

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

HOLIDAY INSIGHTS

Short Divrei Torah on Succos, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

WELCOME HOME

Baal Shem Tov

A king sent his precious son to other kingdoms to acquire wisdom and experience. The prince traveled far, squandering his wealth on newly discovered pleasurable excesses. He wound up lonely and penniless in a region so distant that nobody had heard of his father.

Struggling for survival, he longed for home. The journey home was arduous, but when the king saw his long-lost son returning in genuine remorse, he forgave the prince for his errant choices and embraced him with passionate love.

We are G-d's children. He sends our souls on distant journeys into corporeal bodies to study Torah and perform *mitzvot* so we can earn an unprecedented ascent. We grow corrupted through love for our bodies, money, and human cravings. Our immersion in pleasures leaves our souls terribly distanced from G-d - where He is not recognized. Our souls forget their former spirituality, becoming impoverished spiritually and materially, a condition aggravated by our protracted exile.

When a Jew suddenly returns to G-d, as we do during Tishrei, G-d's mercy erupts at the sight of His lost beloved son. G-d absolves our waywardness on Yom Kippur, and He warmly embraces us during Sukkot. As our Sages state on the verse (Vayikra 23:40), "Take [the *lulav*] for yourselves on the first day...": "This is 'the first day' for reckoning sins," because our record was cleansed on Yom Kippur. G-d embraces us, enveloping us with the sukkah walls and the *sechach*, as it is stated, "His right arm embraced me" (Shir HaShirim 2:6).

GREATER THAN SEEING

Kotzker Rebbe

Some people say they've seen the *Ushpizin*. I don't see them, but I believe they are in my sukkah. And believing is greater than seeing!

PROTECTING OUR SPARK

Sefas Emes

Every Jew has within him an inner spark of Godliness that is rekindled every year during the High Holy Days. Such a frail spark needs protection, and the sukkah provides it.

It was to this spark that the Psalmist referred in the promise (29:11), ה' עז לעמו יתן, Hashem will give strength to His people.

SPEND WISELY

Rabbi Shalom Eisen

Rabbi Shalom Eisen was a noted expert in the laws that determine the *kashrus* of the Four Species. Therefore, hundreds of people would come to his home before Succos to have him inspect the *lulavim* and *esrogim* they had bought for the holiday, to make sure there was no blemish that would render the precious ritual items unfit for use.

One year it happened that a young man brought a magnificent *esrog* for inspection. Rabbi Eisen examined the *esrog* very closely. Then he said, "This *esrog* is not for someone like you."

The man was shocked, since he had thought the *esrog* was perfect. "What is wrong with it?" he asked.

"What do you do?" asked Rabbi Eisen.

The young man explained that he learned Torah full time, for which he received a small stipend.

"And how much will you have to pay for this *esrog*?"

When the young man named an astronomical figure, Rabbi Eisen shook his head. "If you want my advice, don't buy this *esrog* even though it's truly magnificent. Instead, buy an *esrog* that is much cheaper and with the balance of the money that you were going to spend, buy your wife a new dress. That would truly be a way to honor Yom Tov." (L. Astaire)

A HUG FROM HASHEM

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

On Succos, we demonstrate our gratitude to Hashem for His care toward our ancestors as they left Egypt, specifically, for providing them with the Clouds of Glory which offered miraculous protection.

The Chida explains that unlike the miracle of the manna which fell every day, or Miriam's well which followed the Jewish People to provide them with water at all times, the Clouds of Glory were not actually a necessity. For, while the Jewish People would have been unable to survive without food or water in the desert for forty years, they could have survived without the Clouds of Glory.

Therefore, by providing the Jewish People with this luxury, Hashem was showing them that He was not merely keeping them alive due to His promise to Avraham that his children will become a great Nation (Bereishis 12:2), but because He loved them and wanted the best for them in every situation.

Therefore, Succos specifically is the time to demonstrate our happiness, gratitude, and appreciation in the knowledge that just as Hashem loved our ancestors thousands of years ago, He loves us in exactly the same way today. (Although there is a *mitzvah* to be joyous on every festival, Succos is the only festival we call "*zman simchaseinu*" - the time of our rejoicing.)

In fact, the Arizal hinted toward the link between Succos and Hashem's love for us when detailing the minimum *halachic* requirement of a sukkah: two full walls and a third partial wall (Sukkah 6b) - which he depicted as Hashem embracing those in the sukkah (an outstretched arm angled to one side and then coming around to form a hug) - to show that when we dwell in the sukkah, we should feel Hashem's love, protection, and warm embrace. (Based on the verse (Shir HaShirim, 8:3) which refers to Succos, "Hashem's right arm embraces me.")

Furthermore, the sukkah itself is referred to as the "Shade of Emunah" to further demonstrate the immense love and care that we are to feel in the sukkah (Zohar, 3:103b).

To emphasize this message, Rav Noach Weinberg would say that just as Hashem is infinitely greater than any of His creations, so too, His love for us is infinitely greater - even more than a parent could possibly love his only child. (In fact, he would tell his young children every night before bed: "You know how much Ima and Abba love you? Well Hashem loves you even more!")

This message is crucial for us to internalize, especially in our generation where so many struggle to recognize and feel Hashem's love for them. So much so, that Rav Yitzchak Berkovits often says that if the Rambam was writing his Thirteen Principles of Faith today, he would add another one near the top, requiring everyone to believe with perfect faith that Hashem loves them!

GOING ALL IN

Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa

The *mitzvah* of sukkah is the most wonderful of all *mitzvos*. Matzah you eat with your mouth, *tefillin* you put on your arm, *shofar* you hear with your ears, Torah you study with your eyes and mind, but the sukkah! You go in completely, even with your boots!

FREE FROM PAIN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

There is a halacha that "מצטער פטור מן הסוכה" - One who feels pain (or discomfort) is exempt from sitting in the sukkah."

Aside from the normal interpretation, perhaps Chazal are teaching us something more: "מצטער" - A person who finds himself in distress, "פטור" - is able to free himself, both mentally and physically. How? "מן הסוכה" - by correctly performing the *mitzvah* of sukkah!

FAITH ALL YEAR ROUND

Satmar Rebbe

The Gemara (Sukkah 26a) learns from the *pasuk* that one should dwell in his sukkah for the seven days of Yom Tov just as he dwells in his house all year.

But it goes both ways: A person must always remember to dwell in his house with the same *kedushah* (holiness) and respectful attitude that he has while living in his sukkah. Just as he dwells in the "Shelter of Faith" for seven days, he must incorporate *emunah* in his home all year round.

NO ULTERIOR MOTIVES

Vilna Gaon

One year there was a dearth of *esrogim*, and the Vilna Gaon was disturbed that he would not be able to fulfill the *mitzvah*. He told his *talmidim* to search Vilna, and if they should find an *esrog*, to agree to whatever price would be asked.

The *talmidim* found a wealthy man who had an *esrog*, but he would not sell it for any amount of money. "However," he said, "if the Gaon will relinquish to me the reward for the *mitzvah*, he can have the *esrog*."

The *talmidim* had been told to agree to any price, so they agreed. When they reported this to the Gaon, he was overjoyed.

"We are not supposed to do *mitzvos* for reward," he said, "but it's difficult to dismiss the reward from our minds. Now that the reward will go to someone else, I can perform the *mitzvah* wholeheartedly."

FULL-BODY EXPERIENCE

Dubner Maggid

Rabbi Yaakov ben Wolf Kranz, better known as the Dubner Maggid, was a brilliant speaker who used parables - many of which were humorous - to explain deep concepts in Jewish thought and practice. In the parable that follows, Rabbi Yaakov expounds upon the words "And rejoice in your feast" (Devarim 16:14), which our Sages have interpreted to mean that we should partake of delicious foods and drink, and wear special festive clothing on our holidays.

