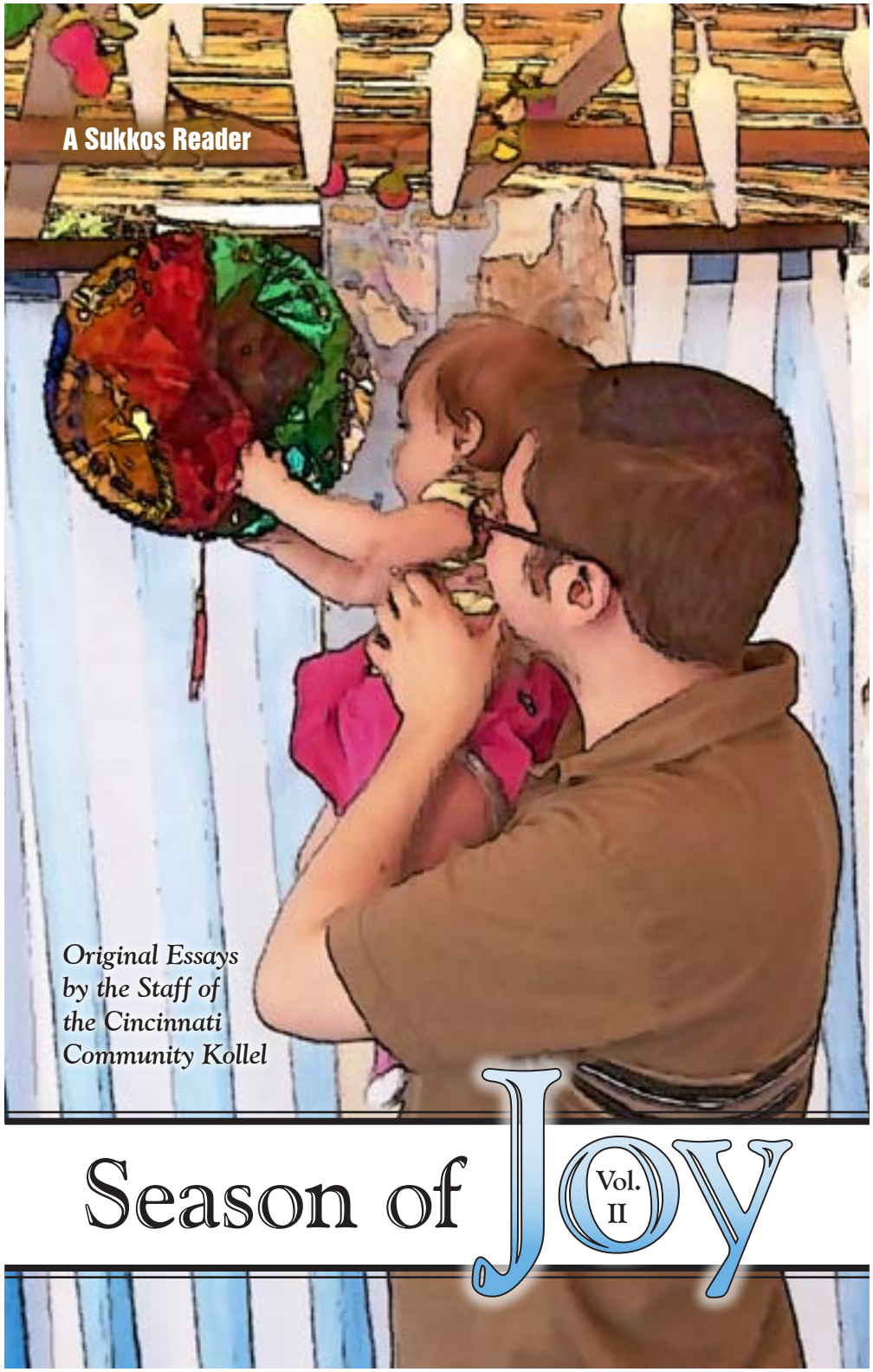

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Season of Joy, Volume I is available in PDF format at

http://kollel.shul.net/Resources/Pubs/pubs.htm

There you can also find our Annual Reports and other Holiday Readers.

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Preface

Welcome to our newest Holiday Reader, *Season of Joy, Volume II*.

The Torah instructs us, in reference to the festival of Sukkos, "… you will be completely joyous" (Deuteronomy 16:15). In our prayers we refer to Sukkos as "*zman simchaseinu*—the time of our joy." Certainly Sukkos always occurs at the time of harvest and, as such, would naturally serve as a joyful time. This however, would not necessitate a commandment to "be completely joyous." We would have been joyous anyway.

Rather the Torah reaches deeper and asks us to recognize that we are really only at ease when we are at peace with our Creator. Having been judged on Rosh Hashanah, and forgiven on Yom Kippur, a Jew serenely enters his sukkah, at peace with his Father in heaven. Only then can he achieve true joy.

The following essays have been written by our staff to help educate and inspire all of us to better appreciate this Season of Joy.

Wishing you a wonderful and joyous Sukkos!

Rabbi Meir Minster Rabbi David Spetner

Sukkos, Uncovered

THE ESSAYS IN THIS BOOKLET EXPLORE SOME OF THE themes which underlie the holiday of Sukkos (the biblical Feast of Tabernacles), its laws, and its customs. Sukkos begins on the fifteenth of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, two weeks after the Jewish New Year and five days after Yom Kippur.

Sukkos

The following is a brief outline of the holiday and its rituals. The highlighted words in the margins of this introduction are vocabulary words, which the reader will encounter while reading this booklet. These words appear beside their definitions; when relevant, they are presented in both singular and plural forms, respectively. (The transliteration of Hebrew words in this booklet follows Ashkenaz—western European—convention; thus "Sukkos," not "Sukkot.")

Sukkos is one of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals described in the Torah. (The others are Passover and Shavuos.) When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, all Jews were commanded to travel there for these holidays and to offer special holiday sacrifices. What we usually refer to as "Sukkos" is actually a fusion of two holidays, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres.

