



TRADITIOON – TRADITION!

The family customs which accompany each Jewish holiday often occupy us more than the mitzvahs of the holiday themselves. Are we exaggerating? Have we lost the proper equilibrium?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARASHAT RE'EH

Book of Deuteronomy / Devarim

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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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In this week's Torah portion, we read about the biblical commandment to be joyful on the holiday of Sukkot (source 1). What was the main celebration of Sukkot? On the nights of the holiday, all the people would gather in the Temple for a celebration known as *Simchat Beit Hashoevah*, after which they would proceed to draw water from the Siloam and pour it on the altar (source 2). The Talmud says that this was a major celebration, the likes of which was never seen elsewhere (source 3).

In his talk, the Rebbe asks: Why was the pouring of the water considered so significant to warrant that sort of celebration? It seems as though it overshadowed the joy of Sukkot which, in itself, is a biblical command.

B. The Passover Equivalent.....7

Before answering the question, let's examine a similar celebration which took place on Passover. The Torah tells us to bring an offering fifty days before Shavuot, "on the day after the Shabbat." The meaning of this verse was a point of contention; traditionally, it was understood to mean the day after Passover. Other Jews interpreted it as the day after the Shabbat following Passover (source 4).

The Rebbe brings the Talmud's description of the elaborate ritual that existed surrounding this offering. Why was it considered so significant? As the Talmud explains, the sages chose to bring this offering with great fanfare specifically because it was questioned by those other groups of Jews. They wanted to emphasize the importance of tradition and reject the modern interpretations.

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What is the source of the Water Libation? Rabbi Akiva explains that it was brought to channel G-d's blessings for the rainy season (source 5). However, it is not explicitly included in the Torah. The Sadducees indeed rejected this custom, and there was an incident in the Temple where one of them tried to sabotage it (source 6).

Thus, the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah* could be understood in the same light. The celebration was held with such fanfare specifically because it was associated with a custom which was subject to dispute. It was a demonstration of our commitment to tradition. Indeed, the Talmud says that special balconies were erected for women as well; clearly, the sages wanted every person to be a part of this moment.

Introduction:

“Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything. How to sleep. How to eat. How to work. How to wear clothes.

“For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God.

“You may ask, how did this tradition get started?

“I’ll tell you.

“I don’t know.

“But it’s a tradition.

“And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.”

These words open the famous play of Fiddler on the Roof, and they are pretty accurate. Judaism is based on tradition. Sometimes, we don't know where a certain custom originated from, but we nevertheless observe it carefully.

This lesson focuses on several unique customs that were carried out in the Temple. As we will explain, it was specifically the customs that didn't seem to have a strong basis in Torah that were carried out with the greatest fanfare, to demonstrate our connection and devotion to tradition.

A. The Great Celebration

Source 1 Deuteronomy 16:14-15

In this week's Torah portion, Moses commands the Jewish people regarding a variety of Mitzvos, such as the prohibition to worship idols and the rules of kosher slaughter and kosher food. He then proceeds to list the holidays and their rituals. When mentioning Sukkot, the Torah emphasizes the obligation to be joyful.

You shall rejoice on your festival along with your son and daughter, your servant and maidservant, and the Levite, proselyte, orphan, and widow from your settlements.

Celebrate to G-d your L-rd for seven days in the place that G-d will choose, since G-d will then bless you in all your agricultural and other endeavors, so that you will be only happy.

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחַגְךָ, אֶתְּהָ וּבִנְךָ
וּבִתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי
וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֱלֻמְנָה
אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחַג לָהּ
אֲלֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר
ה', כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֵׂה
יָדֶיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אֶךְ שָׂמֵחַ:

Source 2 Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 48b

Indeed, Sukkot is celebrated in a very joyful way. Interestingly, there was a specific custom in the Temple which was at the center of the joy of Sukkot: The water libation.

