

*irving greenberg*

*guide*  
to  
**SUKKOT**



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**SUKKOT**

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## THE EXODUS: AN ONGOING EXPERIENCE

The Exodus is the central event of Jewish faith. It gave to the Jews a very special ideal and a very special gift - the knowledge that everyday reality is grounded in a divine reality. There is a God who loves, who cares, who wills human redemption and promises that it will happen. Thus the Exodus was not a single completed historical event. It transcends history to become a Revelation that human beings are meant to be free; that they are endowed with dignity as children of God; that someday the whole world will be restructured into the Kingdom of God, and that this restructuring will take place politically, economically, socially, so that value and security will be given to each person. This is the fundamental testimony of Jewish religion: and the task of giving that testimony, and of bringing about that Messianic age is the calling of the Jewish people.

So great is the gap between this vision of hope and the reality of the world, that we are confronted with two tasks.

First, we must make a compromise with reality so that if perfection cannot be achieved now, at least we can improve on the status quo. For example, Jewish tradition prefers vegetarianism but as a compromise permits the eating of meat so long as it is done in accordance with the restrictions it imposes, such as humane slaughter, removal of blood, etc. Similarly, it demands peace but permits war in such cases as self-defense.

Secondly, the memory of the Exodus must be kept vividly alive so that we will remember the real vision and never yield to the status quo.

If we can strive to experience the Exodus personally, we can find the strength to act ethically by its standards and to strive to approach perfection, thereby lifting our compromises a higher notch towards the ideal. This is why the Torah insists that each Jew must relive the Exodus so that everyone will feel as if he/she personally came out of Egypt. "That you will remember the day out of Egypt all the days of your life." (Deut. 16, 3). Every day there are reminders - in the regulations which govern the food we eat, in the morning prayer, in the tzitzit (fringes), in the tefillin (phylacteries). But twice a year, the Jewish people actually reenact the drama of the Exodus - in the week of Passover and the week of Sukkot. During these periods, Jews recreate the Exodus, become so much a part of it and enter into it so totally that they are changed and renewed by it. Like Galileo, we may be pressured and beaten by a status quo which demands that we renounce our discovered truth and agree that the world does not move, but, when we relive the Exodus, we are forced - even against our will to blurt out, "but it does move!"

The year is anchored by these two reenactments of the Exodus. The first, Passover, comes on the 15th of Nissan: the first month of the Jewish year. The second, Sukkot, comes exactly 6 months later on the 15th of Tishrei. Passover is a springtime holiday officially observed on the anniversary of the Exodus; Sukkot is an autumn holiday which focuses on the Israelites' wanderings in the desert after

the Exodus. The central symbol of Passover is matzoh, the bread of affliction and of slavery that became the bread of freedom. The central symbol of Sukkot is the Sukkah, the portable booth Jews lived in during the forty years of wandering in the desert.

### From Nature to History

Historians and scholars have agreed that the dates of Passover and Succot reflect their origins as nature festivals celebrating the coming of spring and the harvest of fall. Sukkot particularly, because it is not the anniversary of an event, betrays the powerful underlying agricultural stratum of the sacred festival. Maimonides and Jacob ben Asher (a medieval Spanish halachic authority) argue that this Exodus celebration was deliberately scheduled six months out of place, during an inappropriate season. Jacob ben Asher reasons: If Jews were to move into an open air booth in the Spring during warm weather, it would appear not to be a commemoration of the Exodus; but rather a communion with nature. So the Torah bade us go into the booth in the cool of autumn when it is unusual to live outdoors. Thus onlookers will be prompted to ask: Why do these people go into a booth at this time? And the answer will be understood - to obey the will of the Creator and testify to the Exodus and to the subsequent wandering.

As ingenious as ben Asher's comment is, one can still argue that the historians are right. But this contradiction, in fact, underscores the unique, divine genius of the Torah. Jewish tradition reinterpreted a nature festival into an historical celebration because as a religion, Judaism represents the movement from human acceptance of natural forces toward the liberation which can only be achieved in history. As long as humans felt the implacability of nature and the immovability of fate, they could only accept death and defeat, poverty and oppression. Thus they hoped that by celebrating nature they were placating the gods who arbitrarily gave and withheld the staff of life, the rain and the harvest. But Judaism proclaimed that humans are created in the image of God; they are able, indeed commanded, to reshape the world, to conquer nature and to use it for the benefit of humanity. Nature is not God. It is created by God to be used for human welfare. The Exodus proclaims more than political freedom. It summons humans to free themselves from poverty, from sickness, even from death.

Alfred North Whitehead and others have correctly seen behind this Biblical vision, that concept of the universe which gave rise to science, to technology and to medicine. In contrast to Eastern religions which accepted the inevitability of nature and sought only to free people from the illusions of involvement with this life, Biblical revelation supplied the very dynamic of Western civilization which conceived of setting humankind free.

In the dialectic characteristic of Judaism, nature was not simply dismissed nor could the world be manipulated to the point of abuse. The agricultural basis of life remained. Humans remain rooted in nature - respond to its rhythms and celebrate its bounty. They look at the world as God did: "The Lord saw all that He made and behold it was very good" (Genesis 1, 31). But they are free

to remake it and bring it to true perfection in history.