The first of these holidays, Sukkos, lasts one week. Of these seven days, only the first is designated by the Torah as a yom tov, a day on which most constructive and creative labor is prohibited. (In places outside of Israel, two days of yom tov are observed.) The remainder of Sukkos is called Chol Hamo'ed (literally, "the mundane [part] of the festival"), because many restrictions on labor are more relaxed on these days.

yom tov

Chol Hamo'ed

On Sukkos, Jews are commanded by the Torah to live in sukkos, booths (thus the name of the holiday). Many laws govern the construction and use of a sukkah, but the most symbolic requirement is that the roof must be made of plant material which has been detached from the ground but has not yet been made into a functional object. This material is called *s'chach*, a covering. The term *sukkah* is derived from the word *s'chach*.

sukkah (sukkos)

s'chach

Another prominent observance on Sukkos is the taking up of the *Arba'ah Minim*, the Four Species. These consist of a date palm frond (*lulav*), two branches of willow (*aravos*), and three sprigs of myrtle (*hadassim*), which are bound together, as well as a citron (*esrog*). (The Four Species are sometimes referred to collectively as a "Lulav.") These are taken all seven days of Sukkos, except on the Sabbath. In the synagogue, prayers are recited while holding the Four Species, including the Hoshanah service, in which the congregation circles a Torah scroll while carrying the Four Species. Each circuit is called a *hakafah*.

Arba'ah Minim
lulav
aravos
hadassim
esrog

Hoshanah (Hoshanos)

hakafah (Hakafos)

The seventh day of Sukkos is also known as Hoshanah Rabbah, the day of the Great Hoshanah. On this day there is an extended Hoshanah service, and the congregation circles the Torah scroll seven times.

Hoshanah Rabbah

The second holiday, Shemini Atzeres, is a full-fledged yom tov, similar to the first day of Sukkos. However, the Torah does not require the use of a sukkah or the taking of the Four Species on this holiday—proof that Sh'mini Atzeres is a holiday in its own right.

Shemini Atzeres

The annual cycle of reading weekly Torah portions in the synagogue ends and begins anew on Sh'mini Atzeres, and this is commemorated by the celebration of Simchas Torah (Rejoicing of the Torah). In the synagogue, the Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark, and the congregation dances with the scrolls, making seven circuits of the synagogue. In the Diaspora, Sh'mini Atzeres is observed for two days, and Simchas Torah is celebrated on the second of those days.

Simchas Torah

Rabbi Meir Minster

Growing Together

> And you shall take for yourselves on the first day [of Sukkos], a fruit of a tree that is beautiful (*hadar*), branches of date palms, and the branches of a cordlike tree, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the L-rd, your G-d, seven days. (Leviticus 23:40)

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT BEFORE I LEAVE FOR THE store with my wife's shopping list, I always read it over with her. I am no longer surprised to discover that I would have misunderstood many of the items on the list without her explanation.

According to the Midrash (Leviticus Rabbah 30:15) King Solomon expressed a similar feeling when he studied the verse above, which is the source of the mitzvah of taking the Four Species on the holiday of Sukkos. With all his G-d given wisdom, King Solomon wondered how anyone could understand the instructions contained in this command. "Do not all trees produce fruit that is beautiful (*hadar*)? How would one know to take the esrog?" In fact, he found the descriptions of all the four species to be impossibly vague.

King Solomon saw here an example of the wisdom of the Rabbis of Israel, who not only preserved the tradition of the Oral Torah, in which the four Species were clearly identified, but also showed how their true identity could in fact be derived from the written verse. This tradition, dating back to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, connects us to G-d's explanation of His commands.

For example, in the case of the esrog, the Talmud (Sukkah 35a) explains that the word *hadar*, which translates as "beautiful," can also be read as *ha-dar*, which translates as "that dwells." This is a reference to the Esrog, which is unique as a fruit in that it can remain on the tree from year to year. Unlike other fruits, which ripen and eventually fall off the tree by the end of the season, an esrog can remain on the tree for several years, continuing to grow.

The Talmud describes this same phenomenon in another way. The esrog tree is like a corral (*hadir* in Hebrew), in which one would expect to find both older animals and their young offspring. So, too, on the esrog tree—when the small fruits of the new crop arrive, the larger fruits of the previous year's crop are still present.

There is a message here for us in the Torah's choice to identify the esrog by its characteristics rather than simply by its name. A typical tree produces a new crop of fruit each season. The fruits of each year emanate from the same source, the tree, but without any connection to their predecessors. In a symbolic way it can be said that they are on their own. They have no guide for their development, no standard by which to measure their growth. They are there on the tree, alone, to mature in their own way.

The esrog tree represents a better idea. The new fruit develops in an environment surrounded by the fruit of the past years. Their growth can be influenced, so to speak, by the success that is around them. On this tree, the fruits flourish following the standard that has been set before them. In this way there is a connection not only to the past but also to an image of what the future holds.

In Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs), the Jewish people are compared to the esrog. (See Talmud, Shabbos 88a, and Tosofos' commentary there.) As a people we posses this quality that is symbolized by the esrog tree. Our commitment to our tradition and our desire to learn from previous generations are what gives us the ability to grow and what sustains us over the millennia. As King Solomon observed it is only our tradition which allows us to understand what G-d wants from us and how He expects us to conduct our life.

Rabbi David Spetner

Simchas Torah:
Completing the Torah and the First Torah's Completion

Osin seudah l'gomroh shel Torah—We make a festive meal for the completion of the Torah. (Shir Hashirim Rabbah).

THIS MIDRASH IS QUOTED AS THE SOURCE FOR OUR celebration of Simchas Torah. Although Simchas Torah is one of our most joyous holidays, we really need to stand back and think about what we mean by "Completion of the Torah." After all, how do we ever really complete the Torah? Our Torah is *arucha mei'eretz midah*—"Its measure is longer than the earth" (Job 11:9). It is actually infinite, in that it is the manifest expression of G-d's wisdom. Are we not diminishing the Torah, and our never-ending responsibility of its study, by celebrating its conclusion?

Actually, it is precisely because of these concerns that the custom of calling someone to the Torah as *Chosson Bereishis* (literally, the "Groom of Genesis") developed. We immediately begin the Torah again from Genesis to illustrate the continuity of our relationship with the Torah.