Every day in the Holy Temple, wine would be poured into a special hole in the Altar along with the animal sacrifices, in a service called “nisuch hayayin.” On Sukkot, there was an additional ceremony in which water would be poured on the altar. This was known as “nisuch hamayim.”

How was the water libation performed? A golden jug with a capacity of three log was filled from the Siloam pool. When they reached the Gate of the Water, they sounded a tekia, terua, and tekia. The priest ascended the ramp of the altar and turned to his left. Two silver basins were there, perforated at the bottom with two nose-like protrusions. One had a broad

גִּיסוּךְ הַמַּיִם כִּיצַד?
צְלוּחִית שֶׁל זֶהָב מְחֻזָּקת
שְׁלֹשָׁה לוּגִים הָיָה מְמֵלֵא
מִן הַשִּׁילוּחַ, הִגִּיעוּ לְשַׁעַר
הַמַּיִם תִּקְעוּ וְהִרִיעוּ וְתִקְעוּ,
עָלָה בְּכַבֵּשׁ וּפְנָה לְשִׂמְאֵלוֹ
שְׁנֵי סְפָלִים שֶׁל כֶּסֶף הָיוּ...
וּמְנוּקָבִין כְּמִין שְׁנֵי חוּטְמִין
דְּקִין (וְאֶחָד) מְעוּבָה וְאֶחָד
דָּק כְּדִי שִׁיְהוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּלִין

perforation and one had a thin perforation, so that the flow of both [the water and the wine, which do not have the same viscosity] would conclude simultaneously. The basin on the west was for water, and the basin on the east was for wine.

בַּבַּת אַחַת מְעַרְבוּ שֶׁל מַיִם
מִזְרָחוֹ שֶׁל יַיִן.

Source 3 Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 51

This unique ceremony on Sukkot was held with great pomp and celebration. Each night of Sukkot, a massive party would be held in the Temple, replete with music and dancing and masses of people. At dawn, the entire crowd would head down to the Siloam pool where the vessels would be filled up and then brought to the Temple for the pouring on the altar.

Mishnah: Whoever did not see the “Simchat Beit Hashoevah” [lit. Celebration of the Place of the Drawing] has never seen a real celebration. At the conclusion of the first day of the Festival, the “Women’s Courtyard” [the main Temple courtyard] would undergo significant repair. Golden candelabras were set up, each with four basins of gold at its top and four ladders for each pole. Four young priests would take pitchers with a capacity of 120 log of oil and pour them into each basin... The light was so bright that there wasn’t a courtyard in Jerusalem that wasn’t illuminated from the light of the Simchat Beit Hashoevah. The pious men and leaders would dance before the crowd while juggling flaming torches, and they would say passages of song and praise. The Levites would play on lyres, harps, cymbals, and trumpets, and countless musical instruments, while standing on the fifteen stairs descending from the “Israelites’ courtyard” to the “Women’s Courtyard,” which correspond to the fifteen Songs of the Ascents in Psalms [i.e., chapters 120–134].

מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה שְׂמִיחַת בַּיִת
הַשְּׂוֹאֵבָה לֹא רָאָה שְׂמִיחָה
מִמֶּיּוֹ. בְּמוֹצָאֵי יוֹם טוֹב
הָרֵאשׁוֹן שֶׁל חֹג יֵרְדוּ לְעֶזְרַת
נָשִׁים וּמִתְקַנִּין שָׁם תִּיקוּן
גָּדוֹל, מְנוֹרוֹת שֶׁל זָהָב
הָיוּ שָׁם... וְלֹא הָיָה חֶצֶר
בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם שְׂאִינָה מְאִירָהּ
מֵאוֹר בַּיִת הַשְּׂוֹאֵבָה. חֲסִידִים
וְאֲנָשֵׁי מַעֲשֵׂה הָיוּ מְרַקְדִין
בְּפְנֵיהֶם בְּאֲבוֹקוֹת שֶׁל אוֹר
שְׁבִידֵיהֶן, וְאוֹמְרִים לְפָנֵיהֶם
דְּבָרֵי שִׁירוֹת וְתוֹשָׁבְחוֹת,
וְהַלְלוּם בְּכַנּוּרוֹת וּבַנְּבָלִים
וּבְמִצְלָתִים וּבְחֻצוֹצְרוֹת
וּבְכָלֵי שִׁיר בְּלֹא מִסְפָּר,
עַל חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מַעְלוֹת
הַיּוֹרְדוֹת מֵעֶזְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְעֶזְרַת נָשִׁים, כְּנֶגֶד חֲמֵשׁ
עֶשְׂרֵה (מַעְלוֹת) שְׁבַתְהֵלִים
שְׁעֲלֵיהֶן לְיוֹם עוֹמְדִין בְּכָלֵי
שִׁיר וְאוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה.