When nature is all powerful, there are particular holy places where a god's presence and power are found. A god has dominion over a locality, and so there are places where he is not found. The move into History is the move into sacred time. God is everywhere when we are enveloped in sacred time. The Jews were sent into exile but still remained faithful to the Lord, for God was not just the God of Mount Moriah and Jerusalem but he was the God who was encountered on Sabbath and holy days. Israel went into the desert to meet its Lord. The favor was returned by the Lord who went with them into the Exile, into the travail of history. The Shechinah (divine presence) is present in troubled times as well as during the triumphant return to the Holy Land when rootedness in soil and nature is restored.

#### SUKKOT: THE REENACTMENT OF THE EXODUS

Passover celebrates the event of liberation: Sukkot celebrates the way the liberation continues. The people of Israel left behind the settled land and solid homes of Egypt and followed God into a desert, living there in the frail booths that could be assembled by night and disassembled by day.

The central symbol then of their act of faith, of their willingness to risk is that booth - the Sukkah. The central act of these seven days of Sukkot (eight in Diaspora) is our recapitulation of their act of faith by living in the Sukkah. Originally, this meant, eating, learning and sleeping in it so that the Sukkah could become our home for a week as we reenacted the ways of our fathers. Living in the Sukkah is meant to recapture the spirit of the Exodus generation who left thick walls under secure roofs to brave the elements. Symbolically, they left the protection of man-made solid walls to place themselves under the protection of God. Exposed to the elements, they placed their confidence in the divine concern - which is the only true source of security. They were willing to risk that exposure both to enemy and to element, which is the price of striving to be free and to perfect the world. And so in a real way, the Sukkah also pays tribute to Jewish courage and faith. Where else but in the love the People of Israel felt for God could they find the strength to go into a waterless, withered land leaving behind the fertile places and the security of Egypt?

For that act of faith, we are taught that God will never abandon Israel. The prophet, Jeremiah, said of God that: "I remember for you the loving kindness of your youth, the love of your wedding days - that you went after Me in the desert, into an unsown barren land." Indeed while Rabbi Eliezer said that Sukkot refers to the booths which the Jews inhabited in the desert, Rabbi Akiva said Sukkot really symbolize the Clouds of Glory which hovered over the Jews, leading the way through the Sinai. Rabbi Akiva means that the miracle and the celebration are due not only to God who protects but to the people of Israel who were willing to expose themselves to the fiercest storms of history with only the intangible, partial shelter of God's presence.

The halachic definition for the construction of a Sukkah is one attempt to capture the fragility and openness of the booths. Thus the Sukkah may not be too impressive or strong and its height may not exceed 20 cubits - about ten yards. Nor may it be lower than what is reasonably high enough to enter in and live in i.e. ten handbreadths of 40 inches - similarly it should be built well enough to withstand normal winds - but not so solidly that it withstands winds of unusual force. We give up the maximum protection which solid construction could give us. Thereby, we admit our vulnerability and testify that our ultimate trust is in divine shelters.

The most important part of the Sukkah halachically is the S'chach, a material of vegetable origin (laid over wood slats, branches or bamboo poles) which forms the roof. The s'chach should not be so manufactured or changed that it can become ritually defiled e.g. the wood should not have been turned into utensils or other manufactured articles. In other words, the connection to nature should not be broken. The s'chach should not be laid on heavy boards or beams which can offer solid support nor should it be nailed down permanently. It is loosely spread over the area, but it should not be so dense as to shut out rain. The s'chach then is the perfect expression of the true nature of divine protection, God is not a mechanical shield which protects us from all evil, God is the Presence who gives us the strength to persevere and overcome.

The fragility of the Sukkah borders on the playful. What is the minimum Sukkah one can build? It need not have four walls i.e. be fully enclosed. The minimum of a building or enclosure is two walls - plus a part of a third: so that is sufficient for a Sukkah. We "project" as if the walls are complete. Similarly, we need not build the vertical walls fully from top to bottom. We can build part of a wall and project it for completion. One of my father's, z'l's favorite jokes about the Sukkah was about such a jerry-built one which was entered into by a Cossack who stole all the family belongings. The two yeshiva boys who discover the missing heirlooms are totally puzzled by the theft. "How could he even get in?", one asks. "This incomplete wall is legally projected to the end; that vertical wall is legally projected to the ground. So how did the Cossack ever get in?" "To which the other answers: "You see the Cossack is an ignoramus who did not know the law of projection of the wall..." Thus the Jews playfully created Sukkah shelters and humor that, as frail as they were, overcame and outlasted powerful evil forces in the world.

The s'chach is meant to teach us something about the true nature of security and protection. Humans instinctively strive to build up solid walls of security. We shut out life; we heap up treasures and power and status symbols in the hope of excluding death and disaster and even the unexpected. This search for 'solid' security, all too often leads us to an idolatry which causes us to worship the source that gives it to us. We end up sacrificing our values and even loved ones to obtain the controllable and tangible sources of security. The Sukkah argues that we should give up this pseudo 'safety'. The Sukkah does not deny the value of home and human effort, since fifty-one weeks a year we are allowed to live in our homes and are encouraged to build the world and increase security and well-being. However, it teaches us that we must be able to give them up or move out if necessary. If we learn that, we can renounce them, then we become the masters not the slaves of our efforts and achievements.