But still, why celebrate? Let's just keep on going! The answer, clearly, is that progress has to be incremental. Growth in the Torah needs to be like the steps of a staircase, not like a blind elevator shaft where we can not gauge how far we have risen. When we take stock of how far we've come and want to move further, we need to pat ourselves on the back and celebrate.

This cyclical method of completing the Torah is not just necessary on a personal level to provide for individual growth. It is an integral part of the Jewish people's relationship with the Torah. On the one hand, the Torah is an ongoing spiritual and intellectual project, intertwined with the eternity of the Jewish people. Yet on the other hand,

the authorities who wield it, and the people who study and live it, change with every generation. The Torah of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (author of the Mishnah in the fourth century, C.E.) and the Torah of the Chasam Sofer (nineteenth century authority) are the same Torah, but, thanks to those throughout the generations who have studied it, the Torah has expanded (in quantity, certainly) through both application and discussion.

This handing of the Torah, from one "cycle" of scholars to another, has been happening since Moses conferred the mantle of leadership upon his student, Joshua. According to the commentary *Kli Chemda*, this change in Torah authority may be the source for our custom of honoring a Torah scholar with completing the Torah as *Chosson Torah* ("Groom of the Torah").

The Babylonian Talmud (Bava Basra 15a) quotes a difference of opinion regarding who wrote down the last eight verses in the Torah. These last eight verses begin with the words "*vayamos Moshe*—Moses died." The Talmud says that one of two assumptions must be made about this verse—either Moses did not write it, or he wrote it even though he was still alive. Rabbi Yehuda concludes that the last eight verses were written by Joshua. Rabbi Shimon maintains that Moses indeed wrote these words but wrote them *b'dem'a*, literally "in tears."

An alternative explanation of Rabbi Shimon's opinion is offered by Rabbi Menachem Azarya (sixteenth century century Italian Kabbalist, known as the Rama Mipano), who translates the word *b'dem'a* as having its source in the word *dimu'ah*, which means "mixture." As the Vilna Gaon explains, the Torah existed before our world of people, places, and things. It therefore must have meaning and interpretation beyond our physical world. The Torah, in its essence, says the Gaon, is a series of particular letters capable of being combined in different ways. It has both a hidden, mystical way of being expressed, and a more practical way, which guides our functioning in the physical world. Thus, Moses wrote the last eight verses as an undefined string of letters, as yet unbroken into separate words. In this view, even according to Rabbi Shimon, Yehoshua played a role in the last eight verses: he deciphered the mass of letters that Moses had written into separate words.

The Talmud further quotes a statement, in the name of Rav, that, regarding these last eight verses, *yachid korei osan*, literally "an individual reads them." The Talmud explains that Rav's statement

can be agreed upon by both Rabbi Yehuda (who contends that Joshua wrote them) and Rabbi Shimon (who asserts that Moses wrote them). What, though, does Rav mean by *yachid*, an individual?

The medieval halachic work Mordechai (*Halachos Ketanos* 945) quotes a view that the word *yachid* is a reference to a *Talmid Chacham*, a Torah scholar. Rav is therefore telling us that we should specifically call upon a *Talmid Chacham* to read the last eight verses in the Torah. This can be agreed upon by both Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon, because both agree that Joshua played a role in these final eight verses. That role, however understood, represented the passing of a part of the unique authority of Moses to the scholars of future generations.

On Simchas Torah, as we complete a cycle of our own study of Torah, we call upon a *Talmid Chacham* to act as *Chosson Torah*, symbolizing another cycle in the Torah's travel through the generations.

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis

Welcome, Ushpizin!

NO, NOT AN ISRAELI MOVIE—THE REAL USHPIZIN. THE term *ushpizin* is Aramaic for "guests"—in this case, seven "spiritual guests," who, we are told, visit us on Sukkos: our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David.

If discussing visits by the long-deceased sounds like Hollywood make-believe, we had better spend some time getting to know who or what may really be joining us in the sukkah. We will attempt to clarify the nature and roles of these special guests as well as what we stand to gain from their visits. We also need to determine why these visits take place particularly on Sukkos.

Our starting point must be a better understanding of the sukkah itself.

The Zohar (the primary book of the Kabbalah) is quoted as describing the sukkah as a place of "intense concentration of spiritual energy". The Divine Presence manifests itself in the sukkah in an intensity akin to that of Gan Eden (Garden of Eden / Paradise) where souls of the righteous reside after death. The souls of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and King David are described as taking leave of Gan Eden to partake in the Divine Light of the earthly sukkah.

Commentaries also point to the fact that the first time the term *sukkah* appears in any format is in the Torah in describing the woman we typically refer to as our matriarch Sarah. In Genesis 11:29, Sarah is called Yiskah.[1] Rashi explains that this name describes her ability to "see" with Divine inspiration. Accordingly, the term *sukkah* can be understood to be an environment fitting for, or infused with, prophetic vision.

What makes the sukkah such a holy environment?

In part, it is the attitude of the one who enters the sukkah ready to forego "home as palace" for an abode that draws attention to our dependence on G-d. And particularly at this time of year, having just

1 *Yiskah* and *sukkah* (יסכה and סוכה)share the same Hebrew root (ס-כ-ה).

completed the very intense High Holiday period with its judgment and repentance, one might be tempted to withdraw into a spiritual hibernation. But we give ourselves another booster shot, abandoning the comforts of our materialistic homes to be fully immersed in the mitzvah of Sukkah. We utilize the sukkah as a reminder of how G-d enveloped our ancestors with His Clouds of Glory; He, in turn, infuses our sukkah with a trace of the spiritual glory that was found in those unique clouds. In the writings of the Shelah, the walls of the sukkah are even described as "G-d's embrace". He holds us close—provided we've made ourselves close enough to be held. We can now begin to imagine why the Ushpizin can relate not only to the sukkah, but to sukkah-dwellers, as well.

We can glean further insight into these special visits after getting to know our guests a little better.