The Talmud asks: What is the source for the joy in this celebration?

From where are these matters derived?
Rav Eina said that it is as the verse states:
“With joy you shall draw water out of the
springs of salvation” [Isaiah 12:3].

מִנָּא הֲנִי מִיְלֵי? אָמַר רַב
עֵינָא דְאָמַר קָרָא וְשָׂאבְתֶם
מֵיִם בְּשִׂשׁוֹן וְגו'. מִנָּא הֲנִי
מִיְלֵי? אָמַר רַב עֵינָא דְאָמַר
קָרָא וְשָׂאבְתֶם מֵיִם בְּשִׂשׁוֹן
וְגו'.

A verse in Isaiah speaks about drawing water with joy; that is the “biblical context” to the custom.

>> The Rebbe

What is the Meaning of the Celebration?

The Talmud asks: What is the source for the elaborate celebration of the water libation and the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah*? It answers by citing a verse: “With joy you shall draw water out of the springs of salvation,” indicating that this verse refers to the water libation of Sukkot—and commands that the drawing be done “with joy.” [For this reason, we find that the primary celebration took place at the drawing of the water, and not when it was actually poured on the altar.]

However, the verse only indicates that the drawing should be a joyous occasion, while the Mishnah and Talmud say much more: “Whoever did not see the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah* has never seen a real celebration.” The act of drawing water

אודות שמחת בית השואבה איתא
בגמרא¹: “מנא הני מילי (דתוקעין
ומריעין בשאיבת המים של נסוך²).
דאמר קרא³ ושאבתם מים בששון
וגו’”, היינו, שהפסוק “ושאבתם מים”
קאי על שאיבת המים לצורך הניסוך
על גבי המזבח, ועל זה נאמר “ושאבתם
מים בששון”, ששאיבת המים צריכה
להיות בשמחה, ולכן מצינו שעיקר
השמחה היתה (לא בעת ניסוך המים על
גבי המזבח, כי אם) בעת שאיבת המים
דוקא.

אמנם, הראיה מהפסוק “ושאבתם מים
בששון” אינה אלא על הצורך בשמחה
בשאיבת המים; אבל במשנה ובגמרא⁴
נאמר (לא רק שצריך להיות שמחה,
אלא יתירה מזה) “מי שלא ראה שמחת

(4) סוכה נא, א-ב.

(1) סוכה מח, ב.
(2) פרש"י שם.
(3) ישע"י יב, ג.

evoked such joy that it outshined all other celebrations, even the joy of the holiday itself.

This raises a question:

The obligation to be joyful on the holiday is a biblical commandment with a clear verse in the Torah: "You shall rejoice on your festival." On the other hand, the verse in Isaiah, "With joy you shall draw water," is not explicitly associated with this Sukkot celebration. Our sages understood the verse as a reference to this custom only because there is no other ritual in which water is drawn.

Nonetheless, the joy during the drawing of the water (based on an extrapolation from Isaiah) seems greater than the holiday joy (which is an explicit biblical commandment).

This raises the question: Why? What is the source for this tradition?

בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו", היינו, ששאיבת המים היתה בשמחה גדולה, יותר משמחת החג -

ואינו מובן:

אודות שמחת החג - ישנו פסוק מפורש בתורה שנתפרש בו בנוגע ליום-טוב - "ושמחת בחגך"⁵; מה שאין כן "ושאבתם מים בששון" - נאמר בפסוק סתם, אלא כיון שלא מצינו חיוב של שאיבת מים מלבד לצורך ניסוך המים על גבי המזבח, למדים פסוק זה על שאיבת המים לניסוך המים.

ואף על פי כן, גדולה השמחה שבשאיבת המים (שצריכים ללמוד מהפסוק "ושאבתם מים בששון") משמחת החג (שנתפרשה בכתוב).

נשאלת איפוא השאלה: מנא הני מילי? מניין הראיה לכך?

B. The Passover Equivalent

Source 4 Leviticus 23:4, 6, 10-11, 15-16, 21

On Passover, there was a special offering known as the Minchat Ha'omer, the "Omer Offering," which would mark the beginning of the Counting of the Omer. The Torah is very explicit about this offering and tells us when to offer it—between Passover and Shavuot. But when exactly? That's an argument:

These are G-d's festivals that you must celebrate as sacred holidays at their appropriate times:

...Then, on the 15th of that month, it is G-d's festival of matzahs, when you eat matzahs for seven days.

From this verse, we know that Passover begins on the 15th of the month.

...Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you must bring an omer [a biblical measurement] of your first reaping to the priest.

He shall wave it before G-d, so that it will be acceptable for you. He shall wave it on the day after the Shabbat.

Here is the commandment to bring the Omer Offering. The Torah seems to say that it is brought after a Shabbat.

You shall then count seven complete weeks after the day following the Shabbat when you brought the omer as a wave offering.

Until the day after the seventh week, when there will be a total of 50 days. Then you shall present new grain as a meal offering to G-d.

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מְקֻרָאֵי
קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר-תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם
בְּמוֹעֲדָם:

וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
הַזֶּה חַג הַמַּצּוֹת לַה' שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים מַצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ:

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וּקְצַרְתֶּם
אֶת-קְצִירָהּ וְהֵבֵאתֶם אֶת-
עֹמֶר הָאִשִּׁית קְצִירְכֶם אֶל-
הַכֹּהֵן:

וְהִנִּיף אֶת-הָעֹמֶר לִפְנֵי ה'
לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת
יְנִיפוּ הַכֹּהֵן:

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת
הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-
עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת
תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה:

עַד מַמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת
הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים
יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה
לַה':

This very day shall be celebrated as a sacred holiday when no work may be done. This is an eternal law for all generations, no matter where you may live.

וְקִרְאתֶם בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־
מִלְאֲכַת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
חֻקַּת עוֹלָם בְּכָל־מוֹשְׁבֵי־כֶּם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

This is a reference to the holiday of Shavuot, which takes place fifty days after the offering of the omer.

Let's unpack this:

The date of the Passover holiday is stated explicitly: 15 Nissan. The holiday of Shavuot is also clear: exactly 50 days after the offering of the omer. The question remains: when exactly is the omer to be offered? What exactly does the Torah mean with its words, "On the day after the Shabbat"?

Our Sages had an oral tradition that the word Shabbat in this verse is not—literally—the seventh day of the week, but rather a reference to the first day of Passover. It tells us to bring the Omer Offering on the second day of the holiday, and then to count fifty days until Shavuot (thus, the holiday of Shavuot always falls out on the 6th of Sivan).

However, all was not well. In the second Temple period, various groups rejected the Oral Tradition and argued with the Sages on various issues.

Here, it was the Baitusim* who didn't accept this view. They interpreted the word "Shabbat" literally, as the seventh day of the week. According to their interpretation, the Omer Offering was brought on the first Sunday after Passover (and the date of Shavuot fluctuates accordingly).