By moving into the Sukkah for a week, we demythologize our solid walls, and our controllable security. We admit their limits. We open up to the world, to the unexpected winds, to the stochastic process which gives unexpected setback as well as planned gain. Armed with hope, we take on the task of perfecting our lives and the world we live in. Armed with faith, we face both the good and the bad surprises of history and life. And we do so with joy - the joy of free people celebrating the privilege and the rise of freedom, knowing that to finish the task is not crucial, but failing to start it is.

There is another dimension of the Sukkah symbol. It asks us not to become overly rooted, particularly not in the exile. For thousands of years, Jews have built homes in Diaspora. Civilizations of extraordinary richness - culturally, religiously, and often economically and socially - have been achieved. But outside of Israel, all such homes and civilizations have proven to be temporary ones, often blown down and smashed when a turn of the wheel brought new forces to power. Often self-deception and the desire to claim permanent roots led Jews to deny what was happening until it was too late to escape.

The nature of human beings is to absolutise the present, to not be able to conceive of any other home but the present one. The Sukkah asks us to avoid that illusion. It says: Enjoy your home; till the land; sink the roots. Be capable however of moving on, when hurricane winds begin to blow.

How often I have thought of the German Jews who confronted Hitler and pleaded for the right to stay in Germany. How many Jews have been saved if they had not held on too long - because they believed with Alfred Wiener of the Central Verein of German Jewry that "the decisive majority of German Jews nevertheless and in spite of everything remain deeply rooted in the soil of our German homeland". It is not that we may not enjoy and feel deeply about our home. The very consciousness of fragility gives us a deeper sensitivity to the daily joy and to the miracle of its existence. And the precious capacity not to deceive ourselves when change takes place is made possible by the Sukkah consciousness.

#### Inside the Sukkah

Sukkah is one of the few mitzvot into which one can throw one's self - body and soul! One Hassidic master praised the greatness of this mitzvah precisely for this reason. In almost all the mitzvot of the Torah, we use one organ, one part of ourselves. But to fulfill the mitzvah of living in the Sukkah, we must put all of ourselves into it. Traditionally, living in the Sukkah included eating any significant meal in the Sukkah, and some traditional Jews will eat nothing outside the Sukkah. (Jewish law defines a significant meal as a meal which includes water or bread dishes made of the five basic grains (wheat, rye, spelt, barley, oats), or a main dish with meat or fish, eggs or cheese, but not fruits or vegetables.

In our climate, where sleeping in the Sukkah may be a hardship due to inclement weather, exemption from sleeping there has become the rule. Still, families which have learned to go camping together might well enjoy roughing it in the Sukkah.



Everytime one eats in the Sukkah, one makes the special 'layshayv ba'sukkah' to dwell, (lit. to sit) in the Sukkah. On the first night (in Diaspora, on the first two nights) one adds the blessing of 'she-hechyanu' thanksgiving to God who has kept us alive to this season.

There is a special dimension of joy to this holiday of Sukkot (see below). One reflection of this great emphasis on pleasure and joy is that when eating in the Sukkah causes real discomfort, one is exempted from the mitzvah. Thus, classically, if it rains on Sukkot and this results in water coming in (keep in mind the S'chach is not permitted to be thick enough to keep out the rain) one is exempt from the mitzvah of eating in the Sukkah. On the other hand, people were so determined to observe this mitzvah, that the tradition grew to wait even until midnight for the rain to end in the hope of getting a chance to eat there. In cases where rain prevented eating the meal in the Sukkah, people would hastily make kiddush (the blessing over wine) and ha motzi (the blessing over bread) in the sukkah before retreating indoors for the rest of the meal.

Since Sukkah is a fixed commandment which requires fulfillment at a specific time, it was considered a mitzvah not binding on women. Still the tradition ruled that women fulfilled a mitzvah if they did eat or dwell in the Sukkah and that they should say the traditional blessing 'to dwell in the Sukkah'. In our times, when women are making an historic move to assume full religious maturity, it is doubly important that they consider themselves bound to fulfill this mitzvah in every way. However, people traveling or in transit may eat on the road outside of a Sukkah.

#### Building Your Sukkah:

The Jewish Catalog has excellent directions for building your own Sukkah. The building is an extraordinary mitzvah which can involve the whole family in construction and decoration. You can use your imagination in getting ingenious building materials for the Sukkah. For those less handy, the Spero Foundation (offices in Cleveland and New York, listed in the phonebook) sells a reasonable and attractive pre-fab Sukkah with easy directions for putting it together. In other cities, check with local Hebrew bookstores or synagogues for agents who sell Sukkahs. Evergreen or perishable s'chach can usually be bought from local dealers. Many pre-fabs come complete with bamboo stick s'chach. An evergreen topping will not only add fragrance to the Sukkah, but you'll have an extra condiment to your soup as the leaves/needles fall. If you gather s'chach in local forests or river bank areas, be sure not to destroy and not to take s'chach belonging to a private person without permission. (Jewish law generally rules that you can't perform a mitzvah by sinning or by stealing the wherewithal to do it.)

