

SIMCHAS BAIS HASHOEVA - A HAPPINESS OF ONENESS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

During the time of the Temple, a unique form of offering was brought on the Mizbe'ach, the Altar during Sukkos. Each morning of Sukkos, a water libation was poured on the Mizbe'ach when the daily morning sacrifice (Tamid shel Shachar) was brought. The pouring of the water, "Nisuch HaMayim" was celebrated with much fanfare. From the evening before, masses of people would congregate on the Temple mount to watch the great sages of the generation dance, perform, and sing in celebration of the special event. Special mammoth lamps were lit, whose lights illuminated the entire Jerusalem. This occurred every single night of Sukkos, except for Shabbos and the first night. Our sages wrote (Sukkah 51a) "Whoever did not see this celebration never saw a celebration in his days." The celebration was known as Simchas Bais HaSho'eva - The Rejoicing of the House of the Drawing (sho'ev meaning to draw water).

Why was a special offering of water brought on Sukkos? The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 16a) writes that as the world is judged for water on Sukkos, we bring a water offering so that the rains for the coming year should be blessed. Another reason for why Sukkos is the holiday on which we have the Simchas Bais HaShoeva is related to that which we discussed in the last post - Sukkos occurs right after Yom Kippur in the harvest season. During the harvest season, a person may become haughty and forget Hashem. This haughtiness affects not only farmers, of course. The wise may take credit for their knowledge and those of fine character may take credit for their graces. The bottom line is that all we get, whether it be money, wisdom, or respect comes from G-d. When people forget this, problems begin. One starts to think that he is superior to another. A person may begin to form castes in his mind, separating the population into categories of worth. All this does is create strife and tension, and unity in Israel can not and will not exist when people think this way.

On Yom Kippur, we all stand together and are judged. We ask G-d for forgiveness. We beg for mercy. We affirm that we will not do those evil deeds again. On Yom Kippur, I am no better than the next guy. I might be rich, but maybe he is a better person...I am smart, but maybe she is more righteous than I. The divisions which we may have created in our mind crumble. We realize that all anyone has is from G-d, and that we are truly all the same. The barrier to unity that our evil inclination erected comes down. On Yom Kippur, we are one united people, and united we want to stay. On Sukkos, both rich and poor move outdoors to temporary dwellings. We are all protected only by G-d. Our unity is reinforced. We are one nation, all celebrating the holiday of Sukkos together in glee.

G-d reminds us that He loves each and every one of us, regardless of what our status appears to be on earth. Usually, wine is poured on the altar. Fine wine is used. The vines are carefully nurtured, the grapes tenderly picked, the wine masterfully squeezed and thoroughly filtered. It is the product of toil and energy. On Sukkos, water is poured on the altar as well. Water is plain. What you see is what you get. No work went into producing this water. Yet, water is accepted upon the altar as is the wine. Plain water is on the same standing as fine wine. The common denominator between these two is that they must remain pure and adulterated. We may be like fine wine, the product of much blood, sweat, and tears. We may be like water, simple and straightforward. However, this classification, G-d is telling us, is irrelevant, as long as we remain pure in thought and committed to His service. If we remember that this is what is important, and that the trappings are just that, it helps us realize that G-d is the one who gave us the trappings in the first place. If this is our focus, unity is sure to stay.

Why is this a time to rejoice? When the water is poured on the altar, we all see that Hashem accepts all of our service to Him, as long as it is done with a pureness of heart. We can take solace in the fact that Hashem sees that we do want to serve Him, and that the mitzvos we do are performed with that in mind. Although our prayers might not be perfect and our observance sub-par, if we tried with all our might to serve Hashem properly, our service is readily accepted. The fact that Hashem sends us this message right after Yom Kippur is cause for celebration.

Sukkos is a time to inculcate within ourselves the experience of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, we all stood together as equals, and asked Hashem for a good year. We outwardly demonstrated that we know Hashem bestows upon us all the good we get. This acknowledgment is also an affirmation of our belief that we are truly one people, united in service of G-d. If we all reinforce these lessons on Sukkos as G-d wants us to, we can be sure that this will indeed be a good year for our brothers and sisters.

(Based on Sefer HaToda'ah)

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