The Baitusim:

The Baitusim (Boethusians) were an aristocratic group of priests who operated in the first half of the first century AD as one of the religious sects during Second Temple era. They were in constant dispute with the Perushim (Pharisees) about the Oral Torah. They disagreed with the Pharisees on three principles: They believed that there is no reward and punishment, no resurrection of the dead, and they interpreted many verses in the Torah literally, ignoring the oral tradition of the Sages.

>> The Rebbe

The Fanfare of the Omer Offering

We can answer the question with the following preface: We find a similar concept regarding Passover. [In fact, the months of Nissan and Tishrei are considered counterparts: Tishrei is the beginning of the year while Nissan is the beginning of the months, and

יש לבאר זה בהקדם דוגמא לדבר שמצינו בנוגע לחג הפסח, - כידוע שחודש תשרי וחודש ניסן שקולים זה כנגד זה: חודש תשרי הוא "ראש השנה" וחודש ניסן הוא "ראש חדשים", וגם בהמועדים שבהם (סוכות ופסח) ישנם כמה ענינים

their respective holidays—Sukkot and Passover—have many similarities.] Passover also has a very public ritual: the reaping of the Omer Offering on the second evening of the holiday.

The Mishnah says that all the nearby townspeople would gather so that the reaping would be carried out with great fanfare. “Once it grew dark, he would say to the assembled: ‘Did the sun set?’ They would response: ‘Yes’... ‘Shall I reap the sheaves with this sickle?’... ‘Yes’... ‘Shall I place the gathered sheaves in this basket?’... ‘Yes’... ‘Shall I cut the sheaves?’... ‘Cut.’ The emissary asks three times with regard to each and every matter, and the assembly says to him: Yes, yes, yes.”

The reason the reaping was held with such fanfare is explained in the Mishnah’s continuation: “Why was all this done? Due to the *Baitusim* who would say: ‘The harvest of the omer does not take place after the first day of Passover.’” They maintained that “Shabbat” in the verse is to be interpreted literally. The publicity was created to reject the *Baitusim*’s interpretation and underscore that the sixteenth of Nissan was the proper time for the omer harvest.

In other words, although this was an ordinary offering similar to the offerings brought daily in the Temple, they surrounded this specific offering with great pomp and ceremony—even the preparations for the offering—for the express purpose of making a point against the *Baitusim*.

שמשתווים זה לזה - שישנו ענין מסויים שהיו עושים בפומבי ובפירסום מיוחד, - קצירת העומר במוצאי יום-טוב:

איתא במשנה: “כל העיירות הסמוכות לשם מתכנסות לשם כדי שיהא נקצר בעסק גדול, כיון שחשיכה אומר להן בא השמש אומרים הין . . מגל זו אומרין הין . . קופה זו אומרים הין . . אקצור והן אומרים לו קצור . . שלש פעמים על כל דבר ודבר והן אומרים לו הין הין הין.”

וטעם הדבר שהיו עושים קצירת העומר בפירסום ובפומבי - נתפרש בהמשך המשנה - “כל כך למה, מפני הבייתוסים שהיו אומרים אין קצירת העומר במוצאי יום-טוב” “אלא במוצאי שבת”, דסבירא לן “דהאי ממחרת השבת, שבת ממש הוא” (“שבת בראשית”), ולא “ממחרת יום-טוב”, ולכן היו עושים “המולה גדולה” בקצירת העומר, “שיבינו בייתוסין שבמוצאי יום-טוב קוצרין אותו”, “לפיכך הקוצרים מגביהין קולן כדי שישמעו בייתוסין, להוציא מלבן”.

כלומר, כדי להוציא מלבן של בייתוסים, היו עושים אפילו את ההכנות לקצירת העומר בפרסום גדול - אף על פי שהבאת העומר היתה על דרך הרגיל כמו שהיו רגילים להביא קרבנות מנחה בבית המקדש, אבל ההכנה להבאת העומר - קצירת העומר - היתה נעשית “ברוב עם”.