#### SUKKOT: THE AGRICULTURAL DIMENSION

Unlike Passover where the agricultural dimension has been overshadowed by the historical side of the holiday, Sukkot has retained its nature aspect as something central to the holiday. The Torah refers to Sukkot as Chag Ha Asif (the festival

of ingathering) (Exodus 34, 22) and this component is a central part of the celebration. Here we see the dialectic of Jewish tradition operating. The move from nature to history is counter-balanced by a move from history to nature. Human mastery of nature is balanced by the relationship with nature and sensitivity to its rhythms. The miracle of the harvest is acknowledged and celebrated: the need for roots and acceptance of nature's gift is affirmed.

### The Four Species

The central expression of this agricultural dimension was the mitzvah of bringing four species of fruits and plants together and waving them in the Temple. Since the destruction of the Temple, the four species are brought in to every synagogue (or home) in remembrance of this Temple ceremony. The four species were plants of Israel, some particularly related to water, and all representing the entire bounty of the land. "On the first day, you should take the fruit of hadar (goodly) trees (etrog or citron); branches of palm trees (lulav), boughs of leafy trees (hadassim) or myrtle and willows of the brook (aravot), and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days " (Leviticus 23; 40). The myrtle and willows are attached to a holder on the lulav (the holder is made of palm branch, also). Three myrtle branches are placed on the right and two willows on the left. The lulav is held in the right hand together with the etrog in the left hand and the whole is waved together after the blessing. (They are held with the stem down; purists hold the etrog wrong side up until after they say the blessing so that the perfect waving is done after the blessing.) (Even though the etrog is seen as the more precious), the whole act has come to be known as waving the lulav obviously because the lulav is the tallest one and is eye-catching. (A recent survey indicated that tall people average higher salaries than short people. Oh! the injustice of it all!)

The waving of the species is done three times up, three times down, in all directions e.g. east, south, west, north, and up and down. This is symbolic of God's total presence and dominion over the entire universe.

### Buying Your Own:

Since the Bible says "on the first day you shall take (for yourselves) the fruit etc," Jewish law ruled that one should own the four species that one blesses. This has led to the beautiful custom of individuals buying their own four species. Today, the four species are available at reasonable (but varying!) prices in most cities. There are few more beautiful sights than a synagogue flooded with four species; the fragrance, the color, the joyful processional around the synagogue really are a delight. I strongly urge that you make provision to acquire your own. Local synagogues or bookstores may order for you. Yavneh, a religious college student organization, with offices in New York and B'nai Akiva, a religious Zionist youth movement have a special program whereby you can order Israeli etrogim at unusually reasonable prices. (You can find B'nai Akiva in the phone book in most large cities.) Be sure to use this mitzvah to strengthen Israel by insisting on Israeli etrogim. If you don't own four species, or if you do and your friend doesn't, you may make a gift of the etrog to the other so that he or she will fulfill the obligation to

own the species used for the blessing. However, the person you gave the etrog to may then give it back to you as a gift....(Who says Jewish legal minds can't figure out a way to have your cake and eat it too...?) And here again, I believe that women should own them also, but I haven't persuaded too many women to carry them and own them.

See the Jewish Catalog for description of the four species and how to pick good ones. To summarize one can say this. The etrog is the crown of the set and it is a special mitzvah to get an esthetically attractive one. It is unfit if it is dried up, spotted, punctured or smaller than a walnut or if its pitum (protruberance at the tip opposite the stem) has been broken off. (All this because the Torah calls it fruit of the hadar tree; (hadar in Hebrew - beauty, pride, glory.) Above all, remember a citron is not a lemon. If they've sold you a lemon, it's a lemon. Turn it in and exchange it for the real thing.

The myrtle branches are characterized by leaves which grow in clusters of three from the same point on the stem. The tips should not be dried up or broken and the leaves should not be brittle. The last holds true for willows also and the preferred length for both is about 11 inches or more. To keep them fresh, keep both in a moist plastic bag in the refrigerator between uses. True aravot have smooth leaf edges or obtuse (not acute) serrations. The lulav, generally at least a foot long, is unfit if its central spine is split down most of its length. Since the lulav is a symbol of Jews, the message seems to be that a spineless Jew is not of much use.

The Rabbis noted that all four species must be present and bound together to fulfill this mitzvah. They also noted that there are four different characteristics of the species. The etrog has fragrance and taste; the lulav has taste but no fragrance; the myrtle has fragrance but no taste; the aravot has neither fragrance nor taste. Say the Rabbis, taste represents knowledge and fragrance represent good deeds. And so, the four species represent four kinds of Jews. Some know and do good deeds; some know but do not do enough; some do but do not know enough; some have neither knowledge nor good deeds. But all Jews are united in destiny and all Jews are needed. A community should not exclude any Jew, even one who neither knows nor does. True community and true unity demands that we find room for every kind of Jew, that we reach out to include every person in our community.

### Water Drawing and Rain

The Land of Israel is not rich in water resources; it has no river that gives it basic fertility as the Nile does for Egypt. Therefore, rain and water supply was always tenuous and, greatly appreciated when present. The inclusion of willows-of-the-brook in the four species is connected to thanksgiving for water.

