



# True Joy Through Water: Appreciate Water This Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres

## מים היים מירושלים<sup>1</sup> : Exploring the “Nature” of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* Celebration<sup>2</sup>

The human pursuit of happiness is one of the central themes in life. The greatest imaginable שמחה in our tradition was witnessed during Sukkos. מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו<sup>3</sup> - “Whoever has not seen the rejoicing at the festival of the water drawing, has never seen true happiness”. The Sages see the nightly celebrations in anticipation of the drawing the water that would be poured onto the altar, as the pinnacle of happiness. In this *shiur*, we will explore some of the underlying themes of both the נישוך המים as well as שמחת בית השואבה. *B'Ezras Hashem HaChonen Da'as* we will shed light on some of the spiritual aspects of these rituals in a way that informs our connection with water and the environment. As the season of Teshuva, the return to our roots, comes to a close, we must reflect upon the changes we wish to make not only in our spiritual lives, but also in terms of the way we relate to the world in which we live. On Sukkos, the most pervasive ecological issue is certainly the understanding of the importance of water as the essential component of physical life on Earth.

### נישוך המים - The Essence of the Mitzvah

There is a basic *Hakira*, deep Talmudic investigation, as to whether נישוך המים is essentially part of the libations that accompanied the daily offering, or rather, a unique fulfillment in its own right. Harav Yaakov Ettlinger<sup>4</sup> in his offers a lengthy discourse in which he proves it is actually a *Hovas HaYom*- an obligation of the day. One of the primary proofs for this is the unique Halakha that if the נישוך המים was brought prior to the *Korban*, it is valid.

Additionally, the Talmud<sup>5</sup> records a dispute as to the source for נישוך המים. Rabbi Akiva<sup>6</sup> believes that this is an agricultural offering- just as the Omer on Pesach brings blessing to the wheat, and *Bikurim* on Shavuot bring blessings to the fruit, נישוך המים gives us the opportunity to activate the blessing of rain throughout the year. After all, “בהג נידון על המים”- on Sukkos the world is judged regarding water. The timing of Sukkos is the *Mechayev*- the source of the obligation.

Rav Yehuda Ben Beteira holds that it is from the extra letters *mem-yud-mem*, found in the Torah regarding *Nesachim*, while Rav Natan learns from the double language of הסך נסך, that the Torah refers to both wine and water. Yet the *poskim*<sup>7</sup> hold that it is actually *Halakha LeMoshe MiSinai*. If נישוך המים was truly under the general category of the libations that were brought each day, we would have certainly preferred the textual sources of the Mitzvah. Clearly, *Halakha* leads us to an understanding of this Mitzvah as a unique expression of the messages inherent in the holiday of Sukkos.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zechariah 14:8

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to Tuvia Aronson, who prepared this *shiur* for Canfei Nesharim. Tuvia expresses his thanks to his father and teacher Rabbi Dr David I Aronson *shlit" a* for providing valuable sources and suggestions.

<sup>3</sup> Talmud Bavli Sukkah 51

<sup>4</sup> Responsa Binyan Zion (43)

<sup>5</sup> Zevachim 110b, Sifrei Piska 150, Taanit etc.)

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Akiva in other places gives a textual proof. Also the opinion of Rav Yehuda Ben Beteira in one rendition is that the extra letters are proof this mitzvah is from the Torah, whereas in the other reading, he says they are a *remez*- hint.

<sup>7</sup> Rambam Mishneh Torah

<sup>8</sup> For further Iyun see Rav Yeruchem Fishel Perla's commentary to Rav Sa'adia Gaon's Sefer HaMitzvot, GRY"Z HaLevi Soloveitchik 50b, Kehilos Yaakov Yoma siman 5



## שמחת בית השואבה - The Essence of The *Simcha*

The famous Temple party raged all week long with no time to sleep. As the Talmud tells us<sup>9</sup>, there were parades, flutes and *shofaros* were blown, gigantic orchestras played, Psalms of praise were sung, Rabbis dancing wildly like *David Hamelech*, there was fire-juggling, and even thumb push-ups. There was a special effort made to include women with the building of a special platform. The Temple and all of *Yerushalayim* were lit up with humongous bowls of oil. It is interesting to note that the wicks were made of old priestly undergarments. Any environmentalist will tell you that reusing is even better than recycling due to less energy being wasted.

Why this elaborate ceremony? There is a fundamental dispute between Rashi and Rambam regarding the source of the *simcha* that inspired the most festive (if not raucous) celebration in the Beis HaMikdash. Rashi<sup>10</sup> is clear that the *Simcha* is in celebration of the ניסוך המים and is a form of *Hiddur Mitzvah*- an enhancement of the water-drawing. What a *hidur Mitzvah*! It must be a world record! Rashi's textual source is from the beautiful image- "ושאבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה"<sup>11</sup> - You shall draw water with joy from the wellsprings of salvation.. Rambam<sup>12</sup>, however, maintains that the happiness is related purely to the holiday itself, and is a fulfillment of "ושמחתם לפני ה' א-לויכם"- and you shall be happy in the presence of Hashem.

Rav Soloveitchik z.tz.l.<sup>13</sup> teaches that Rambam breaks down the mitzvah to be happy at the party into two *dinim* or categories: there is a general mitzvah to be happy like on the other festivals, yet there is another dimension in that we have a specific mitzvah to be happy in the Mikdash.<sup>14</sup> (It also seems, says the Rav, that the Rambam further distinguishes between the happiness of ניסוך המים and the שמחת בית השואבה as we see two different sources in both Torah *Devarim* 16:14-15 and *Vayikra* 23:40, and Talmud *Sukkah* 48a and 51 a).