The Mishnah states that although the reaping was only a preparation for the offering, and not essentially different from the other offerings in the Temple, they enacted a custom to prepare and offer the Omer Offering with great fanfare to demonstrate publicly that they were remaining true to the traditions of their ancestors, who brought this offering on the first Sunday after Passover.

C. All to Make a Point

Source 5 Tosefta, Rosh Hashana 1:11

The custom of the water libation isn't stated explicitly in the Torah, as we mentioned earlier. It was an oral tradition passed down from Moses through the generations. Rabbi Akiva explained the custom as follows:

Rabbi Akiva said, "The Torah said: Bring an omer of barley on Passover, the season of barley, so that the grain shall be blessed for you. Bring wheat and first fruits on Shavuot, the season of the trees, so that the fruit will be blessed for you. Bring the water libation on Sukkot, so that you will be blessed with rains."

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶקִיבָא: אֲמַרְהָ
תּוֹרָה הָבָא שְׁעוֹרֵין בְּפֶסַח
שְׁהוּא פָּרֶק שְׁעוֹרֵין, כְּדִי
שְׁתַּתְּבָרַךְ לָכֶם תְּבוּאָה. הָבָא
חֲטִים וּבְכוּרִים בְּעֶצְרָת,
שְׁהוּא פָּרֶק אֵילָן, כְּדִי
שְׁתַּתְּבָרְכוּ [עֲלֶיךָ] פִּירוֹת
אֵילָן, [הָבָא נְסוּךְ הַמַּיִם]
בְּחָג, כְּדִי שְׁתַּתְּבָרְכוּ [עֲלֶיךָ]
מִי גְשָׁמִים.

Source 6 Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 48b

The water libation could be understood in the context of the seasonal offerings that were brought in the Temple. The Omer was offered for G-d's blessings for grain, the first fruit were brought to bless the fruit, and the water libation was to mark the beginning of the rainy season.

Now, this was also a custom rejected by those groups. In this case, it was a different group, the Sadducees*, who are recorded as rejecting this custom.

Sadducees

A religious sect in the days of the Second Temple with views similar to those of the Baitusim. It is unclear if they were two distinct groups. The Sadducees are mentioned often in Torah and historical works (while Baitusim are featured less).

One year, the priest appointed to carry out the water libation was a Sadduccee. Instead of following protocol and pouring the water into the altar, he poured the water on his leg. The masses of people in the Temple—who were, by and large, pharisees—were infuriated, and immediately expressed their anger, as explained in the next source.

From that year and onward, the priest was asked to lift his hands while he poured the water, to demonstrate publicly that he was doing the process correctly.

The appointee says to the one pouring the water, "Raise your hand," as one time a priest poured the water on his feet, and the people stoned him with their etrogs.

לְמַנְסַךְ אוֹמַר לוֹ הַגְּבִה יָדְךָ,
שְׁפַעַם אֶחָד נֶסֶךְ אֶחָד עַל
גְּבִי רַגְלָיו וּרְגָמוּהוּ כָּל הָעָם
בְּאֶתְרוּגֵיהֶן.

>> The Rebbe

The Rationale of the Simchat Beit Hashoevah

With this in mind, we can understand the meaning behind the great celebration of Simchat Beit Hashoevah.

The water libation is not explicitly written in the Written Torah, and therefore, the Sadducees rejected it. The Talmud relates that the priest was told to raise his hand while pouring so that everyone would be able to see, because a Sadducee priest once poured the water on his leg and the entire crowd stoned him with etrogs.

We can suggest that this is the reason for the immense celebration that surrounded the water libation. The verse merely states that the water should be drawn with joy, but nevertheless, since the Sadducees rejected the entire ritual, the sages instituted an elaborate celebration for the entire event, doing it with unparalleled fanfare (much like the customs surrounding the Omer Offering).