For this reason, a special prayer for rain was inserted in the holiday services. Since the Israeli rain season starts approximately at the Sukkot holiday season, it was the appropriate time to pray for rain. (Jews are realists. One prays for rain during the rainy season not during the dry summers. One walks across water by stepping on rocks...) Since rain disrupts the mitzvah of sitting in the Sukkah, however, (see above) it was decided to hold off the prayer for rain until the last day of the holiday. Actually it is said on the eighth day, which is technically a separate holiday called Shemini Atzeret (The Eighth Day of Assembly) - see below.

Another association with water was the march around the Temple with water willows, concluding with a symbolic beating of the willows on the ground, (to get the earth to come across with water?). It is a fairly primordial ceremony, and if you've seen or heard people beating vigorously and grunting as they swing, it sounds a little bit like "me Tarzan, you rain!" (or else!) -

The classic water celebration, however, was the simchat beit hashoevah ceremony (the rejoicing of the drawing of the water.) This was a symbolic joyful first drawing of the water, done at a major well in Jerusalem on the first night of Chol Ha Moed (the regular weekdays interspersed between the first and last holy days). All sorts of festivities took place at that time and certainly this is one celebration which should be revived.

The Talmud describes the event as follows: Jerusalem was lit up by the light of gigantic menorahs. To liven things up, a torch light parade was held with lyres, cymbals, horns and drums. The Rabbis entertained and clowned to add to the joy. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel did all sorts of gymnastic feats culminating in incredible headstands which were so good that the Olympic Committee rated him the only '10' in the history of beit hashoevah gymnastic. This same Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel (the president of the Jewish community?) also entertained by juggling flaming torches. (I tried to revive this grand old Jewish custom in my own synagogue. However, after the sanctuary burned down for the second time, the Board passed a resolution in favor of dropping "That Old Time Religion"). The humor, the music, dancing and liveliness, as well as the elimination of the Rabbi's 'pedestal role' all are as much needed in our contemporary religion as they were during Temple times.

#### THE ZIONIST HOLIDAY

Due to its strong agricultural ties, Sukkot kept alive a strong remembrance and identification with the land of Israel for Jews who were in exile. Even when forbidden to own land, the Jews remembered their old agricultural roots and the bounty of the Holy land. The prayer for rain (Geshem) was said at the time when the rainy season begins in the land of Israel. It was the Jews' way of maintaining an unbroken tie to the land. It was a statement that Jews were living on Jerusalem standard time not Greenwich meridian, or Central Mountain time.

The restoration of the land is, of course, a central symbol in the prophecy of Jewish redemption. "For the Lord has comforted Zion. . . . He made her deserts like Eden and her parched lands as the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51, 3). Sukkot kept the Jews connected to the land and to the dream of renewed life in Israel. When the first Zionist halutzim came to Israel, they emphasized the renewal of Jewish life through the restoration of the land. Early on, especially under the leadership of the late great Chief Rabbi Kook, etrogim became a prize cash crop supporting the new settlement and closing the cycle of dream and reality. A controversy erupted when the charge was made that Israeli etrogim were products of forbidden grafting and breeding with other non citron fruits. As a result of that controversy, Lubavitch recommends non-Israeli etrogim to its followers. But in this rare case, it is wrong. Rabbi Kook fought for the religious supremacy

of ritually proper Israeli etrogim precisely because he saw how this mitzvah could support the reborn state of the Jewish people. Rabbi Kook was right and the proper Zionist way is to buy Israeli etrogim and/or to go on pilgrimage to Zion during this Zionist holiday. Truly, a fulfillment of that great Jewish doctrine: Help make Israel green! Bring money!

#### WEALTH, ENJOYMENT AND THE 'MATERIALIST' SIDE OF JUDAISM

Since it is a harvest festival, Sukkot incorporates frank recognition and celebration of material goods. There is a general mitzvah on festivals that "you shall rejoice on your holy day" (Deut. 16, 14). However, Sukkot alone was given the title "The Time of our Rejoicing". On this holiday, all the stops were pulled out for joy. This is partly because there are no restrictions on food as there are on Passover; partly because the bounty of the harvest gives great joy. In other words, the Jewish tradition sees wealth and material as a necessary - but not sufficient basis - for spiritual fulfillment.

As Maimonides put it: "The general purpose of the Torah is twofold: The well being of the soul and the well being of the body. The well being of the soul is ranked first but...the well being of the body comes first": (Guide to the Perplexed, Part 3, chapt. 27). Since the human being is a body-soul union, deprivation of the body means deprivation of the soul. While some may benefit from voluntarily chosen poverty, for most people poverty is debilitating, reducing the soul as it shrinks concentration down to survival and elementary needs. Thus appreciation and enjoyment of material things is a legitimate spiritual concern. It all depends on how you do it. Prosperity frees one for personal development but if it is worshipped or absolutized, it disrupts personal growth.

In many ways, Sukkot has become the model for this wordly enjoyment in Jewish tradition - which is why it is called the time of rejoicing. In Talmudic literature, it is known as ha chag (the Holiday). The depth of the joy is also a factor of its relationship to Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement). Sukkot comes four days after the most ascetic, self-denying, guilt-ridden awesome Holy Day of the Jewish year. On Yom Kippur, we experience and pre-enact our own death only to be restored to life in the resolution of this day. Only those who know the fragility of life and who have confronted death can truly appreciate the joy and fullest preciousness of every moment of life; (See I. Greenberg - Guide to the High Holy Days, section 1). The release from Yom Kippur brings on one of the strongest dialectical moves in all of Jewish tradition - the extraordinary outburst of life and joy which is Sukkot. On this holiday, we are commanded to eat, drink, be merry, dance and relish life to the fullest in celebrating our harvest and our wealth.