There was a lame man who was very unhappy because he was unable to leave his home. He had a friend who was able-bodied, but this person was deaf. One day it occurred to the lame man that if the two of them joined forces, life would be better for both of them.

"If you'll carry me on your shoulders, I'll act as our guide and do all the talking," he said.

The deaf man agreed to the plan, and things were going well until they came upon a place where some beautiful music was being played. The lame man loved music, and so he wanted to linger and listen. But the deaf man, who couldn't hear a note, was impatient to go on their way.

The resourceful lame man reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small bottle of gin, which was topped by a small cup. He filled the little cup with the liquor and offered it to the deaf man, who was happy to pause in their journey to drink the gin. The lame man poured out another cup, and then a third one. By then, the deaf man was a little tipsy and more than happy to remain where he was. Indeed, he began to dance to an inner music that only he could hear. In this way, the lame man was able to enjoy the music and even "dance" atop the deaf man's swaying shoulders.

So, too, is it with us, says the Maggid of Dubno. The *neshamah* (soul) longs for spiritual delights, but it can only be joyous if the *guf* (body) is also happy. Therefore, we gladden the body with good food and fine clothes, so that it will cooperate with the soul and allow us to fully rejoice on our holidays. (L. Astaire)

COME ONE, COME ALL

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

The Rebbe Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev used to invite simple, unlearned people into his sukkah. "In *Shamayim* there will be a sukkah with all the Tzaddikim in it," he explained. "I will try to push my way in, but the guard at the door will say, 'You don't belong here with the Tzaddikim.'"

"I had simple, unlearned people in my sukkah," I will answer. '*Middah keneged middah*, I deserve to go in.'"

HUGGED BY HASHEM

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

Take a moment to picture being estranged from a loved one for an extended amount of time. By the good grace of G-d, at long last, you are now reunited. You were never sure you would see this day. Now picture the warm embrace, the deep tearful hug between you and that loved one. No words, no pleasantries are necessary; the overwhelming desire to connect is brought to life by that long hug.

Shortly after the most momentous event in Jewish history, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the nation of Israel sinned with the Golden Calf. This was an idolatrous act, nothing short of treason against the Almighty Himself. This act was so severe that our leader, Moshe, broke the *Luchos*, the Tablets, which were written for Israel by the Hand of G-d. The Jewish future seemed doomed right at the start; but this was not the case.

G-d forgave the nation and Moshe delivered a second set of Tablets; the Jews were then instructed to build the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle. The nation of Israel was restored to its former glory.

Through our calendar, we relive these events year after year. Throughout the year the community errs and estranges themselves from G-d. On the anniversary of the deliverance of the second set of *Luchos* we celebrate Yom Kippur. That day is immortalized as a national day of penitence, a day for us to reconnect to our Creator.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, in his expansive *halachic* work *Aruch Hashulchan*, explains that our calendar reenacts the events following Yom Kippur as well.

After the Jewish People were pardoned, they built the *Mishkan*, a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence. The building of the *Mishkan* at that specific time represented a renewed connection to the Almighty. It showed Israel that they were not estranged; the Jewish People can cleave to G-d.

Following Yom Kippur, we too are in a renewed spiritual place. No longer sullied by our deficient activity throughout the year, we may invite the *Shechinah* back into our lives. We build our own *Mishkan*, the sukkah. There we can bask once again in the embrace of G-d.

The mitzvah to *live* in the sukkah is unique. We do not directly engage with the mitzvah. Rather, we are surrounded by the mitzvah. One does not need to come in physical contact with the sukkah, rather, merely being and living in the airspace within the walls and under the *s'chach* of the sukkah is how we observe this mitzvah. We are, in a way, completely submerged in the mitzvah.

The mitzvah, by design, seems to represent an embrace, an encompassing hug. After Yom Kippur, we can come home and relish the embrace of G-d.

CHILD OF HASHEM

Rebbe Nachman

It is written, “For Israel is a child and I love him” (Hoshea 11:1). Love is an embrace - an embrace with the right hand (cf. Shir HaShirim 2:6, 8:3). This embrace is the sukkah.

On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the Jew enters into an aspect of, “Behold, a child was crying, and she had mercy on him.” Then on Sukkot, he can enter the category of, “For Israel is a child and I love him” - the sukkah. (See Sichot HaRan # 87)

SHINING IN THE SUKKAH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Every native-born Israelite shall dwell in the Succos...” (Vayikra 23:42)

The commandment to sit in a sukkah for seven days is immediately followed with the words quoted above. Rashi translates the word *eizrach* as a “native resident.” What is the significance of the word “native”? Why does the Torah specify that only a native son of the Jewish people should perform the *mitzvah* of sukkah?

Rav Yehoshua Asher Rabinowitz zt”l of Perisov, son of the Yid Hakadosh, Rav Yaakov Yitzchak of P’shischa zt”l, understands the word *eizrach* in a totally different light.

He states that this *pasuk* is a *remez*, a hidden allusion, to those Jews who have not yet entered into the service of *Hashem Yisbarach*. It is a reference to the one upon whom the sun has yet to shine (*zarach ha’shemesh*), a person who has just recently accepted upon himself to follow the ways of Hashem with all of his heart.

After the repentance of Yom Kippur, many Jews are now true *ba’alei teshuvah* and feel the urge to serve Hashem. The *pasuk* is in future tense to show that it’s a look to the future.

In other words, a Jew who accepts upon himself that from today and on he will begin to shine (*zarach*) in the service of Hashem is assured that he will merit the *mitzvah* of sukkah. He will be graced from Heaven to sit in a *sukkas shalom* - “a complete (perfect) booth.”

This is a clear reference to the sukkah of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who shines His holy light from above on those who serve Him properly.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DECOR

Divrei Chaim of Sanz

People are accustomed to decorate their sukkah with all kinds of beautiful adornments. But the beauty of my sukkah is different: *Tzedakah* - charity, that is what makes my sukkah beautiful!

GUESTS OF HONOR

Divrei Chaim of Sanz

Succos was just a few days away. Everywhere in Sanz, children were busy decorating their family’s sukkah, beautifying the humble walls with their homemade artistic creations and hanging apples and other fruits from the leafy roof.

The children of Reb Chaim of Sanz also wanted to decorate their sukkah. They therefore asked their father for a few coins, so that they could go to the market and purchase what they needed. But Reb Chaim was very busy. During the days before the holiday, many people came to him with their *esrogim* and *lulavim* and asked him to check them, to ensure they were kosher and useable for the upcoming holiday. The poor folk of the town came as well, with their requests for help with buying meat and wine for the holiday meals, or new clothing and shoes for their children. In other words, there was always a steady stream of visitors who had to be taken care of. He therefore told his children to return later. Later. And, again, later.

Finally, it was Erev Succos and the children still hadn’t bought their decorations. Since the holiday would begin that night, the children decided that this time they wouldn’t take “later” for an answer. They went to their father and repeated their request. Reb Chaim reached into the drawer where he kept his money, but there was nothing there. He had given away every last coin that he possessed to the poor Jews of the town!

He tried to explain to his disappointed children that giving charity was a great *mitzvah*, but the children refused to be consoled. They couldn’t imagine how they could be joyous in a sukkah that didn’t have any beautiful decorations.

“We will have a beautiful sukkah. Don’t worry,” Reb Chaim told them.

Yom Tov finally arrived. The children watched their mother light the Yom Tov candles, and then they waited impatiently for Reb Chaim to come home from synagogue. When he finally arrived, he called to his children to come with him to the sukkah and they eagerly followed.

“Here are our decorations,” he said, nodding his head in the direction of three very poor men who were dressed in brand new clothes, courtesy of Reb Chaim’s charitable fund. “They are joining us for the Yom Tov meal.”