The seven Ushpizin are not simply selections from our ancient ancestry. Each of these seven is known for being the epitome of a particular trait. A careful study of each of their lives would reveal how this was an area of particular focus and excellence. A common breakdown of the seven traits is as follows:

Abraham—kindness
Isaac—restraint, strength
Jacob—truth, harmony
Moses—eternality, Torah
Aaron—receptivity to Divine splendor
Joseph—holiness and spiritual foundation
David—establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth

When we absorb the messages of their lives and incorporate their special qualities into our behavior, we begin to bear a resemblance to our spiritual ancestors; they, in turn, better "recognize" us.

Combining all of the above messages, we have the potential to become spiritually elevated—spiritual-*forebears*-related—inhabitants of spiritually-charged sukkos. Let us aspire to accomplish this and thereby welcome the great Ushpizin into sukkos in which they can all feel "right at home!"

Rabbi Chaim Barry

Food for Naught, Food for Thought:
The Transformative Power of the Torah

IF WE COULD USE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE ACtivities involved in all Jewish life-cycle events, I believe it would be food. Yes, food. From a bris to a bar mitzvah, from a wedding to a house of mourning, one will find that the event invariably involves the copious consumption of food. Sounds kind of quirky, doesn't it? After all, here we are celebrating a momentous and spiritual occasion with something so mundane, when instead we should just focus on the elevated aspect of the event. So, why all the fuss over food?

The answer lies in the sukkah, the little hut in which we eat, sleep, and live on a temporary basis during the holiday of Sukkos.

But first we must mention one important idea on which Judaism is based. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk asks a penetrating question which unlocks the understanding of the role which Torah and Mitzvos play in the life of a Jew.

We all pretty much know the story: G-d visits Moses in Midian and He speaks to him through the medium of a burning bush. Moses goes to Egypt, tells Pharaoh to "let my people go," leads the Jews through the Yam Suf (Reed Sea), and eventually reaches his zenith when he ascends Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. All of this takes place while Moses is in constant communication with the Al-mighty, clinging to Him, while simultaneously witnessing the greatest miracles the world had ever seen. There is no doubt that Moses attained a rare state of spiritual perfection, or close to it. The question is, if so, what exactly do the acceptance and fulfillment of the Torah accomplish for him? After all, here is a man who has attained the highest spiritual levels

which are humanly possible, all prior to the acceptance of the binding rules of the Torah, so what could the actual mitzvos have added?

The answer is that there is spirituality and there is spirituality. There are the priests, monks and mystics of most of the world's faiths, who view our world and all of its physical aspects of eating, sleeping, earning a living, marriage, and child-rearing as a complete hindrance to spirituality by definition. In this worldview, the two realms of the physical and spiritual cannot be reconciled. Hence the monastic will sit in complete isolation, in a world of his own, divorced from everything this planet has to offer, all in pursuit of attaining spiritual transcendence. The world is a burden, he feels, and escape from it brings salvation.

Judaism, however, sees no contradiction. The world and its physicality were not created as something to shun, but rather to embrace, elevate, and transform into actual spiritual substance. Those who attain the highest levels in Judaism have the ability to change—in a sense—the earthly substance of food and render it into something fitting for a sacrifice on the altar of the Temple itself. All of this through eating. The mitzvos were given as the tools to create this metaphysical pipeline between our world and the heavens above. Without the Torah we would be forced to shun the world. With the Torah we can now embrace the world through its guidelines. Moses was not the same man after receiving the Torah. He now had the power to convert the physical into the spiritual. And so do we.

What is the connection between this transformative power and the sukkah? In Isaiah (4:6) it is stated, "The sukkah will be for an eternal protection." The Midrash comments on this:

> Rabbi Levi says, "One who fulfills the mitzvah of Sukkah in this world, G-d says regarding him, 'He fulfilled the mitzvah of Sukkah, I will then protect him from the blasting rays of the sun in the next world.'" Rabbi and Resh Lakish said, "The only *Gehinnom* (Hell) in the next world will be *the Day that comes* (a reference to the blasting rays of the sun), which will incinerate evildoers… During that time G-d will create a sukkah for the righteous and protect them inside of it, as it says (Psalms 27:5), 'He will hide me in a sukkah on that horrifying day.'"

This is a very cryptic Midrash, indeed. What is meant by "the Day that comes," and how does the sukkah afford protection from it?

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander explains that "the Day that comes," which will incinerate evildoers, represents the idea that, in the future, the ultimate truth will become known to all of mankind with the utmost clarity, just as the day itself is clear and illuminating, providing light to all of one's surroundings. The evildoers, having now experienced the light and realizing that the truth always had been a life dedicated to G-d, will be overwhelmed with remorse because of the meaningless pursuits which had filled their days while still alive.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler gives the following parable. His father had been a successful merchant in the years preceding the Bolshevik Revolution. When the Bolsheviks took over, he devised a plan to save all of his wealth while fleeing during that most turbulent time. He liquidated all of his assets into Russian rubles and placed all of the money into suitcases with the hope of being able to start over again in a more stable place and time. His entire life lay within those suitcases. But, to his dismay, the Bolsheviks had nullified the existing currency and announced a new ruble. He was devastated.

The same will be with those evildoers who thought they were filling the suitcases of their lives with the best of currencies, only to find out that it was all counterfeit. They, too, will be deeply disappointed. The righteous, however, will find solace in the sukkah, the little hut in which they ate, drank, and slept—all mundane activities, but which were infused with purpose. The sukkah represents all of our physical actions which have been consecrated for the service of G-d. On that day, it will be made clear that in the lives of the righteous there was no futility, because it was through the keeping of the Torah which provided the ultimate meaning in their lives. So when you attend the next Jewish life cycle event, remember that the food which is served is not merely for the purpose of filling our stomachs. Rather it is filling our souls as well, through the celebration taking place then.

May we all merit to sit in the Great Sukkah in Jerusalem next year.

