

# THE WOMEN'S COURTYARD

by Rabbi Yoav Elan

To the east of the Main Courtyard stood a large enclosed area called the Women's Courtyard, measuring 135 cubits (202½ feet) to a side. Entry into this area was not restricted to women, as its name might imply, but in fact was used as a staging area for the multitudes of people arriving daily bearing sacrifices and gifts who would assemble here before proceeding into the Main Courtyard. It was called the Women's Courtyard because the women would specifically gather here to watch the Rejoicing of the Water-drawing which took place each year on the holiday of *Succos*. On the holiday of *Succos* the Rejoicing of the Water-drawing would take place inside the Women's Courtyard. The celebration began on the second night of the holiday when the great sages and pious men of the generation would assemble in this courtyard to dance, juggle, and sing God's praises while scores of *Leviim* stood upon fifteen round steps at the western side of the courtyard providing musical accompaniment. This rejoicing continued all night until dawn when, with great ceremony, a delegation was dispatched to a nearby spring to draw water for that day's water libation. [The water libation, which was only performed on *Succos*, entailed pouring a pitcher of water into a bowl at the southwest corner of the Altar.] Numerous spectators, both men and women, stood along the sides of the Women's Courtyard to watch these festivities. The mingling of men and women at this event led to a certain amount of frivolity and steps were taken to correct this. The Sages came up with an innovative solution in which the women would gather

 Interior of the Women's Courtyard

upon balconies constructed within the courtyard  
while the men would stand below on ground level.

These balconies for the women ran along the southern, eastern, and northern sides of the courtyard, but not the western side. Halfway up the walls of the Women's Courtyard were protruding stone ledges that supported the wooden planks which formed the floorboards of the balcony. Above the floorboards they built row upon row of ascending steps to afford all of the women a good view of the festivities below. Only the protruding balcony supports were permanent fixtures in the courtyard, while the floorboards and steps were put up each year during *Succos* and then taken down after the holiday. \_\_\_\_\_For more information on this topic, and to submit questions or comments for the author, please visit the [blog post](#) of this class.

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