The three guests smiled at the children. Their happiness at being invited to the Rebbe’s sukkah filled the little booth with such a radiant light that the Sanzer Rebbe’s children forgot their earlier disappointment. Instead, they wholeheartedly agreed that when it came to beautifying a sukkah, guests were the best decorations of all. (L. Astaire)

BREAKING THE EGO

Rebbe Nachman

One of the ways of breaking your pride is by honoring the festivals properly and celebrating them with joy and delight, with delicacies and fine clothes, whatever you can afford. (See Likutey Moharan I, 135).

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

When Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi *zt'l* began to disseminate his teachings, many young men flocked to him and became his ardent followers, despite the prevailing opposition to the *chassidic* movement. They found that *chassidus* injected a new vitality and joy into serving Hashem that was lacking in traditional Judaism.

Among the newly converted *chassidim* were two sons of a leading Torah scholar of the time.

One day, they approached the Ba'al HaTanya with a dilemma that had been on their minds for some time:

Should they attempt to win their father over to the *chassidic* approach to serving Hashem, as they found it spiritually fulfilling, or was he too set in his ways to change his lifestyle?

"Tell me," asked the Rebbe, "does your eminent father perform *mitzvos* with joy?"

"Every year," related one of the sons in reply, "when we finish building our sukkah, our father climbs onto a bench and kisses every piece of the *s'chach*."

"In that case," said the Ba'al HaTanya, "don't worry. He's fine just the way he is!"

LOVING UNDERSTANDING

Rebbe Nachman

The *mitzvah* of waving the Four Species brings about a revelation of holy understanding; we realize that "the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Yeshayahu 6:3) and we can see G-dliness everywhere, even in the languages of the non-Jews.

People on every level, even the lowest, come to acknowledge G-d and draw closer to Him.

This *mitzvah* helps us bind our heart to the knowledge of G-d, and in this way bring the heart under our control. This is what brings us to love G-d - and through loving G-d we show the truest love to ourselves.

Then we can rise to receive the light of the love which is in holy understanding. This is the "hidden light" stored up for the righteous. Through glimpsing it, the hidden tzaddikim and the hidden Torah are revealed, and abundant peace spreads forth in the world. (See Likutey Moharan I, 33)

THE TASTIEST OF FISH

Reb Shmuel Abba of Zichlin

It was just a few days before Succos, and there was no fish anywhere in Zichlin. The people weren't unduly worried, however. There was a tzaddik living in their midst, Reb Shmuel Abba. Surely, in his merit something would happen at the last minute - a miracle, if need be - and the stalls of the fish sellers would be filled with plump and tasty fresh fish.

Reb Shmuel Abba was not so sure. Every day, when he returned home from synagogue after the Morning Prayer Service, he asked his wife, the Rebbetzin, "Did you go to the market? Were you able to buy fish?" When she replied in the negative, a worried look obscured the Rebbe's usually cheerful face.

"How can we have the holiday meal without fish?" he asked.

His Rebbetzin had no reply.

Yom Tov arrived. The looked-for miracle didn't occur. There still wasn't any fish to be had in all of Zichlin.

Still, after Maariv, Rebbe Shmuel Abba, accompanied by several of his *chassidim*, entered his sukkah with his customary joy. He complimented his wife on the beautifully set table, but then added, "My dear, you have set the table with just one plate and fork. Where is the plate and fork for the fish course?"

"Rebbe, there is no need," said one of the guests. "This year there isn't any fish."

Reb Shmuel Abba paid no heed to those words. Instead, he asked that fish plates and forks be brought to the sukkah. "And don't forget the liquor for the *l'chayim*!"

The plates and forks were brought to the sukkah and distributed. Reb Shmuel Abba's family and guests waited expectantly for what was going to happen next. After all, of what use was a fish plate if there wasn't any fish? If Reb Shmuel Abba had requested a fish fork, it could only be because there was going to be a piece of fish to put on it.

But if the group thought that dozens of freshly cooked fish were going to start dropping miraculously from the sky, they were mistaken. After Reb Shmuel Abba made the blessings over the wine and the challah, and everyone had been served a slice of bread, he began to speak. He spoke about all the times that fish are mentioned in the Torah, as well as all the times that fish are mentioned in the Talmud. He then turned to the Zohar and other kabbalistic works and spoke about the hidden, mystical significance of fish. Finally, he wove together all the threads of his discourse and proved, as though by then there was any doubt, why fish was so important for a Yom Tov meal. Then, when he had finished speaking, he cheerfully called for the fish plates and forks to be taken out of the sukkah, and for everyone to pour some of the liquor into their glasses for a *l'chayim*.

As they all raised their glasses, he said, with an elated smile, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, thank you for giving us the most delicious fish in the world. *L’chayim!*”

“*L’chayim!*” the others replied with enthusiasm. Indeed, everyone who was in that sukkah that night agreed that never in their lives had they tasted such delicious “fish.” (L. Astaire)

PURITY OF HEART

Rebbe Nachman

The merit of the *mitzvah* of sukkah brings purity of heart. When your heart is pure it is easy to express yourself before G-d. You will always find new and original words and prayers. (See Likutey Moharan I, 156)

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“*The Festival of Ingathering, at the close of the year, when you gather in [the fruits of] your labor from the field...*” (Shemos 23:16)

This *pasuk* correlates each of the Three Festivals to a specific period of the agricultural cycle. Pesach is called “Festival of Spring” (when the fields are planted); Shavuot is called “Festival of Reaping”; and Succos is known as “Festival of Ingathering (Harvest).”

The Maharal zt”l elaborates on this relationship between the festivals and working the land. There are three points of contact between an emissary and his dispatcher: the moment he is appointed to his mission; when his task is completed; and when he returns to the one who sent him to inform him that he has completed the mission.

On Pesach, *Bnei Yisrael* became Divine agents charged with the task of becoming a nation worthy of being chosen by the Almighty. On Shavuot, with the acceptance of the Torah, we became this “Chosen Nation.” Succos, writes R’ Yitzchak Hutner zt”l (Pachad Yitzchak), is when we, *Klal Yisrael*, return to our Sender - our Creator - and tell Him, “We have accomplished the task. We are prepared to return what we have harvested for You, the Master of the World.”

The beauty of Succos is that it crowns both the *shalosh regalim* (Three Festivals), as well as the *Yamim Nora’im*. It is the moment when we report back to Hashem, with hearts filled with joy and overflowing song, that we have completed our mission and are looking forward to representing the Almighty once again in the future.

This particular joy extends from the depths of the overflowing heart of the *baal teshuvah* after the season of repentance, to the essence of the days of Mashiach, when we will walk proudly with our *lulav* and *esrog* and proclaim eloquently the victory of *Klal Yisrael*.

BEYOND NATURE

Rebbe Nachman

The festival days cry out, proclaim and reveal Divine will, which rules over all. There is no such thing as the “inevitability of nature.” Every festival commemorates the awesome signs and miracles that G-d performed on our behalf - all of them contrary to nature.

Pesach commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Shavuot recalls the Giving of the Torah. And on Sukkot we remember the Clouds of Glory that surrounded us in the desert. Through these awesome signs and wonders it was revealed that everything comes about through the will of G-d alone. There is nothing inevitable about nature at all.

You must just take care to direct your ear and heart to the holy message that is thus proclaimed. The more carefully you attend to this message, the greater the joy of the festival you will attain.

The way to attain this joy is through acts of charity and kindness. This is why we should give generously to charity before every festival - in order to experience the true joy of the festival. (See Likutey Moharan II, 4:6)

THE FINEST DECORATION

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

It is customary to have beautiful decorations in the sukkah. But the sukkah of the Tzaddik of Sanz was bare, with no decorations. “The finest beautification of the Sukkah is to give the money for the decorations to the poor,” he said.