Rabbi Asher Mendelsberg

Some Thoughts on a Jewish Wedding —and the Jewish Calendar

Imagine yourself standing at your son's wedding. Everyone is dancing around with joy as they celebrate his big day. He is smiling ear to ear. With a sense of awe, you reflect on your son's life thus far, and how so many events have culminated in this moment. You still vividly remember racing to the hospital with his mother as she labored with him. His youthful enthusiasm when he told over his first lesson from school. Your son standing tall at the bima *for his bar mitzvah. His proud smile as he walked on stage to receive his high school diploma. You think about how this little baby has truly become a man. He has grown so much as a person and come such a long way to reach this momentous occasion. With all your memories swelling inside you, the moment is really hitting you. The happiness you feel is immense.*

TOO OFTEN, THE DAILY GRIND OF LIFE TAKES HOLD OF our consciousness to the exclusion of all else. Days pass in mirror image of each other and suddenly—"Can it really be Rosh Hashanah already?" With no mental preparation, the holidays pass us by in a blur; and, sadly, we are unable to tap into the emotional and spiritual rejuvenation that are inherent in each one. How can we begin to appreciate the holidays in all of their depth? Perhaps we could do so if we would keep in mind the grand picture of the yearly cycle rather than merely bumping into the holidays as they come along, for, indeed, the Jewish calendar can be viewed as a paradigm for the natural course of man's life, with each holiday representing another significant milestone.

According to Biblical references, the Jewish calendar actually starts with the month of Nissan. Therefore, our holiday timeline begins with Pesach, and consequently our first milestone. And so, in classic Jewish thought, we find that when the Jews left Egypt it was akin to a birth. (See *Horeb* by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh, Edoth 23:165.) After 210 years of hard "labor," the Jewish people emerged like a new child into the world. Natural labor progressively intensifies until the mother is certain she can bear no more; it is at that moment that the child is ready to be born, and suddenly all is calm and there is a new life in the world. So, too, the Egyptians progressively embittered the lives of the Jews, intensifying their work, denying them basic ingredients and tools, assigning impossible tasks, and ultimately, instituting widespread infanticide. Finally, the Jews cried out in pain from the sheer bitterness of their struggle: "The Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out" (Exodus 2:23). *Ohr HaChaim* explains that this was not an organized prayer to G-d, but rather an inarticulate cry of pain; the Jews had reached their breaking point. At that moment, their cries were heard in heaven and the wheels of redemption were set in motion. Shortly thereafter, the Jews were taken out of Egypt with a mighty hand and a new life was brought into the world—the Jewish nation was born!

As the Jews counted down until the monumental day on which they were to receive the Torah, we are taught that this newly-created nation rose to great spiritual heights through self-improvement. They went from the depths of impurity in Egypt—the forty-ninth of fifty levels—to the height of man's potential for holiness prior to their standing at Mount Sinai. How did they do this?

We know that the Omer offering (Leviticus 23:10) is brought from barley, which is animal feed, at the start of the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuos, and culminates with a wheat offering (Leviticus 23:17), food fit for humans, on Shavuos. This symbolizes the Jewish people's coming of age—"becoming men," as we like to say. By refining themselves, in a strict regimen of self-improvement, they rose from a level where they were akin to animals to the greatness that is man's full potential. And it is at this point that we were ripe to receive our mission in life—the mitzvos as transmitted by the Torah. Mazal tov! The Jewish people became bar mitzvah! Just as a young boy at thirteen is formally initiated into his life as a Jew, with all the responsibilities and privileges that it entails, so too, Klal Yisroel for the first time were now G-d's Chosen Nation in the full meaning of the title, with all the responsibilities and privileges of their heritage.

As we continue down our yearly calendar, the next major holiday we encounter is Rosh Hashanah. If one looks through the Rosh

Hashanah *machzor* (a siddur with special prayers used exclusively for a particular holiday), he will find that the main theme of Rosh Hashanah is anointing G-d as our king. On this day, every individual accepts G-d's total sovereignty, and the Rosh Hashanah prayers revolve around this central concept. We decide, and commit, to build our lives around Him, like a bride becoming engaged to her future husband. The Jewish People is now irrevocably engaged to the Holy One, blessed be He, with the same fervent dedication and faithfulness as a bride towards her betrothed.

And then comes the wedding day, Yom Kippur, a day of enormous and vast import—one in which the Talmud Yerushalmi (Bikkurim 3:3) tells us atones for all of the sins we have committed until that day. It is a day of reflection on the past, our childhood, and at the same time a day of anticipation and excitement for what the future holds. One's wedding day and its themes find a parallel in this holiest day of the year, since the day of one's marriage is another day in which one can gain forgiveness for his past sins. Precisely like Yom Kippur, the wedding day is a day of reflection upon the past year and a commitment to make the most of the future. As a bride about to walk down the aisle to her beloved, we reflect on our past with G-d, and we renew our commitment to deepen our relationship with Him and dedicate ourselves towards the future year.

Next comes the holiday of Sukkos. The Sukkah, a hut, bears a striking resemblance to the marriage canopy (*chuppah*). After we have experienced a long wedding day, full of anticipation and excitement, the time has finally come to stand under the *chuppah* and solidify the relationship with our chosen one. And so the Sukkah represents our nation's wedding canopy, joined together with G-d. Many have the custom, based on the Zohar, to invite our forefathers to join us in the Sukkah each of the seven nights we eat in the Sukkah. This custom is known as "Inviting the Ushpizin" and includes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Just as no wedding is complete without family, so, too, our holiday of Sukkos needs to be graced by our illustrious forefathers.

The apex of any wedding is surely the dancing. After the traditional ceremony under the *chuppah*, we come out and dance the husband and wife into their new life together. We watch as the bride and groom dance with their close family and friends. It is a wonderful time for us to step back and be thankful for all that G-d has given us, and to appreciate the wonderful couple and how they have truly grown up.

Simchas Torah is also a time to celebrate the new couple—Klal Yisroel and G-d—and their future together, and this is why we dance! At the same time it is a wonderful opportunity to take stock of all that has been accomplished since the Jewish people's inception. We have gone from a child and grown to become G-d's Chosen People. We have so much for which to be grateful and so much we have accomplished. At the same time, we look forward to a wonderful future together with our beloved One, and our obligation to deepen that relationship year after year. There is no better way to dance the night away than with our holy Torah. We are taught in the Zohar that *Yisroel, v'Oraisa, v'Kud'sha B'rich Hu, chad hu*—the Jewish People, the Torah, and G-d are one. When we dance with the Sefer Torah we are dancing with G-d, with the palpable joy of a bride on her wedding day.

