

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Shmuel *ben Yosef a"h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Water and Happiness

## PARSHAS HAAZINU 5777

There are many unique elements associated with the *yom tov* of Sukkos, which, at the same time, are both intriguing and somewhat mystifying.

### Grand Celebration

Perhaps chief among them is the aura of supreme joy that surrounds this particular festival more than any others. Every *yom tov*, of course, is a time of great happiness and celebration. But in the prayers, this is the only festival upon which is conferred a title involving *simchah* (joy). Whereas Pesach is referred to as “*Zeman Cheiruseinu* – the Time of Our Liberation,” and Shavu’os is referred to as “*Zeman Matan Toraseinu* – the Time of the Giving of Our Torah,” it is Sukkos that is called “*Zeman Simchaseinu* – the Time of **Our Rejoicing**.”

In Temple times, the apex of this *simchah* was the grand celebration known as the “*Simchas Beis Hasho’eivah* – Celebration of the ‘House’ of Drawing (Water).” We get a sense of the sheer jubilation associated with this event from the Mishnah in Sukkah (5:1-4), which states:

כָּל מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה שְׂמֵחַת בֵּית הַשּׁוֹאֵבָה, לֹא רָאָה שְׂמֵחָה מִיָּמָיו... לֹא הָיְתָה חֲצַר בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁאֵינָה מְאִירָה מֵאוֹר בֵּית הַשּׁוֹאֵבָה, חֲסִידִים וְאֲנָשֵׁי מַעֲשֵׂה הַיּוֹ מְרֻקָדִים לְפָנֶיהֶם בְּאַבְיוֹקוֹת שֶׁל אוֹר שֶׁבִידִיָּהוּ, וְאוֹמְרִים לְפָנֶיהֶן דְּבָרֵי שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת. וְהַלּוּיִם בְּכַנּוּרוֹת וּבַנְּבָלִים וּבַמַּצְלֵתִים וּבַחֲצוֹצְרוֹת וּבַכֵּלֵי שִׁיר בְּלֹא מִסְפָּר...

“Whosoever has not beheld the *Simchas Beis Hasho’eivah* has not beheld true joy in his life... There was no courtyard in all of Yerushalayim that was not illuminated from the (profusion of) light emanating from the arena of the celebration. Pious individuals and men of deeds would dance (before the people) with light-bearing torches in their hands; they would pronounce before them songs and praises. The Levi’im were equipped with harps, lyres, symbols, trumpets, and musical instruments beyond number...”

What was the cause of such unprecedented elation and revelry? As its name suggests, the *Simchas Beis Hasho’eivah* centered around a particular ritual: the drawing of the water to be used for the libation offering (which at other times of the year consisted of wine).

This is one of the mystifying aspects of the festival. No doubt, the pouring of water on the *mizbe’ach* (altar) was an important detail of the Temple service; but, seemingly, so were many others. To be sure, every detail of every mitzvah is important in serving Hashem. Why, then, did this specific item elicit an outpouring of such delirious joy?

### No Worries

The Nesivos Shalom (*vol. II, pp. 191-193*) clarifies the issue by focusing on the essence of this mitzvah. Quoting the *Sefarim Hakedoshim* (Sacred Literature), he reveals that water is emblematic of the attributes of kindness and love. Thus, a profound sentiment is expressed through the water libation. By offering water on the *mizbe’ach*, we are essentially ceding to Hashem all of our loves and attachments to worldly matters and pursuits, thereby indicating that our sole love and desire is for Him alone. And, as we shall see, this is the greatest source of *simchah* imaginable.

The *Ba’alei Mussar* (Masters of Ethical Teachings) employ the following poignant parable: The king of the realm had fallen ill, and his physicians searched desperately for a cure.

Employing a variation of the concept that “laughter is the best medicine,” they determined that their royal patient could use a dose of true joy to aid his healing. Thus, they proposed that the happiest, most worry-free individual be found, and his shirt should be donned by the king himself. In this way, they hoped, a measure of the man’s joy would be transferred to their monarch.

The issue, however, was that it was no small matter to discover such a fortunate person. Finally, after an extensive search, the party was led to an individual whose whole being radiated joy and contentment; it was clear that they had found someone who was truly worry-free. But when they asked to borrow his shirt for the king’s use, they stumbled upon another problem: apparently, the man did not own one!

When asked how this was possible, the happy man answered with simplicity. “I don’t have any possessions,” he told them, “and that’s why I have no worries. As soon as I would get a shirt or anything else, I would immediately acquire some worries for myself!” This straightforward but sagacious statement, of course, echoes the sentiment expressed by Chazal: “*Marbeh nechasim, marbeh de’agah* – One who increases his wealth, increases his worry” (*Avos 2:7*).

What this illustrates, explains the *Nesivos Shalom*, is the simple reality that it is actually the lure of materialism that is the source of man’s unhappiness. The more invested a person is in accumulating wealth, the more he sets himself up for frustration – for he can never be satisfied. As the Medrash states: אֵין אָדָם יוֹצֵא מִן הָעוֹלָם וְחֻצֵי תְּאֵוֹתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ – “No person – by the time he leaves this world – has fulfilled even half of his heart’s desires” (*Koheles Rabbah 1:22*).

In a similar vein, Shlomo Hamelech declares: כָּל־עֲמַל הָאָדָם לְפִיהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא – “All of a man’s toil is for his mouth, but the soul is not satiated” (*Koheles 6:7*). The Medrash (*Koheles Rabbah 6:6*) offers another parable, comparing the situation to a king’s daughter who somehow becomes wedded to a peasant. No matter what her husband may offer her, she will not be particularly impressed; after all, she is the daughter of royalty and used to much better. The soul’s relationship with the body operates in a similar fashion. The soul, a spark of the Divine, originates from on High; as such, no physical delights can bring it true satisfaction. The key reason why people experience unhappiness in the first place is because their soul, their true inner essence, yearns for something much loftier and more valuable than mere material pleasure. The only thing that will bring the soul true happiness is attaining closeness with Hashem.

Thus we can better understand the true nature of the festival of Sukkos. Indeed, the water libation is a fitting representative of the *yom tov*, as it embodies the element that elicits true joy. By relinquishing to Hashem our attachment to material matters and directing our love to Him alone, a person thereby connects to the source of real and absolute happiness.

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