It is said that the neshamah of R’ Naftali of Ropshitz was related to the *mitzvah* of sukkah. Every day of the year he would speak about the sukkah, learn the laws of the sukkah, or do something for the sukkah.

BEGINNING WITH MERITS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

The Talmud says that the first day of Succos is the beginning of the reckoning of sins. Reb Levi Yitzchak explained, “The Talmud says that if a person does *teshuvah* out of fear of Hashem, his intentional sins are mitigated to the status of unintentional sins. If a person does *teshuvah* out of love for Hashem, his sins are converted into merits.

“On the awesome days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we do *teshuvah* out of fear. Our sins are downgraded to unintentional, but they are still sins. On Succos, with the joy of Succos, we do *teshuvah* out of love for Hashem - and our sins are converted into merits. That’s when Hashem wants a reckoning, to know how many merits we have.” (Rabbi Avraham Twerski zt”l)

ABSOLUTE AND COMPLETE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

In the Jewish lexicon, there are four common expressions that are all followed by the word *sheleimah* - perfect or complete: *Emunah sheleimah* - “a perfect belief,” *teshuvah sheleimah* - “an absolute repentance,” *refuah sheleimah* - “a complete recovery,” and *Geulah sheleimah* - “the final and complete Redemption.” The word *sheleimah* conveys the idea of absolute, complete and total perfection.

These four concepts can all be connected to the Yom Tov of Succos. We step outside, under the *kippas HaShamayim* - the Heavenly veil, and sit in the sukkah to demonstrate our *emunah sheleimah*, our perfect belief that Hashem is protecting and watching over us. (Divrei Shaul)

After the *Yemei Hadin* (Days of Judgement), when our *teshuvah* out of fear of retribution and punishment has been uppermost in our minds, we now welcome the *Zman Simchaseinu* of Succos, a time when we joyously embrace the *mitzvos* of Hashem, and demonstrate that now our *teshuvah*, borne from joy and happiness, is truly a *teshuvah sheleimah*. (Toras Avos)

Chazal teach us (Sukkah 25b) that one who feels pain is exempt from the *mitzvah* of sukkah. Thus, writes Rav Shlomo HaKohen zt'l of Radomsk (Tiferes Shlomo), it follows that a sukkah is not a place of pain, suffering or any type of sickness in the world. The Divine Clouds of Glory which the sukkah represents will assure that any ill person will surely merit a *refuah sheleimah* there.

The *mitzvah* of sukkah is derived from the *pasuk* (Vayikra 23:42): בסוכות תשבו שבעת ימים. The Belzer Rebbe zt'l (Sar Shalom) derives from here the acronym תשבי (Tishbi) which is the name for Eliyahu HaNavi, who will come and herald the Mashiach. If *Bnei Yisrael* will fulfill the *mitzvah* of sukkah properly and for its proscribed period of time, Eliyahu HaTishbi will announce our final Redemption from this bitter *galus*, our *Geulah sheleimah*.

These four expressions of - אמונה, תשובה, רפואה, גאולה - also spell out the word אתרג, and as a result, one of the *mitzvos* that we extend ourselves above and beyond to obtain a *shaleim*, a perfect specimen, is the *esrog*. With our perfect belief (אמונה) we will come to an absolute repentance (תשובה), which will heal us completely (רפואה) and bring forth the coming of Mashiach (גאולה), speedily and in our days. (Ohr HaTzvi)

BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The power of Sukkot is that it takes us back to the most elemental roots of our being. You don't need to live in a palace to be surrounded by Clouds of Glory.

IGNITING THE SOUL

Rebbe Nachman

The joy we experience on the Three Festivals can give us a share in the light of G-d's countenance. This brings new life to the soul and the mind, through which we gain a perception of G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 30:6)

PUT YOUR BODY INTO IT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

When discussing the *Mitzvah* of shaking the Four Species, the Sefer HaChinuch outlines the principle that we are heavily influenced by the actions that we perform, whether for good or for bad. As such, Hashem gave us the *Mitzvah* of shaking the Four Species to positively influence our bodies to serve Him properly through the performance of this *Mitzvah*.

Specifically, the Sefer HaChinuch notes that the Four Species represent different parts of our body:

The *esrog* resembles the heart, which is the “seat of our intelligence.” Therefore, we shake the *esrog* to signify that we are prepared to serve Hashem with our intelligence.

The *lulav* is similar to the spine, which is the main element of a person. Therefore, by taking the *lulav*, we state our commitment to direct our entire body to the service of Hashem.

The *hadas* (myrtle) looks like eyes, so when we take the *hadasim*, we are stating that we will not let our eyes be led astray.

And finally, the *aravah* (willow branches) has the appearance of lips, in order to show that we undertake to be careful with our words and refrain from bad speech.

If these Four Species represent our commitment to serve Hashem with every aspect of our body, why is Succos specifically chosen to propagate this point, why not Pesach or Shavuot?

The answer is because Succos comes immediately after the tremendous inspiration that we experienced over Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The *Baalei Mussar* tell us that whatever high spiritual level we attain, unless we are able to put our newfound inspiration into practice in a physical way, then we will lose it - it will simply fizzle away!

Therefore, specifically after the holy days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur when we are still inspired, we are instructed to shake the Four Species which represent the different aspects of our body, in order to take the commitments we made during our moments of inspiration and put them into practice in a physical expression so that they do not fizzle away and become lost forever.

TRUE HONOR

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"You shall take for yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of the beautiful tree (esrog)..." (Emor 23:40)

A number of days before the Yom Tov of Succos, the tzaddik of Yerushalayim, R' Aryeh Levine zt'l, entered the renowned Rubinstein sefarim store in Meah Shearim, which also sold *lulavim*, *esrogim*, and the other necessities for Yom Tov. Turning to the man behind the counter, he asked, "Did you pick out an *esrog* for me, like I requested?"

Nodding affirmatively, Mr. Rubinstein took a wrapped *esrog* box out from under the counter and handed it to R' Aryeh.

R' Aryeh thanked the proprietor, took out a handful of bills from his pocket, and paid for the *esrog*. Then, without another word, he turned and walked hastily out of the store. A young *bachur*, who happened to be in the sefarim store at the very same time, watched with rapt interest as the short exchange took place. As soon as R' Aryeh walked out of the store, he immediately ran after him and brazenly called out, "R' Aryeh!" Not hearing his name being called at first, R' Aryeh continued walking, apparently deep in thought. "R' Aryeh," called out the young man in full pursuit, "I have a question."

This time, after hearing his name being called, R' Aryeh stopped walking and turned around, while the young man hurried to catch up. Then, the boy asked with characteristic Israeli forwardness, "It's about the Rav's *esrog*. Doesn't the Rav want to look at the *esrog* he just bought? At least to see if it's *mehudar* (beautiful)!"

R' Aryeh looked at the young *bachur* with glowing eyes. "This is indeed a good question," he said after a moment. "But I have an even better answer. You see, twice in the Torah, we find the word *hadar* used: Once by the *mitzvah* of *esrog*, as it says, '*U'lakachtem lachem pri eitz hadar* - And you shall take for yourselves a beautiful fruit,' and a second time with regard to the *mitzvah* of '*V'hadarta pnei zakein* - You shall honor the presence of an elder.'" The boy nodded in agreement.

"Now," R' Aryeh continued, "some people are only careful when it comes to the first *hadar*, checking and searching and making sure that their *esrog* is the finest in the land. This is indeed an important and admirable trait, one that is prevalent at this time of year."