Just as a bride retains some of the enthusiasm, happiness and energy of her wedding day for days, weeks, even months, so too we can capture the energy of Simchas Torah, and essentially the vitality of all of the holidays, to help us spiritually elevate our daily lives. When we view the year as a life cycle that is forever renewing itself, we can hopefully tap into that ever-fresh spiritual energy on a regular basis and use it to transform even the most mundane of days towards a deeper, more mature relationship with G-d. May we all merit to access the inherent spiritual power in all of the holidays and use it to imbue our daily lives with holiness until the next holiday comes along to recharge us.

Rabbi Eli Polsky

Goal!

"Sukkos is the most joyous time of the year."

THAT'S QUITE A BOLD STATEMENT TO MAKE. AFTER ALL, conventional wisdom says that one can not quantify a national "Time of Joy." Joy is an individual and personal feeling.

But the Torah is very definitive:

> On the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Sukkos), when you harvest the land's grain, you shall celebrate a festival to G-d for seven days… You shall rejoice before G-d for seven days. (Leviticus 23: 39-40)

> When you bring in the products of your threshing floor and wine vat, you shall celebrate Sukkos for seven days. You shall rejoice on your festival… Celebrate to G-d for seven days… And you should be only happy. (Deuteronomy 16: 13-15)

The Torah has commanded us no less than three times to make Sukkos a celebration of joy. This is in stark contrast to the other holidays: Shavuos only garners one mention of joy, and Passover gets none. In addition, Sukkos is the only major holiday that the Rabbis refer to as "the time of our joy."

What, in particular, is so joyous about Sukkos? What if one feels more joyful at the Passover Seder as he is recounting the story of the Exodus and recalling all of the miracles that G-d performed for our forefathers? Perhaps one feels more joyous when he stays up all night on Shavuos learning the Torah. Many will feel more joyous on Rosh Hashanah, when they look forward to a fresh and a sweet New Year, or on Yom Kippur, when they feel the relief of erasing all of the mistakes and sins of the previous year. Even if none of the aforementioned holidays elicit joy in one's heart, surely he may claim that he attains a higher level of joy by sitting in his warm, solid house, as opposed to a cold, flimsy Sukkah. And yet, the Torah is informing each and every Jew that, in fact, this is the most joyous time of year! How is this possible?

One of the reasons given as to why the Jewish calendar has an occasional "leap month" (a second Adar) is to ensure that Pesach will always fall in the spring. Why does it matter? After all, at first glance, we would assume that, when setting up the Jewish calendar, the only relevant factor that comes into play is on what day of the month the holiday falls.

The major holidays (Passover, Shavuos and Sukkos) clearly reflect the agricultural cycle in the Land of Israel. Passover is a celebration of the planting season. (This is why it is also known as *Chag HaAviv*, The Holiday of the Spring.). Shavuos always falls seven weeks after Pesach, at about the beginning of the summer. This is an ideal time to start reaping the crops that were planted in the spring (around the time of Pesach). If Pesach is the holiday of planting, than Shavuos is the holiday of reaping. But the farmer's work is far from done. Throughout the summer, the farmer is hard at work; winnowing, threshing, gathering, piling, storing, etc., until, finally, in the fall, the farmer may look around at all that his hard work had accomplished over the last half of a year and sigh in satisfaction. This coincides with the holiday of Sukkos, which is known as "the time of gathering."

But is this really all that the holidays are about? Is it just a physical celebration relating to every step of the agricultural cycle? It feels almost… secular.

The Maharal (*Tiferes Yisroel*, chapter 46) tells us that the physical and spiritual worlds are absolutely linked. What happens in one is reflected within the other. Our spiritual growth cycle follows the physical growth cycle—or rather, in reality, the opposite is true.

Spring is a time for renewal. After a long and dormant winter, man finally begins to rouse himself as, on Pesach, he feels G-d's benevolence shining down upon him. It is a time to free himself from his spiritual bondage, as did his ancestors in Egypt at this time thousands of years ago. Over the next seven week period, he is constantly elevating himself until he will seemingly reach his climax and, on Shavuos, will accept upon himself the Torah. But, just as the farmer knows that reaping the benefits of what he has sown will be for naught unless he sukkessfully processes and stores his grain, so the Jew knows that just accepting the Torah is not enough. He must live its lessons and impress them into his very being.

How so?

Into the calendar steps the lesson of the sukkah. A thin, fragile hut, with a joke of a roof. So seemingly insignificant. And yet… such a powerful representation.

The sukkah represents two seemingly diametrically opposed ideas—man's puniness and insignificance in the grand scheme of things, on one hand, and, paradoxically, G-d's mighty love for him. As he sits in the sukkah, the Jew should reflect that in such booths did his ancestors dwell, exposed to all that the harsh and unforgiving desert could throw his way. If he would not have been traveling with a group, who really would know or care if he had perished in the desert? Similarly, the "mighty" and "powerful" person should reflect on his own mortality, and his own insignificance in the larger scheme of things. What, ultimately, would prevent a calamity from happening that may strip him of his wealth, power, health, and life? Which man has enough influence to prevent "acts of G-d," which acts have the ability to wipe out towns, cities, or even large swaths of countries? The sukkah serves as a cold, sobering splash of reality on our otherwise arrogant, self-centered, dreaming faces.

On the other hand, the sukkah commemorates and represents the clouds of glory that G-d provided to our ancestors in the desert. It is true that the physical tents that they dwelled in offered little in the way of protection from the world. However, enveloped within G-d's spiritual hug they could walk with their heads held up high, without any worries.

The sukkah speaks to us, their descendants, telling us that we, too, should not worry. Indeed, we should be joyful. As surely as a father carries his fragile child upon his shoulders when they encounter a path covered with sharp thorns and thistles, so, too, does G-d carry us upon His shoulders, especially in troubled times. And, like the famous saying goes, while the child may look back and only see one set of footprints on the ground behind him, he must know that they are, in fact, his father's prints. The child's feet have yet to touch the dangerous ground.