The Rebbe explains that the Simchat Beit Hashoevah was all surrounding the pouring of the water. It was enacted to “stick it” to the Sadducees, who rejected it, and to demonstrate in the most public way that we reject the attempts to overthrow tradition and we remain steadfastly connected to the traditions of Moses.

על פי זה יש לבאר גם בנוגע לגודל השמחה בשאיבת המים לניסוך המים על גבי המזבח:

ניסוך המים - שלא נתפרש בתורה שבכתב - אין הצדוקים מודים בו, כפי שמצינו⁸ ש"למנסך אומר לו הגבה ירך (שנראה שתתן המים בספל, לפי שהצדוקין אין מודים בניסוך המים), שפעם אחד נסך (צדוקי) אחד (את המים) על גבי רגליו ורגמוהו כל העם באתרוגיהן".

ויש לומר, שזהו גם הטעם לגודל השמחה בשאיבת המים - דאף שמהפסוק ("ושאבתם מים בששון") יש רק ראייה ששאיבת המים צריך להיות בשמחה, מכל מקום, כדי להוציא מלבן של צדוקים שאינם מודים בניסוך המים כל עיקר, תיקנו חכמים בנוגע לשאיבת המים - שאינה אלא הכנה לניסוך המים - שתהיה בשמחה גדולה באופן יוצא מן הכלל (על דרך הפירסום והפומבי בנוגע לקצירת העומר).

(8) סוכה מ"ח, ב (במשנה) ובפרש"י. וראה פיה"מ להרמב"ם שם.

Making Women A Part of It

This was also the reason that they would arrange “significant repair” in the Temple courtyard. What exactly was the repair? The Talmud relates that there were protrusions in the walls of the courtyard, and each year they would construct a balcony, allowing the women to gather on the balcony and witness the celebration while the men gathered on the floor below.

From a perspective of biblical law, women are obligated to come to the Temple only once in seven years for the *Hakhel* gathering at the close of the Sabbatical year, when the entire Jewish people would gather to hear passages of Torah from the king.

Otherwise, we find only one other instance in which a special place was arranged for women to participate in the events at the Temple: the celebration of the *Simchat Beit Hashoevah*. In Rashi’s words, “So that the women would be able to stand there and witness the celebration.”

The explanation is, as we said before: The Sadducees objected to the entire ritual of the water libation. Therefore, the sages made it into a fundamental part of Judaism and created this entire elaborate celebration, ensuring that women participate as well—all to emphasize the mistake of the Sadducees.

וזהו גם הטעם לכך ש”במוצאי יום טוב הראשון של חג ירדו לעזרת נשים ומתקנין שם תיקון גדול”⁹, “מאי תיקון גדול.. חלקה היתה בראשונה והקיפוח גזוזטרא והתקינו שיהו נשים יושבות מלמעלה ואנשים מלמטה”¹⁰, “כל שנה מסדרין שם גזוזטראות.. כדי שיהו נשים עומדות שם בשמחת בית השואבה ורואות, וזהו תיקון גדול דקתני מתניתין שמתקנין בכל שנה”¹¹:

מן התורה יש רק פעם אחת שגם נשים חייבות לבוא לבית המקדש - במצות הקהל: “מצות עשה להקהיל כל ישראל אנשים ונשים בכל מוצאי שמיטה בעלותם לרגל ולקרות באזניהם מן התורה כו’ ובעזרת הנשים היו קורין”¹².

ומלבד זה - מצינו רק פעם אחת שעושים תקנה מיוחדת, “תיקון גדול”, לסדר בבית המקדש (בעזרת נשים) מקום מיוחד לנשים - בנוגע לשמחת בית השואבה: “שהיו נשים עומדות שם בשמחת בית השואבה ורואות”.

וההסברה בזה - על פי האמור - שהצדוקים היו חולקים על כללות הענין דניסוך המים, ולכן החשיבו ענין זה לעיקר בדת, ועשו... שתהיה שאיבת המים בשמחה גדולה, וגם הנשים יהיו עומדות שם ורואות, כדי להוציא מלבן של צדוקים.