He smiled now at the intrigued look on the boy's face. "I, on the other hand, try to be careful with the second *hadar* as well, the one dealing with the honor of elderly people. As a result, since I am now on my way to an old-age home to visit an old man who has no visitors and no one to talk to, I placed more emphasis on the second *hadar*, and less on the first *hadar*!"

TEST OF GRATITUDE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 3a-b) explains that at the End of Days, Hashem will present the other nations of the world with the opportunity to observe the *mitzvah* of sukkah as a final chance to earn eternal reward.

Although the Gemara refers to sukkah as a particularly "easy" *mitzvah*, why were the nations specifically tested with this; surely there are plenty of other "easy" *mitzvos* they could have been tested with?

Perhaps we can answer that Succos is unique, since, when the *Beis HaMikdash* stood, this was the festival that specifically benefited the nations of the world. For, on Succos, seventy bulls were sacrificed, atoning for the sins of the seventy nations, thereby allowing the rain to fall for the entire world when it was needed (Sukkah 55b with Rashi).

Thus, Hashem's test to the nations will not specifically have to do with Succos. Rather, it will be whether they have a special affinity and appreciation for the festival which kept them alive. Essentially, therefore, their test will be whether they are able to value the kindness done for them, and in turn, gratefully fulfill the *mitzvah* which helped them so much.

Why, though, is gratitude so crucial to attaining eternal reward?

Gratitude is the primary means of developing a deep connection to Hashem. Thus, someone who does not recognize or appreciate the good that Hashem has done for him is denying himself the means of understanding and loving Hashem in a greater way, truly cutting himself off from the Source of eternal life.

Thus, specifically Succos would test the nations' resolve whether they would warrant eternal closeness with the Creator (see Berachos 17a).

Yet, it should be noted that no nation should be more grateful than the Jewish People for Succos, which celebrates Hashem's love and protection for His Chosen People (see Tur, Orach Chaim 625).

The trait of gratitude was so important to Rav Moshe Schwab that he availed himself, despite being old and frail, to walk to the *shalom zachor* of a relative stranger. When asked why he was making the difficult trek to someone he did not know very well, Rav Moshe answered that his own *shalom zachor* welcoming him into the world decades earlier fell on Seder Night, and as a result, only one person came to wish his parents *mazel tov*. This person was the new baby's great-grandfather, and because gratitude is such an important attribute, he did not want to miss the opportunity of demonstrating appreciation to the family.

IN GOOD COMPANY

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

Of the four species, the *esrog* has both taste and fragrance, representing the person who has both Torah and good deeds.

The *hadass* is fragrant but has no taste, representing someone who has good deeds but no Torah.

The *lulav* has taste but no fragrance, representing someone who has Torah but no good deeds.

The *aravah* has neither taste nor fragrance, representing someone who has neither Torah nor good deeds. But as long as this person associates with the other three he is worthy, and an essential component of the *mitzvah*.

SPREADING LIGHT

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"I invite to my meal the exalted guests..." (Order of Ushpizin)

The concept of the *Ushpizin* (exalted guests), is one shrouded in mystery. How is each and every Jew visited by the great shepherds of Israel: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef and Dovid?

Rav Eliyahu Kitov zt'l offers the following explanation: These seven shepherds wandered from *galus* to *galus* (exile to exile), and only attained rest after undergoing much toil and travail.

Avraham Avinu left Ur Kasdim for Charan, came to the Land of Canaan, and then went down to Egypt. Yitzchak sojourned in the land of the Pelishtim. Yaakov fled to Aram Naharayim, and he and his sons made their way down to Goshen in the Land of Egypt. Yosef was sold into slavery in a foreign land. Moshe fled to Midyan and, together with his brother Aharon, led the people in the desert for forty years, and neither merited entering Eretz Yisrael. Dovid HaMelech also fled to the wilderness and knew no rest from war.

Hashem bestows life and kindness upon all of the world's inhabitants. Why, then, does He make those who dearly love Him wander from place to place without rest? The purpose is for them to shed light, goodness and blessing all around the world.

Now the children of these great and righteous ones rejoice on the Yom Tov of Succos by leaving their homes, as if to say to Hashem, "We desire neither grand homes nor overflowing fields; all we desire is You!" Through this statement of joy and submission, *Bnei Yisrael*, like their forefathers, become a source of blessing for themselves and the entire world, and through their merit, the whole world is blessed with bounty for the entire year.

Hashem responds and says, "It is fitting for the loyal shepherds of old to come back down and dwell in the *tzila d'heimnusa*, shadow of faith, together with My faithful children."

PALPABLE JOY

Rebbe Nachman

The truest joy comes from fulfilling the *mitzvot*. The more a person forms some estimate of the true greatness of G-d, the greater the joy he is able to feel with every *mitzvah* he performs. He begins to realize how privileged he is to perform the will of the Holy One, Who alone is, was, and will be for all eternity.

The joy of all the *mitzvot* we perform throughout the year is collected together, as it were, on the Three Festivals. This is what makes up the joy of the festival. All the good points of all the *mitzvot* performed throughout the year are joined together and concentrated in the festival, and the joy becomes truly palpable.

If we make an effort to search for the holy joy that is to be found in performing the *mitzvot* on the other days of the year, then this "festival joy" will be accessible to us every day of the year. But on the actual festivals themselves, the joy is something special. The Torah itself commands us (Devarim 16:14), "You should rejoice on your festival." The joy of the festivals themselves is made up of the joy of all the *mitzvot* of the whole year. There are no limits to this joy. (See Likutey Moharan I, 30:6)

GATHERED BY HASHEM

Sefas Emes

Succos is called a Festival of Gathering. Perhaps the Torah gave it this name to demonstrate the contrast between Israel and the rest of humankind. While other nations leave the fields and gather their harvest to take it back to their homes, Jews leave their homes to seek out Hashem, by gathering at the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Another possible interpretation is that Succos is the day on which Hashem gathers us and brings us to His home, the sukkah.

ATTAINING ENLIGHTENMENT

Rebbe Nachman

The *mitzvah* of sukkah can bring us to experience the radiance of G-d's abundance through holy inspiration. This experience is a special state of enlightenment granted to certain people when they are worthy of contact with levels of G-dliness that transcend the levels of attainment they have reached through their own efforts. For there are levels of Divine wisdom that are granted to people simply through G-d's beneficence, without their having to work to acquire that level specifically.

Indeed, man's whole task in this world is to work on himself until he is worthy of being granted these transcendental levels. This is the true delight of the World to Come. (See Likutey Moharan I, 21:3)

PINK SLIP DECOR

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

At the turn of the century, Jewish life in the United States was a tough proposition. Many immigrants who escaped their homeland, dreaming of a new beginning on these “golden” shores, instead found earning a decent living, while simultaneously maintaining a semblance of religious observance, almost impossible.

The American standard was to work seven days a week, and a person who wished to keep both Shabbos and his wage-earning job, was often forced to choose between the two. Sadly, many observant Jews were unable to withstand the test, and the holy Shabbos became an unfortunate casualty.

One man, however, would not give in. He was a skilled worker and his talents were in demand, yet no employer was willing to tolerate his absurd request to take off on Saturday. As a result, more often than not, when Friday rolled around, he was told that if he didn't show up the next day, he should not bother coming in on Sunday. The pious man would nod his head, but then ask for one small favor: Rather than being verbally fired, could his employer write him a “pink slip,” so he could have his termination in print? The employer, seeing no reason not to oblige, would usually agree to this unusual request.

It was not until many months later that the man's reason for requesting the papers became known. A few days before the Yom Tov of Succos, as his children were building and decorating their sukkah, he informed them that he had his own special decorations which he would like to put up.

“What decorations could Papa have come up with?” they thought. It was then that their father pulled out his stack of “pink slips” and began pasting them up against the walls.

