ancient Jewish history, medieval Jewish history, modern Jewish history, Jewish philosophy and Talmud, as well as a doctor of philosophy degree in these areas.

The dual degree program will enable students to earn masters degrees from each of the two schools with a total of 54 credits, whereas in the past doing so would have required 66 credits. This program offers significant savings of both time and tuition.

For information on the the *Azrieli-Revel Dual Degree program*, contact:

Susan Rosenberg at rosenb7@yu.edu or
 212.960.5400, ext. 5949

Dr. Stuart Halpern at shalpern@yu.edu or
 212.960.5400, ext. 5720

www.yu.edu/revel/master-science-master-arts

www.yu.edu/azrieli/master-science-master-arts

www.yu.edu/revel | www.yu.edu/azrieli



Yeshiva University

Aaron and Blanche Schreiber

Torah Tours Simchat Torah 5775

A PROGRAM OF RIETS-CJF

Bringing simchat hachag to communities all over the world!

The Aaron and Blanche Schreiber Torah Tours, currently in its fourth decade, shares the Torah knowledge and enthusiasm of Yeshiva University and RIETS students with Jewish communities throughout the world. This year teams of 4 to 6 young men and women will be spending Simchat Torah in over 80 communities across North America. The 350 plus students participating on Torah Tours will teach classes, lead singing and dancing, meet with synagogue youth, and create a fun and spirited Yom Tov experience. For more information about the Aaron and Blanche Schreiber Torah Tours program please visit www.yu.edu/cjf/torah-tours.

We thank the following communities for hosting Yeshiva University students over Simchat Torah:

Albany, NY
Allentown, PA
Baltimore, MD
Binghamton, NY
Boynton Beach, FL
Bradley Beach, NJ
Brighton, MA
Brookline, MA
Charleston, SC
Columbus, OH
Cote St. Luc, QC
Dewitt, NY
Dollard des Ormeaux, QC
East Brunswick, NJ
East Windsor, NJ
Fair Lawn, NJ
Flushing, NY
Harrisburg, PA
Highland Park, NJ

Las Vegas, NV
Lido Beach, NY
Loch Sheldrake, NY
Longmeadow, MA
Lowell, MA
Malden, MA
Memphis, TN
Milwaukee, WI
Mount Kisco, NJ
New Haven, CT
New Rochelle, NY
Newton, MA
Newton Centre, MA
Newton, MA
Northridge, CA
Oakland Gardens, NY
Omaha, NE
Palo Alto, CA
Paramus, NJ

Parsippany, NJ
Philadelphia, PA
Pittsburgh, PA
Plainview, NY
Richmond, VA
Roslyn Heights, NY
Sharon, MA
Silver Spring, MD
Springfield, NJ
Toledo, OH
Toronto, ON
Washington, DC
West Hartford, CT
West Hempstead, NY
West Orange, NJ
Westmount, QC
Wilkes Barre, PA
Youngstown, OH



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