Even the prayer for Rain (Geshem) should be understood in this spirit. Today, the prayer is overlaid with the patina of romantic association and nostalgia for Zion. In its original form, it simply meant that the economy (in an agricultural society) was dependent on rain. Therefore, it was legitimate to bring this basic need before God in prayer. Religion should take the basic needs of people seriously. Geshem was quite simply a prayer for the economy. (Its equivalent today might be a prayer for the Dow Jones Industrial Average!) Yet if a Rabbi today proposed such a prayer,

he would be dismissed as a raving materialist. The modern synagogue has thus falsified Jewish spirituality which in truth sees a profound connection between economic security and the independence and potential spiritual flowering of a person.

Sukkot, is a model of the ways Jews enjoy the material world. This means holiness, selectivity and gratitude for the gifts - not worship of those gifts or of those who own them. It means first and foremost, sharing the bounty we have. "You shall rejoice on your holiday - you, your family, your servants, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow" (Deut. 16, 14). All had to be invited to partake.

A special holiday feature is the Ushpizin, the hospitality for honored guests. By tradition, every night a different Biblical personality is invited to visit the Sukkah and sit with us - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. (A recent custom is growing to invite great patriarchs of the Jewish people as well - Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc.). With the Biblical figures, we invite their stand-ins - fellow human beings, especially those who are needy or who need a Sukkah in which to eat. This mitzvah is especially important in our society where bureaucracies and institutions handle welfare and medical coverage, leaving very little room for personal acts of g'milut chasadim (loving kindness) which are the foundations of the world (Avot 1) because they are fundamental expressions of human solidarity and human contact in a larger impersonal world.

Another way the tradition keeps the balance is by interspersing dialectic moves within the holiday to offset its materialism and joy. Thus, Hoshanna Rabba, the sixth day of Sukkot is connected back to Yom Kippur. It is seen as the day on which the verdict of life and death of the Day of Atonement is finally sealed. The evocation of the awe and the encounter with death challenges excessive materialism. A similar effect is implicit both in the saying of Yizkor on the last day and when the scroll of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) is read on the Shabbat of Sukkot. Its theme "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" challenges the meaningfulness of worldly living. This counterpoint keeps us from seeing as absolute the good things which we are encouraged to enjoy and celebrate.

Finally, the holiday's hospitality is extended to all the nations of the earth. By tradition, seventy bullocks were sacrificed on the holiday - one for each existing nation. (When the Temple is rebuilt, we will have to split the sacrifices two-for-one to catch up.) The prophetic reading of the first day says that "every one that is left of all the nations that came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts and to keep the feast of Tabernacles"...And, "the Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord shall be one and His name shall be One." (Zechariah Chapt. 14 v. 16,9). The universalism of Sukkot is undoubtedly connected to its harvest theme - all thy world can share in the bounty of the harvest. And joy is relatively easy to share while tragedy usually leaves the mourner alone even in the midst of people. Beyond this, Sukkot, unlike Passover, is not marred by the drowning of the Egyptians - the suffering of our enemies. Therefore, on all eight days, unlike on Passover, we recite the full Hallel (hymns of Thanksgiving). On Passover, we diminish these songs of rejoicing because our deliverance meant that human beings had to be killed. On Sukkot, our joy is at no

one else's expense. Moreover, we speak of God spreading a Sukkat Shalom - a Tabernacle of Peace-over all the world, thus making unity and celebration possible.

The culminating balance of joy came in focusing on the delights of Torah learning to supplement the pleasures of the flesh. Hoshana Rabba, the sixth day of Sukkot was a special day of rejoicing in the Temple. On this day, the Temple was circled seven times instead of the usual one time. Circling with the four species and with water willows the celebrants called hosha-na (hosanna)-help us, please, O Lord! Since there were many hosannas on this day, it became known as Hoshanna Rabba (great Hosannahs). Connecting this day to the day of judgment increased its awesomeness. Then the tradition grew to cap the rejoicing and sealing of judgment with the learning of Torah, and so the custom arose for people to stay up all night learning Torah. A special resource book was created which has opening excerpts from the various sections of the Bible and the Mishna to that in one night one could accomplish a summary review of the bulk of the Torah. Similarly, the pure joy of Shmini Atzeret, the Eighth Day Assembly, was suffused with the Rejoicing of the Law (Simchat Torah). In the dancing and rejoicing was the affirmation of the gladness which Torah brought into our lives and our pleasure in study and learning.

The whole holiday is an object lesson in post modern religious life. Nostalgia tends to romanticize poverty and the religious life of the old shtetl. But as affluence rises, our great religious calling is to learn to share the wealth and to learn how to consecrate it in enjoyment. It may be more difficult religiously to do this than to live properly in poverty. Thus, Sukkot is bound to be a major new focus of post modern Jewish life.