“My children,” he said with an inner joy borne of spiritual greatness, “this is the most glorious ‘decoration’ that we can put in our sukkah. For with these, we are declaring that we work for no one other than the ‘Boss of all bosses’ - *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and we do so *b’lev shaleim* - wholeheartedly!” Incidentally, every one of his children and grandchildren remained true to *Yiddishkeit*, and many great *talmidei chachamim* emanated from his family.

JUST BE HAPPY

Chasam Sofer

On the first day of Succos, the Torah commands us to fulfill many *mitzvos*: sukkah, *lulav*, *esrog*, *simcha*, etc. On the rest of the days of Yom Tov, there are just two *mitzvos*: sukkah and *simcha*. But on Shemini Atzeres the Torah is very clear. There is only one *mitzvah* that we must perform with every fiber of our being. “והייתא אך שמח” - And you shall be only joyous.”

TIME WELL SPENT

Lelover Rebbe

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak of Lelov never made a public show of the intensity with which he served Hashem. True, everyone knew that he never ate more than the minimum amount of food he needed to stay alive - his one meal of the day consisted of a slice of bread and a little bit of a cooked dish, which he didn't eat until around midnight, after he had made a *cheshbon nefesh* (spiritual accounting) for the day. But when it came to spiritual practices such as praying, on the outside he seemed to be doing the same thing as everyone else.

There was one day of the year, however, when he took off the mask and revealed his intense inner fire - Hoshanah Rabbah, the last day of Succos. On this one day, he sat alone, from dawn until nightfall, enveloped in an aura of intense *kedushah* (holiness) as he chanted mystical prayers that were understood by only a select few. Although the door to his home was usually left open during the rest of the year, so that all could enter freely, everyone knew that it was forbidden to disturb the Lelover Rebbe on this one day of the year.

Almost everyone, that is. One Hoshanah Rabbah it happened that a lonely person decided to pay a visit to the Lelover Rebbe, announcing that he wanted to keep the Rebbe company during the traditional special Hoshanah Rabbah meal. The Rebbe's attendants didn't want to disturb Rav Yaakov Yitzchak, but before they could turn the man away, the Rebbe appeared at the door. For the Rebbe, there was no such thing as an “unimportant Jew,” and so he greeted the visitor warmly. The Rebbe then asked that a meal be served at once, and for two full hours the Rebbe sat with the lonely man, who basked under the warm and friendly glow of the Rebbe's countenance.

The lonely man finally went on his way. Without saying a word, the Rebbe returned to his study and shut the door, where he remained locked in intense prayer until the end of the day. (L. Astaïre)

STOREHOUSE OF JOY

Sefas Emes

Only regarding the Yom Tov of Succos does the *pasuk* state (Vayikra 23:41): “You shall celebrate it... seven days in the year,” implying that these seven days of joy constitute a vessel of *simcha* radiating joy throughout the year.

Similarly, in our Kiddush on Yom Tov, we refer to our festivals as *mo'adim l'simcha* (appointed times for rejoicing) rather than *mo'adim b'simcha* (appointed times of rejoicing) to teach us that our Yamim Tovim are not only days of rejoicing, but storehouses of joy and gladness for the remainder of the year.

PERSONAL INVITATION

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

Throughout the festival of Succos, seventy sacrifices were offered in the *Beis HaMikdash*, each corresponding to the welfare of the seventy nations of the world. On Shemini Atzeres however, just one sacrifice was made in the *Beis HaMikdash*, and it corresponded to the Jewish People alone. As such, this is a very special day in the Jewish calendar, and signifies the deep connection that we have with Hashem (Sukkah 55b). Using an analogy, Rashi writes that after the seven days of Succos, Hashem says to the Jewish People, "Please stay with me just one more day, for it is difficult for me to part with you!" (Vayikra 23:36).

Commenting on Rashi's words, the Shem MiShmuel asks two penetrating questions: Firstly, if the reason why it is difficult to part ways is because of the close connection that was developed from the holiness of Succos, then if the Jewish People remain an extra day, the love will get even stronger. Surely it would then be even more difficult to part ways?!

Secondly, why is there no "extra day" as a result of the hardship in parting ways when it comes to the other Festivals? Are they not also all about strengthening our relationship with Hashem?

The Shem MiShmuel answers that there are two types of giving; the first giving is found in a regular transaction where someone wants a commodity that someone else has and he gives money to him in exchange for it. The entire relationship between these two people centers around and depends upon the goods for sale. After the deal is done, both sides will return home, perhaps never to meet again. However, there is another type of giving where the entire purpose of the gift is in order to create and develop a connection. This is best illustrated using the example of a marriage. Even though the ring is the object that acquires one's wife, the object is only a way of creating a relationship, and whereas in the case of a business deal, the relationship between the buyer and seller is not forever, the ring given from the groom to his bride is an expression of his commitment to an eternal relationship, even if the ring is later lost or stolen.

Using this analogy, explains the Shem MiShmuel, we can answer our questions. On Succos, the entire world receives a flow of spiritual nourishment to keep it in existence, but since the nations of the world rejected Hashem and His Torah, it is clear that they only want these means for the sake of simply existing, but they are certainly not interested in a lasting relationship with Hashem. Consequently, that is all that they receive. However, when Hashem sees that His children, the Jewish People, seek a deeper connection and an eternal relationship with Him, He says, "Please stay with Me just one more day, for it is difficult for Me to part with you" in order that the Jewish People receive what they are looking for most, not just the means to stay alive but more importantly, a lasting relationship with our Creator.

With this approach, we can understand why, unlike other festivals, only Succos is concluded with an invitation for the Jewish People to "stay behind an extra day"; because it is only Succos that includes the other nations. However, regarding the other Festivals, which only involve the Jewish People in the first place, they do not require this extra day because we receive everything that we are truly looking for during the Festival itself!

POWER TO SUBDUE

Rebbe Nachman

There are many different ways to honor the festivals - with fine food and drink, with beautiful clothes, with pure and holy thoughts, with joy and openheartedness, and so on.

Through honoring the festivals you can attain the knowledge of G-d, and you can draw this knowledge down into the heart, which is the seat of passion and desire...

Because the festivals have the power to subdue our lusts and desires, we should be extremely careful to celebrate them with the proper respect. This is the way to be freed from these desires.

Every Jew has the task of subduing and refining these aspects of his character. When he succeeds, he is open to experiences that are truly prophetic, he can attain genuine prayer and true healing, and he can see the sparks of Mashiach.

In the end he will come to rule over the angels, which is the very purpose for which the Jew is created and the ultimate destiny of Israel. (See Likutey Moharan II, 1)

RESTORING OUR IMAGE

Sefas Emes

In the prayer that precedes taking the Four Species, we ask to know how we will, so to speak, "interface" with Hashem by performing this commandment.

While every human being is created in Hashem's image (cf. Bereishis 1:27), Israel in particular bears the likeness of the Creator through the visible observance of His Torah. Like any other object of beauty, however, man can forfeit his status as a "likeness" of Hashem through unworthy actions. The sins and errors we commit throughout the year tarnish the luster of this beauty we have been favored with.

On Succos, after the cleansing of Yom Kippur, we return to our original challenge, to act in a way that is worthy of bearers of Hashem's image which is now restored to us.

This is achieved by taking the Four Species, symbolic of different parts of the human organism, and waving them towards Heaven, symbolizing the fact that everything we have, body and soul, emanates from there.

TASTE OF THE FUTURE

Rav Akiva Eiger

The custom to dance *hakafos* in a circle on Simchas Torah is based on the words of Chazal (Taanis 31a):

In the future (time of Mashiach), the Holy One blessed be He will make a circle for the righteous and He will sit in the middle in Gan Eden.

In This World, every tzaddik worships the Almighty in his own manner, and the way of one righteous person is unlike that of another. In the future, in the World to Come, it will be revealed that all these ways are in reality one way and all will revolve around one central point - *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who represents truth.