Based on these ideas, the Sfas Emes (the second Rebbe of the Chasidim of Gur) explains that Sukkos is the culmination of the cycle of the Three Festivals. On Passover, the Jew gains his freedom in order to "plant the seeds" of that which will eventually bloom into his accepting the yoke of G-dly service. After seven weeks of nurturing these saplings, he reaches the stage where he may "reap that which he had planted." He is now ready to accept the Torah. Once he has the Torah in his hands, he may begin to internalize its lessons and to work on that which he has harvested, until finally he is ready to bring it to market and present to G-d all that he has worked on over the past six months.

And so Sukkos truly is "The Time of Joy." Just as the farmer may finally rejoice once he has completed all of his labors and sees that they have indeed bore fruit, so, too, the Jew may rejoice and celebrate as he sees that he has sukkessfully solidified his commitment to G-d, and has completed his own personal mission.

Rabbi Cobi Robinson

The Transforming Love of Sukkos

WE ARE INTRODUCED TO THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOS WITH the following commandment:

> *"Ul'kachtem lachem bayom harishon…"* Take for yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows. (Leviticus 23:40).

Our Rabbis, however, have the following novel interpretation:

> *"Ul'kachtem lachem bayom harishon"—rishon l'cheshbon ha'avonos.* "Take for yourselves on the first day"—the first day of accounting for your sins. (Midrash Tanchuma Emor 22)

What does it mean that Sukkos is the first day of this accounting? Haven't we been involved in repentance and an accounting since Rosh Hashanah?

CERTAINLY, THE DEFINING FEATURE OF THE HIGH HOLIdays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) is the *teshuva* process. *Teshuva* is generally translated as "repentance," but, more accurately, it should be defined as "returning," the process of coming back to G-d and to our real selves after a year that didn't live up to our true potential.

The Babylonian Talmud (Yoma 86b) lists two levels of *teshuva*: *teshuva me'ahava* and *teshuva miyir'a*. The lower level, *miyir'a*, is returning to G-d merely out of fear of punishment and a worry about the ramifications of our sins. The higher and more selfless level of returning, *me'ahava*, is *teshuva* out of love for G-d. This is returning out of a desire to mend the rift and renew the closeness to G-d that we felt before sinning.

TESHUVA IS NOT ONLY THE DEFINING FEATURE OF THE High Holidays, *it is the principal theme of the entire month of Tishrei*. It is critical to understand that the month of Tishrei does not contain two separate sets of holidays, one set being Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, days of repentance, and the second being Sukkos through Shemini Atzeres, days of joy and celebration. Rather, it is one continuum: We start our *teshuva* journey with Rosh Hashanah and reach our destination at the end of Sukkos, with the holiday of Shemini Atzeres.[1]

Generally, *teshuva* done during the High Holidays is due to fear. We return to G-d as a result of an awesome awareness that we are standing for judgment before "Our Father, our King," and the fear of His impending decision, a decision which will determine our lives and the lives of our families for the upcoming year.

The holiday of Sukkos, however, is a time of *teshuva* due to love. Once the final shofar blast is blown at the end of Yom Kippur, and we have broken down the barriers separating us from G-d, we run to His embrace. Sitting in the sukkah completely under G-d's shelter, one of only a few mitzvos that can be performed with the entire body, is an expression of this closeness.

This understanding should answer the popular question asked by our commentators: Why is Sukkos placed in the calendar right after Yom Kippur? After all, if this holiday commemorates the huts which protected us in the desert after the exodus from Egypt, shouldn't Sukkos follow Pesach instead?

The answer is that Sukkos has a direct link to the High Holidays. Only after being cleansed of our sins on Yom Kippur are we fit for the embrace of Sukkos and the intimacy of Shemini Atzeres. This explains, as well, why Sukkos is referred to in our prayers as "The Holiday of Joy." After all, what greater happiness is there than total forgiveness and a renewed closeness to G-d?

THE TALMUD REFERENCED ABOVE (YOMA 86B) EXPLAINS that *teshuva* due to fear converts our transgressions into accidental sins, but the higher form of return, due to love, transforms them into actual

1 "Draw me, we will run after you! The King has brought me into His chambers, we will rejoice and be glad in you (*bach*)." (Song of Songs 1:4) The numerical value of "in you" (*bach*) is twenty-two, a reference to the twenty-second day of Tishrei, which is Shemini Atzeres. On this day, after months of remoteness from G-d, we have finally bridged the gap and are invited in for an intimate meeting with the King in His private chambers.

mitzvos.[2] The mechanics of this Talmudical teaching alone are worthy of elaboration, but it takes on a whole new meaning when understood in light of the following insight of the Vilna Gaon.

The Mishnah (Ethics of the Fathers 3:1) states, "Look at three things and you will not come to sin… And know in front of Whom you will eventually give judgment (*din*) and an accounting (*cheshbon*)." What is the difference between judgement and an accounting?

The Vilna Gaon, in *Sh'nos Eliyahu*, explains that the judgement will be on sins committed during one's lifetime, and the accounting will be of all the mitzvos one *could have performed* during the time wasted doing those sins.

Putting together the above Talmud (Yoma 86b) with the Vilna Gaon's interpretation of the Mishnah, we can derive the following:

If one does *teshuva* due to fear, his transgressions are converted to accidental sins, and, therefore, he will no longer have to stand in *judgment* for them *because in retrospect he didn't commit any*—they are deemed to have been accidents. However, he will still have to offer an *accounting*, because he will be accountable for not performing any mitzvos during that time.