#### CODA: PURE JOY

When the seven days of Sukkot end (in Diaspora, eight days), the Bible decrees yet another holiday, the Eighth Day of Assembly. The Rabbis interpreted this as an encore. After the High Holy Days, after the intense seven days of Sukkot and pilgrimage, the Jewish people is about to leave, to scatter and return to their homes. God, as it were, grows nostalgic and pensive, knowing He will miss the sounds of music and joy and the unity of His people. They will not come together again until Passover - six months hence. Therefore, Torah decreed an eighth day Assembly - a final feast/holy day. On this day, Jews leave the Sukkah (in Diaspora on the 9th Day), and enjoy the fullness of the pleasure of solid well built, well insulated homes. The lulav and Etrog are put aside: All that remains is the pure joy of the day.

It is appropriate that this day of pure joy has become the day of the rejoicing of the Torah. Whatever things it denies to us, whatever suffering Jews have undergone because they upheld it, the Torah essentially affirms life. At the end of this week of fulfillment, on this day of delight, all the Scrolls are taken out of the Ark and the Torah becomes the focus of rejoicing.

There are many facets of the pleasure of the day. In many congregations, the evening service is done as parody, mixing melodies of solemn days with melodies of modern music and frequently employing a lay 'cantor' and mock choir. Simchat Torah and its humor punctures the rest of the year tendency to religious pomposity and over seriousness. At night, all the Scrolls are handed out and members of the

congregation takes turns marching around the synagogue seven times while holding the scrolls aloft. At the completion of each circular procession (Hakafa) songs and niggunim are sung and people dance with the Torah. Candy and gifts are showered on the children who escort the Torah and kiss it and dance with it. The service is followed by feasting.

The holy pandemonium reaches a climax the following morning. Again, there are seven hakafot (circuits). It is now a world wide Jewish tradition to go out doors for the seventh Hakafa and dance in solidarity with Soviet Jewry which led the way in declaring its renewed Jewishness publicly by dancing in the streets of Moscow. As we spill out into full public view, we declare the wonder and the glory of the eternal miracle - Am Yisrael Chai - the People Israel lives! Od Aveynu Chai! Our Heavenly Father still lives! Then mini congregations are set up in the synagogue and the Torah is read again and again in every available synagogue area until everyone has received an Aliya - a calling up to the Torah - which enables her/him to say the blessings of Thanksgiving to God who chose us and gave us the Torah...who gave us a Torah of truth and thus planted eternal life in us.

As each person finishes his/her aliyah, traditionally she/he pledges something to charity and then makes Kiddush over wine and scotch. With each passing aliyah the synagogue gets livelier and the happiness higher (or should I say, the synagogue gets higher and the happiness gets livelier?).

The last regular Aliya is called the "Kol Hanearim "all the children" aliyah. All the children under 13 are gathered to the Bima. One adult takes the Aliya and says the blessing aloud with them. A group of adults hovers over the children and a giant canopy made up of large talitot (prayer shawls) held together by loving human hands is stretched over the heads of the children. When the Second blessing is finished, the classical blessing of Jacob is recited..."bless the children and may the name of my ancestors be called on them (e.g. may they continue the line) and may they multiply and be fruitful in the midst of the land." With the shower of blessings, comes a shower of candy and of song. The Jewish people has children, has life, has continuity. Thirty years after the fate of cruelest death was decreed for every Jewish child and inflicted on one and a half million of them, thirty years later, they live; they grow; they laugh and dance; they rejoice to be Jewish; they are unafraid. Was there ever joy like this? Was there ever faith or power of life like this?

The final three Aliyot are special ones. The first is the Hattan Torah (the Groom of the Torah) an honor usually given to a person who exemplifies the love and practice of Torah. The Hattan is called to the Torah with a special proclamation declaring his good deeds and life. This Aliyah completes the cycle of the reading of the entire Torah - it is the final portion of Deuteronomy. However, the Jewish people go from strength to strength. Lest anyone think that the Torah reading is completed, the cycle is begun anew by reading the first chapter of Genesis. This Aliya is called Hattan Bereshit (Groom of Genesis.) It is typically given to one specially designated for outstanding service to the community of the people of Israel in the past year. As each day of creation is read, the congregation recites in joyous choral response to the reader "and there was night and there was day, the first day...



the second day etc." Each verse is followed by a niggun (melody) without words, a niggun of rejoicing and redemption. Thus our sacred world is rededicated, its goodness celebrated, its redemption foreshadowed in a wordless song that wells up from the very depths of the people of Israel. (IMPORTANT NOTE: In a growing number of congregations, Hattan Torah and Bereshit are now paralleled in practice by Kallat Torah and Bereshit (the Bride of the Torah and the Bride of Genesis).

The last Aliyah is maftir (in some congregations it is now called Hattan Maftir - Groom of the Prophetic reading;) - again chosen for appropriate service or exemplary living. This portion tells how Joshua succeeded to leadership when Moses died. It is the same message as that contained in the immediate start of Genesis. Whoever may die, whatever leader or generation may perish, the circle goes on. Another Jew steps forward and says; Hineni - here I am. Death or defeat can never triumph; the power of human love is to create new life and carry on.

A joyous Mussaf prayer followed by feasting and visiting concludes this day (eighth day in Israel, ninth day in Diaspora).