This is the circle that the Almighty will make for the righteous in the future, and on this holiday, we get to taste a bit of what will be in the World to Come.

NEW BEGINNING

Chiddushei HaRim

A common misconception is that on Simchas Torah we celebrate the completion of the Torah. But in truth, we celebrate beginning all over again!

DANCING FOR JOY

Baal Shem Tov

Simchas Torah with the Baal Shem Tov was unlike Simchas Torah anywhere else in the world. Even the walls of the synagogue seemed to leap and shake with joy as the *chassidim* sang and danced the night away with holy ecstasy.

Usually, the Baal Shem Tov could be found at the very center of the dance circle, his eyes closed tight as his thoughts soared upward to the loftiest of heights. One year, however, he left his accustomed place and stepped to the side.

As he contemplated the scene, the Baal Shem Tov's face glowed with an intense light.

"My precious Jews!" he called out to the crowd. "Do you realize how very holy you are at this moment? Other people only dance like this when they are drunk - and when they are drunk they end up out in the street brawling with their neighbors.

"What makes us rejoice with such intense emotion? The Torah, of course! And what makes us join together as brothers in this holy dance in our beloved synagogue? Celebrating the honor of the Torah!

"We Jews have no joy other than the Torah. Therefore, dance, my friends, and continue to rejoice with all your might. The Torah alone is our strength. The Torah alone is our light." (L. Astaire)

CROWN OF SHOES

Baal Shem Tov

Shacharit is scheduled later on Shabbat and Yom Yov than during the week, but on the morning of Simchat Torah in particular, people involuntarily sleep in after the exertion of the night's *hakafot*, followed by a festive Yom Tov meal.

Angels do not have *hakafot* and Yom Tov meals. They begin their day as usual, desiring to sing praises to their Creator. They cannot do so without the participation of the Jewish souls on earth, as our Sages derive from the verse, "When the morning stars sing together" (Iyov 38:7): "The ministering angels do not sing G-d's praises Above until the Jews sing His praises below." But today, the Jews are late.

The angels spend the hiatus tidying the Garden of Eden. They discover unfamiliar objects: shoes, slippers, heels. They are utterly mystified. They are used to *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and other objects used for *mitzvot*, but not shoes!

They consult the archangel Michael. He replies, "These are my merchandise!" He explains that these items come from the Jews exuberant dancing with the Torah and begins sorting them, "These shoes are from the Jews of Kaminka, these are from the Jews of Mezritch..."

With these broken shoes, Michael gloats over the archangel Matat, "Your duty is to tie crowns for our Creator from the Jewish prayers, but I will fashion a far superior crown from the lost shoes and torn heels of their Simchat Torah dancing!"

CONSTANT GROWTH

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

The Gemara (Sukkah 11b) tells us that a sukkah needs to be built in accordance with the principle of *תעשה ולא מן העשוי*. This means that when one builds a sukkah, the *schach* needs to be made anew, and one is not permitted to use *schach* that is automatically created. For example, if one built a sukkah next to a vine, and for *schach* he covered the roof of the sukkah with the vine when it was still attached to the ground, and only then cut the vine, the *schach* is invalid. The vine would need to be cut first and only then placed as *schach*. When we place the *schach*, it needs to be fit for its purpose.

HaTzaddik Rabbi Mordechai Shlomo of Boyan states that this law teaches us an important insight into how we are required to serve Hashem. We need to be constantly in a mode of *taaseh* - of action, growth, and movement - and not be *min ha'asui*, i.e., satisfied with what we have already achieved. Spiritual growth is compared to walking the wrong way on a downward escalator; you need to be constantly in motion just to remain where you are. There is no room for resting on one's laurels when it comes to our relationship with Torah and mitzvot.

PREP TIME

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

As we get ready for the final two days of this wonderful holiday, it is important to realize that the entire period leading up to this point, from Chodesh Elul until now, has been preparation for the climax of Simchas Torah. But the level on which one is able to rejoice with the Torah is going to depend on how he performed all the *mitzvos* leading up to this Yom Tov.

Over this time period, a Jew performs many *mitzvos*: *teshuvah*, *shofar*, fasting, sitting in the sukkah, shaking the *lulav* and *esrog*, etc., and there are multiple layers of deep, rich and beautiful meaning in every single aspect of every action that we are commanded to do as Jews.

The more time one takes to delve into the revealed and hidden meanings of the *mitzvos*, the greater effect they will have on his *neshamah*. Since he has to do it anyway, he may as well get the most out of it; all it takes is a little understanding and a little extra contemplation. One can hear the sound of the *shofar* or one can listen to the message of the *shofar*. One can sit in a wooden shack, or one can bask in it in the shadow of Hashem's glory. One can shake a *lulav* and *esrog* or one can deeply inculcate the many beautiful ideas hidden within the act.

There is much to be learned from everything we do as Yidden, and it is all to help us grow and be the best children possible to our Father in Heaven. The more one infuses himself with the life-changing *mitzvos* he was given, the more he will truly feel the "Grand Finale" of Simchas Torah, which will give him strength throughout the year to serve Hashem with meaning and joy!

CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

The Homeler Rav was joyously dancing in shul one Simchas Torah when he noticed a group of boys outside, watching through the window with envious glares. The sight distressed him, because he knew that these boys had never received a Torah education because they came from extremely poor families, and their days were spent working in order to put some food on their family's table.

With tempered joy, the Rav came out of shul to speak to the group, saying the following, "Did you know that on Simchas Torah there are two *chassanim* (grooms): *Chassan Torah* and *Chassan Bereishis*. The *Chassan Torah* is the one who makes the final blessings of the entire Torah, while the *Chassan Bereishis* begins the Torah afresh. Now, we understand why we celebrate with the *Chassan Torah*, because he has finished the entire Torah and we join in his jubilation after a year of intense learning, but what is the *Chassan Bereishis* celebrating? The answer is that although he hasn't finished anything, he has resolved to start, and that is worth celebrating just as joyously."

The Homeler Rav then asked the group if they would be willing to start their Torah journey. The boys readily agreed, and the Homeler Rav learned with the boys every day from 3 a.m. until 7 a.m. at which time they went off to work; thus beginning the famous yeshivah, Tifferes Bachurim.

As we approach Simchas Torah, we should certainly feel great delight over the Torah we have learned over the past year, but we should be equally excited over what we are committing ourselves to learn for the year to come. And even if we know that we could have achieved more with our time, we can - and should - commit on this very special day to push ourselves harder; and with that determination, we have even more reason to celebrate!

PURIFIED RAINS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

On Shemini Atzeres we say a special prayer for rain to fall in the right places at the right time. We know that everything that Hashem does is for the best, therefore, when we experience a drought, we too must try to understand how this is for our benefit.

The Chasam Sofer beautifully explains how even a drought is really the greatest kindness that Hashem could give to us.

Explaining the rain cycle in a general sense, the Chasam Sofer notes that we see water droplets evaporating, rising from below and reaching the sky, where, due to condensation, they cool and join together to form a cloud. Then precipitation occurs when the cloud becomes full and heavy, causing the rain to fall. The Chasam Sofer then tells us that even the water vapor from our breath and speech forms part of the moisture which rises to the sky.

Therefore, explains the Chasam Sofer, the rain which we drink and waters our crops is formed in part from what comes from our mouths. As such, if we have misused our speech by speaking lashon hara for instance, this too rises and eventually comes into the food that we eat. This food, polluted by lashon hara, in turn has a negative effect on the person eating it, causing a cycle of its own which leads to more impure water vapor reaching the sky.