(11) פירש"י שם.

(12) רמב"ם הל' הגיגה פ"ג ה"א-ג.

(9) סוכה נא, א.

(10) שם סע"ב.

And obviously, when all the details of the water libation are carefully carried out according to the instructions of the Torah, it is a great reason to celebrate.

ומובן, שכאשר מביאים לידי פועל כל פרטי הענינים דשאיבת וניסוך המים כפי רצון התורה, הרי זה גורם שמחה גדולה ביותר.

*Simchat Beit Hashoveah, 1951 (5712)
Toras Menachem vol. 8 pg. 43*

In this segment, the Rebbe adds an interesting point: The Talmud relates that the Temple would undergo significant improvements for the celebration, erecting a balcony for the women. Normally, this fact is cited as a source for the custom to erect a mechitza. Here, the Rebbe points out something else: The only time women were obligated to attend an event at the Temple was during the Hakhel gathering, once in seven years. But here, during the Simchat Beit Hashoevah, the sages encouraged the participation of the women, to the extent that a special balcony was necessary.

This, the Rebbe says, was to emphasize the importance of tradition to the women as well. It was also important for them to participate.

(Click [here](#) to listen to the Sicha)

One of the foundations of Judaism is the belief that the written Torah was given along with an oral tradition to Moses at Mount Sinai. Over the generations, we have passed those traditions and customs from father to son and teacher to student. These traditions shape our lives and help preserve our peoplehood. Jews have always given tremendous respect to the elders and teachers—specifically because they are the ones who connect us to our traditions.

Throughout our history, various groups questioned Jewish tradition and claimed to follow only the “original,” written Torah. They developed their own elaborate interpretations, which were often convenient and in-style for their period. They intended to preserve what they viewed as the “essence” of Judaism, while ignoring the “superstitions and impositions” of the rabbis. History has proven that those groups do not survive. Time and again, all their members have either assimilated or rejoined the normative Jewish community.

The Judaism that we observe—and the Judaism that has survived the test of time—is the traditional Judaism that links us back to Moses at Mount Sinai. It is the oral tradition that has preserved us until today and will continue to preserve us into the future.

As Tevye sang: “Traditiooon, Tradition!”

In the custom of Simchat Beit Hashoevah, we see how Judaism values and treasures traditions. If there was a group of people who rejected a custom, there was an immediate effort to create an elaborate affair around it, to ensure that it was treasured and continued.

The custom of the Simchat Beit Hashoevah continued until the destruction of the Second Temple. With the destruction, Jews no longer offered sacrifices, and no longer observed the

wine and water libations.

In 1980, the Rebbe established a new custom (See [Derher Tishrei 5777](#)):

On the first evening of Sukkot, in 1981, after the evening service had drawn to an end and the Rebbe had wished the crowd the customary 'Good Yom Tov,' the Rebbe suddenly delivered a talk.

In the short message, the Rebbe said that even in exile, we are obligated to celebrate Simchat Beit Hashoeva, being that every person has a spiritual Temple in his heart. The Rebbe concluded: "May this joy bring us to the great joy of the coming of Moshiach, and we will thank G-d with 'Shehecheynu vekiyemanu vehigeanu lizman hazeh!'"

Then the Rebbe began to sing "Ata Vechartanu," encouraging the singing all the way out of shul, and the elated dancing and singing continued throughout the night in 770.

In the nights that followed, the Rebbe continued to speak on the topic, encouraging the celebrations to continue. He emphasized that just as the dancing was outdoors in the Temple times, the celebrations should be held outdoors, in the streets of Crown Heights, allowing everyone to participate.

Each year, a large celebration is held on Kingston Avenue with live music, singers, and entertainers, and thousands of people come to participate. Like every good thing, the custom spread to many other communities and locations. In recent years, Jewish communities all over the world hold dancing celebrations to mark the Simchat Beit Hashoevah just as it was held in the Temple.