#### A Final Word:

It was the Russian Jews who taught us the secret power of joy and the central importance of Sukkot for our time. Many American Jews, who let the tradition diminish, cling to Yom Kippur as their last tradition. Yom Kippur, however, is a day of deprivation and denial, of guilt and self-flagellation. If that is one's only contact with Judaism, one can only say: "O'Lord who is like your people, Israel?" What but the most incredible devotion and love could keep people coming back year after year to a service which is the longest, the most tiring of all?

Russian Jews totally cut off from tradition had to rediscover it - or die. They chose life. With profound and prophetic understanding they unerringly chose to rediscover Simchat Torah first. What a way to discover a religion! - in joy, in dancing, (with or without understanding: with or without words) - in the union of generations, in the voice of children blessing the Torah and adults blessing children. It is a model and challenge for all of us to rediscover the Torah - through joy.

"Whoever has not seen the simchat beit ha shoevoh "the rejoicing of the water drwing" has not seen - real joy in his life" says the Talmud. I would say: whoever has not had the full joy of Sukkot has not tasted sheer joy. The modern synagogue has too often cheated us of our heritage of uncontrolled joy, of real elation. Could there be a more profoundly generation-unifying experience than a rediscovery of family building together, of dance and drink and love - a rediscovery of nature for City dwellers - of religious purpose for the materially jaded, of worldwide concern for our fellow Jews?

Says, the Talmud: "The Shechinah (Divine Presence) comes upon us neither out of sadness, nor out of raucous laughter...but out of the joy of Mitzvah. It is in our hands to bring that Presence into our life and world in a deeper way than ever in this generation - in rebuilding our Land and our lives, in sharing and concern, out of enjoyment and love.

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## OUR NAME

The rabbinic phrase *clal Yisrael* refers to the indivisibility and sacred collectivity of the Jewish people. It is in this spirit of pluralism and respect for the many forms which Jewish practice may take, that we have chosen the word CLAL for our name. CLAL heralds our belief that only by strengthening each and every constituent part, and by encouraging dialogue between groups, can all of Judaism be strengthened. CLAL symbolizes our commitment to serve as a Center where Learning And Leadership go hand in hand.



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## HOW WE DO IT

### Shamor *Leadership Education*

As the Programming and Educational Division of CLAL, *Shamor* provides lay and professional leaders extraordinary learning and pluralistic religious experiences. It also identifies, nurtures, and motivates talented individuals to assume the obligations and responsibilities of leadership in the Jewish community.

CLAL, in joint sponsorship with local Jewish organizations and national Jewish agencies, annually coordinates over thirty ongoing classes in five cities, sponsors dozens of weekends, seminars and institutes, for more than ten thousand leaders in over 50 Jewish communities in the United States and Canada.

### Am Echad *(One People)*

CLAL has undertaken a major new challenge—dealing with the dissolving bonds of Jewish unity. To strengthen the forces committed to *Clal Yisrael*, CLAL has created *Am Echad (One People)*, a new division devoted to promoting intermovement understanding and interaction.

The common objective of all of CLAL's *Am Echad (One People)* programs is to reduce polarization and increase cooperation between movements by creating the occasions and the voices which will spread the message of *Clal Yisrael*.

CLAL's *Am Echad (One People)* activities include: *Chevra*, Lay and Rabbinic Communal Programming, *Symposia for Unity*, *Advanced Theological/Halachic Dialogue*, the *Modern Orthodox Outreach*, and *International activities*.

### Zachor *Holocaust Resource Center*

The first Holocaust Resource Center in the country, *Zachor*, was founded by CLAL to commemorate and explore the fundamental challenge of the Holocaust. Among its accomplishments are its help in establishing the permanent United States Holocaust Memorial Council, and the development of a service for *Yom Hashoah*, the Day of Remembrance. *Zachor* also created "The Fifth Child", a commemorative prayer developed by an interdenominational group of scholars, authors, and rabbis, designed for use in the Passover seder.

Other resources include the award winning "Witness to the Holocaust" film series and *The Holocaust: An Annotated Bibliography and Resource Guide*.

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## WHY CLAL

CLAL is dedicated to preparing Jewish leaders to respond to the challenges of a new era in Jewish history; challenges which include the freedom to accept or reject Judaism, the liberty to choose from an abundance of Jewish values and lifestyles, and the exercise of Jewish power after the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel.

CLAL believes that freedom and pluralism are unparalleled blessings in Jewish history which can stimulate higher standards and more individual participation, strengthen each segment of Judaism, and enrich the totality of Jewish life.

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## WHAT WE DO

CLAL educates Jewish leaders, teaching them the lessons of leadership through the treasures of Jewish history and texts. Our programs strengthen Jewish unity, create a deeper appreciation for Jewish culture and religion, yield insights from our tradition, and offer authentic Jewish responses which can be applied to private behavior and communal policies.

CLAL provides its learning experiences to Jewish leaders through classes, dialogues, study groups, conferences, publications and retreats. Our programs are offered to Jewish groups in their communities throughout North America.

CLAL (formerly the National Jewish Resource Center) was founded in 1974 by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, Elie Wiesel and Rabbi Steven Shaw. In 1983, the Institute for Jewish Experience, founded by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, merged into CLAL.