Before irreversible damage occurs, Hashem - in His abundant kindness - stops this cycle by withholding this damaging rain. It is a sign for us to do *teshuvah*, learn more Torah, and pray for mercy. This combination essentially leads to pure and holy water vapor rising from our mouths - purifying the impure water vapor which has been withheld in the sky. Once the water has been spiritually sanitized, Hashem allows the rain to fall.

Therefore, as we pray for appropriate rain on Shemini Atzeres, we should know that to a large degree, it is in our hands - or more appropriately, in our mouths - to make sure that we indeed benefit from the right rain in the right places at the right time.

RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT

Sefas Emes

Simchas Torah is not an isolated moment of joy in the Jewish year. Rather, coming at the culmination of a joyous Succos, the happiness with which this day is saturated gives the Jewish people strength and enthusiasm to study Torah joyously throughout the coming year.

The Mishah (Avos 3:6) emphasizes the vital importance of commitment to Torah. If someone takes upon himself the yoke of Torah, then the yoke of government [e.g., oppressive taxation] and the yoke of worldly responsibilities are removed from him [i.e. he will prosper materially].

A commitment to any worthwhile undertaking should be made in advance. There is no better day to commit oneself to Torah - and to do so joyously - than Simchas Torah. The Talmud (Shabbos 130a) suggests that any *mitzvah* started with joy will always be performed joyously. If Israel accepts the Torah with joy on this happiest of festivals, it will assuredly continue studying Torah joyously in the year ahead. In fact, Simchas Torah, with its heartfelt joy, serves to ensure that the Torah one learns will not be forgotten in the year ahead. Even the businessman with his many worries will retain his Torah knowledge if he makes a commitment to Torah on Simchas Torah with joy and sincerity.

PROPER PRIORITIES

Dzikover Rebbe

A chassid asked the Dzikover before Sukkos to grant him a blessing that he should have exceptionally fine *hadasim*, *aravos*, *lulav* and *esrog* for the festival.

The Rebbe replied: "What you need for Sukkos is a kind heart, a humble spirit, a truthful mind, and the will to perfect yourself. After you have attained these, it will be time to concern yourself regarding an exceptionally fine set of the symbols for Sukkos." (Namely, "First attain 'Arba Middos,' and then acquire 'Arba Minnim.'")

ALL ARE WELCOMED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Sukkah symbolizes Hashem's embrace of every individual, regardless of their spiritual level or background. The Sukkah calls on us to leave behind material concerns and focus on our spiritual core, where we are all equal in Hashem's eyes.

REASON TO REJOICE

Kotzker Rebbe

Joyfulness is the outcome of holiness, therefore Sukkos, coming after Yom Kippur, when we become holy and sinless, is called "the season of our joy."

INTIMATE DANCE

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

The great Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, often told a story to his students about a group of Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz during the Holocaust. They had met their certain end; the Nazis were preparing them to be gassed. They stood together, a pathetic assembly of flesh and bones. One Yid alerted the others, "Yidden, today is Simchas Torah!"

The others meekly looked at the man. "What Simchas Torah? Do we have a Torah? Do we have what to make a *l'chaim*? We don't even have clothing on our bodies. How should we rejoice here, in this awful place at this awful time?"

The Yid answered, "You have the *Ribbono shel Olam*, the Almighty! We are all Yidden! The Nazis cannot take that from us!" And with that encouragement, mustering whatever strength they had, they danced on that Simchas Torah.

The students of Rav Shach relate that he would repeat this story often, and when he did so he would become visibly moved, as if it were the first time he had heard the story. He would relate that he would be willing to give his whole life of good deeds and Torah study just to be with those Jews dancing in Auschwitz. The joy and elevation that occurs when a Jew dances with the *Ribbono shel Olam* is a remarkable experience.

It's noteworthy that on Simchas Torah (and Shemini Atzeres), we do not have a specific mitzvah object. Simchas Torah comes on the heels of Sukkos, the holiday where we just spent as much time as possible in our sukkah and where we waved the four-species every day. Our Sukkos service is quite "object-heavy." The lack of an objectified method of service on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah is a stark contrast. The message is, that after the month of Elul, Rosh Hashanah, the Days of Repentance, Yom Kippur, and seven days of Sukkos, we rejoice in a more intimate way (see Sefas Emes and Shem MiShmuel). We celebrate with ourselves, we are Yidden and have a unique and deep bond with the Almighty.

This works well with the famous Gemara (Sotah 55b), which contrasts the days of Sukkos with Shemini Atzeres. On Sukkos, during the time of the *Beis HaMikdash*, many cow-offerings, representing all the 70 nations of the world, were brought. In contrast, on the day of Shemini Atzeres, just one cow was brought as an offering. The Gemara likens this to a king who makes a grand banquet for all of his subjects. After the banquet, the king asks his most beloved subjects to make a small intimate affair, without the pomp, just for them to enjoy each other. The message is the same; Hashem wants us to rejoice with Him. On Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah, after fifty-one days of service beginning on the first of the month of Elul, we are asked to bring only ourselves, we rejoice with the Torah and celebrate our most treasured asset, our close relationship with Hashem.

BEYOND WORDS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

If one were to peruse all the writings of the holy Arizal, not surprisingly, one could find comments, explanations, and hidden *remazim* for just about every *mitzvah* - *D'Oraysa* and *D'Rabbanun*, every prayer ever instituted by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, and even *minhagim* or distant customs that are not well-known and *not* all kept by the varying groups in *Klal Yisrael*. All this notwithstanding, with regard to the *mitzvah* of *hakafos* on Simchas Torah, the writings of the Arizal contain... nothing! No penetrating illumination of the *mitzvah* through kabalistic sources, not even the most minor of *remazim*! This is obviously an unusual circumstance.

To attain a bit of understanding, one must first discern the nature of the *mitzvah*. R' Shimshon Pinkus zt'l explains that when a person comes before Hashem *with* an urgent request, he may use the phrase, "*Hosha na* - Save, please." When one feels the need to thank Hashem, he employs the word, "*Hallelukah* - Praise G-d." But when a person has no words with which to express his innermost thoughts and feelings of awe, gratitude, love, and holiness towards the *Ribono Shel Olam*, there is only one way for him to truly make his feelings felt; it is then that he bursts forth with song and dance.

On Simchas Torah, when a person grasps the holy Torah in his loving embrace, there are no words to be spoken. Whether subconsciously or through a deep-rooted feeling of spirituality, his only recourse is to sing and dance. This is the *mitzvah* of *hakafos*. It is possible, concludes R' Shimshon, that when the Arizal sat down to write the esoteric meanings of the *hakafos*, he realized that there truly are no words to be spoken. It can only be expressed with joyous singing and dancing.

ENTERING HASHEM'S HOME

Sefas Emes

The role of the final days of Succos (Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah) in the overall setting of the holiday season can be appreciated by remembering that the sukkah is frequently compared to Hashem's home. On Succos, Hashem's Presence is made manifest in this world, but on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, an even greater spiritual feat occurs: Instead of bringing Hashem's Presence into our homes, we accompany him to His domicile.

Rashi (Bamidbar 29:35) says that on Shemini Atzeres the Jewish people bid farewell to Hashem after an elaborate and successful holiday season by making a "farewell feast" for Hashem. But Israel refuses to leave! Instead, armed with the Torah, it enters Hashem's home and obstinately makes a dwelling place for itself there.

This is the message imparted by these final, sacred days of Succos - that the student of Torah dwells permanently in Hashem's abode.

STAY UNITED

Tiferes Shmuel

Hashem tells *Bnei Yisrael*: קשה עלי פרידתכם - Your separation is difficult for Me. The word "פרידתכם" - "Your separation" refers to the separation of Jews from each other. Each Jew traveling to his own home after being so close to each other during the festival in Yerushalayim - this separation, says the Almighty, is difficult for Me!

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