However, if one does *teshuva* out of love, his sins are transformed into mitzvos. If so, not only will he be able to avoid *din* on the Day of Judgment, he won't even have to offer an accounting—*he's not accountable for the mitzvos he could have performed while sinning, because those sins themselves count as mitzvos!*

AS ESTABLISHED ABOVE, THE *TESHUVA* MOST OFTEN done during the High Holidays is due to fear. This teshuva will be strong enough to make our transgressions into accidents. Therefore, by the time Yom Kippur is over, we will have successfully removed our *judgement*—it is as if we had not sinned. But we will still have to render an *accounting* for not doing mitzvos during that time. Only through the *teshuva* due to love on Sukkos, and its powers to transform our sins into mitzvos, will we have successfully removed the need to offer an *accounting*, as well.[3]

We can now understand the Midrash cited above: "'Take for yourself on the first day'—the first day of the *accounting* of your sins." With the transformative power of the *teshuva* out of love that is exclusive to Sukkos, we are introduced to our first opportunity to not only remove the judgement for our previous sins but even the accounting—and it becomes "*the first day* of the accounting of our sins."

May we all merit to do *teshuva me'ahava*.

2 The verse says, "Confess your sins and return your guilt to be before you." What does it mean to "return your guilt before you?" R' Dovid Deutsch (*Chasam Sofer* on Psalm 51) answers based on the Gemara (Avodah Zara 5a) that says that one's mitzvos *preceed* him to the Day of Judgment but his sins *follow* him. If one does *teshuva* out of love and his sins turn into mitzvos, his sins will shift from behind him to be in front of him, thereby literally "returning his guilt *to be before him*."

3 It is interesting to note that on Rosh Hashanah we do Tashlich and throw our sins *into* the water, whereas on Sukkos the Nisuch Hamayim (water libation) was preformed in the Temple, where water *was drawn from* a river. Perhaps we are trying to retrieve our sins, to convert them into mitzvos with the *teshuva* out of love that we do on Sukkos.

Rabbi Yitzie Stern

The Lulav:
Cause for Happiness or Heartache?

SUKKOS IS PORTRAYED AS ONE OF THE HAPPIEST TIMES in the Jewish calendar. Indeed, we refer to it as "the time of our joy" in the liturgy. We feast, dance, and live the good life in our temporary dwellings. But, taking a closer look at some basic holiday customs, the reason for our joy may not be so clear.

The Mishnah in Maseches Sukkah (41a) states:

> Originally, the lulav was waived in the Beis Hamikdash (Temple) for seven days and elsewhere for only one day. Once the Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai decreed that the lulav should be waved everywhere for a full seven days as a memorial for the Temple.

Where's the happiness here? Our present custom of daily lulav waiving is an outgrowth of the Temple's destruction. Wouldn't the constant reminder of paradise lost serve to dampen our spirit?

This same question can be raised in regard to another hallmark of Sukkos, the *Simchas Beis Hashoeiva*.[1] So special was this event during the Temple era that regarding it, we mention in the Mussaf of Yom Kippur: "Fortunate is the eye that saw all this. But to even hear of it makes our souls depressed." Our watered-down substitute for the real thing should bring us to tears, not to rejoicing!

The *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 560-561) lists a number of customs that were instituted after the Temple's destruction to remind us constantly of our loss. Examples include tearing one's clothing when seeing the Temple Mount, setting an empty place at a lavish feast, and leaving a small portion of one's new home unfinished. These are to specifically aid in demonstrating our current, sub-optimal state and thus, appropriately, soften even our most joyous moments. If our Sukkos customs are supposed to generate the same feelings, how are we to celebrate and mourn at the same moment?

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE. SOME people work better with positive motivation. Positive motivation is effectively created by offering an incentive. Others can be better influenced by negative motivation. A negative motivator could be a punishment applied whenever one steps out of line. The following anecdote can serve to illustrate:

> A wealthy and eccentric business tycoon threw a dinner party for all his friends. During the course of the evening, the wealthy man offered an odd proposal to his guests: "I have an Olympic size swimming pool downstairs," he said. "If anyone can swim across in record time, I will grant him any request!" Odd as it was, the offer piqued the curiosity of even the most nonathletic and they all followed the host down to the pool.
>
> The room was dark as the guests tensely gathered round. When the host threw open the lights, there was a collective "Gasp!" as they noticed a school of man-eating piranhas swimming in the water! Realizing that this had been a crude practical joke, they all turned around to go back upstairs. Suddenly they heard a loud splash! They swung around and saw one of the guests flying across the pool with the piranhas nipping closely at his heels. He swiftly made it to the other side and dragged himself out with mild injury.
>
> The host broke the stunned silence. "I had not seriously intended for anyone to take me up on my offer. But I am a man of my word. What is your request? Money? Real estate? Prestige?" The guest shook his dripping head sternly. "All I want," the guest began slowly, "is to know....who pushed me in the pool!"

Some people swim to get to the other side. Others swim only to get away from what's behind. Most, however, need a combination of both motivational techniques applied at appropriate intervals.

These motivational methods can help account for the apparent contradiction in our holiday customs. Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon[2]

1 Nightly celebrations filled with song and dance, commemorating celebrations of the same name which took place in the Temple.

2 *Sefer Matnas Chayim*, Mo'adim, Vol. 1, essay 6

explains that there are really two forms of necessary commemorations for the Temple.

One is called *zecher* ***l'churban***, commemorating the destruction of the Temple. This includes the list of practices cited above (from *Shulchan Aruch,* O. C. 560-561), all of which convey a message of deprivation. They help us realize the void that was left in the wake of the destruction and keep us focused on working for its return.

The other form is called *zecher* ***l'mikdash***, a commemoration of a ritual once performed in the Temple. These customs give us a taste of the holiness and spiritual elevation that were once readily apparent and available when the Temple stood. Once we have a taste, we will naturally crave more and focus on hastening the redemption. The customs we perform on Sukkos fall into this latter category.[3] We reenact the rituals and reignite our spirit with the hope that we will be hungry for more.

While remembering the destruction, we are mourning the past. But on Sukkos, when we sing, dance, and wave, we are really catching a glimpse of the future. Even though it may seem distant, we have faith in G-d's promise that He will soon redeem us and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash. That's certainly something to be happy about!

3 It is therefore appropriate that these customs are not included in Shulchan Aruch, O. C. 560-561.

Thank you!

To Shmuel Plotsker, for your editorial assistance.

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