Dr. Ronen Ahituv notes<sup>15</sup> that there are two primary reasons for the happiness in the *Beis HaMikdash on Sukkos*: a) the expansion of the area intended for ritual purpose in particular, and the holy essence of the place in general; and b) the gathering of the entire community. The *Navi* describes *Shlomo HaMelekh* dedicating the *Beis HaMikdash on Sukkos* with both these elements. There were innumerable sacrifices offered in the entire courtyard. These *korbanos*, stresses the *Navi*, were brought by all of *Am Yisrael* together. On *Sukkos* there were both these factors. People gathered en masse, and there were renovations to the *Mikdash* to include women in an appropriate way.

Rav Shlomo Goren z.tz.l.,<sup>16</sup> the famous former chief rabbi (a vegetarian, by the way), explains after a lengthy discourse on the subject, that there really is a third category: 1) the happiness of *shalosh regalim*, 2) the happiness of the *Mikdash*, and 3) the happiness related to the agricultural aspect of the festival. Remember, in Temple times, we lived in an agrarian society. Farmers harvested various crops for six months. Here we are, gathering in the last of our produce, preparing for the winter, and what do we do? We gather and celebrate!

The Gemara<sup>17</sup> solves a contradiction in the book of *Koheles* that we read on *Sukkos*. The same author both praises and criticizes happiness. The Gemara solves the paradox by maintaining that the happiness that is praised is *Simcha of Mitzvah*. According to The Rav, Rav J.B Soloveitchik z.tz.l.<sup>18</sup> "Halakhically, *simcha* arises from man's

<sup>9</sup> BT Sukkah

<sup>10</sup> 50b

<sup>11</sup> Yeshaya 12

<sup>12</sup> Mishne Torah- End of ch 8 of Laws of *Lulav*- Note that he doesn't bring the halakha in *Hilkhos Temidin Umusafin*! Also, Rav Goren points out that he cannot hold that *Simchas Beit HaShoevah* is a derivative of *Nisukh*, because he holds that *nisukh* is *halakha lemoshe misinai*

<sup>13</sup> Brought down in *Harerei Kedem* by Rav Shurkin siman 147

<sup>14</sup> Rambam in *Sefer Hamitzvos* is consistent with this approach.

<sup>15</sup> in Bar Ilan University's weekly Parasha sheet (#624)

<sup>16</sup> *Toras HaMoadim* pp. 117-126

<sup>17</sup> Shabbos 30b

<sup>18</sup> Transcribed from a lecture in *Noraot Harav* vol 13 p 108

closeness to God...*simcha* is expressed by becoming closer to God than the day before, even an hour before. Becoming closer to God is in itself, the source of joy that stimulates man and gives him a sense of happiness. Similarly, both *Maharat*<sup>19</sup> and *Sefas Emes*<sup>20</sup> teach that *Simcha* means a sense of completion with Hashem and with the deepest part of oneself. Finding one's true self, accessing one's deep personality, is an element of *Deveykus* with Hashem; In turn, bonding with God is the absolute peak of *simcha*! This is the essence of the שמחה בית השואבה.

### Primordial Waters

To understand the specific connection between water, Sukkos, and *simcha*, we must go back to the beginning. When looking back to the dawn of humanity, we find a plethora of references regarding water. For our purposes we will mention just a few that have direct bearing on our topic. We know that from the very beginning of creation Hashem's presence hovers over the waters. Rashi z.t.z.l. understands this "spirit of Hashem" to be talking about the Holy Throne hovering above the water. Interestingly, Rav Moshe Kordevero z.t.z.l. maintains that the Holy Throne refers to the system of natural laws. It is clear that one of the most powerful manners of connecting to *Ribbono Shel HaOlam* is through nature, so much so that Rambam codified this in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah (2:2)<sup>21</sup>.

The *gemara*<sup>22</sup> brings a discussion of *Ammoraim* about what to call the special *simcha* on Sukkos. One opinion says it should be called "*shoevah*" (drawing) because of the joy of drawing the water. The second name given is "*chashuva*" (important). This second deserves some attention. Rashi<sup>23</sup> explains that this name is also related to *nisuch hamayim*. The שיתין '*shitin*', the channel system reaching down from the southwest corner of the altar to the depths of the earth, was so important that it was created during the six days of creation. The Gerrer Rebbe<sup>24</sup> asks why the "importance" is specifically related to water, if the *shitin* channel was also used for the wine. He answers that Sukkos is such a universal holiday that it celebrates the unity of all humankind. On Sukkos we are essentially reconnecting with all of humanity and all of creation. This is why the water channels connecting the *Beis Hamikdash* with the primordial waters are so "important" that some called the celebration the *Simchas Beis HaChashuvah*!

The Torah teaches: "And a mist came up from the ground, and gave moisture to the whole face of the earth. And Hashem E-lokim formed the man, dust from the ground, and He breathed in his nose a living soul; and the man was a living spirit." (*Bereishis* 2:6-7) Rashi notes that Hashem raised the תהום [the deep groundwater] and gave moisture to the clouds to wet the earth and make human. Like one who kneads bread, who adds water and after that kneads the dough. So too here, 'He gave moisture' and then 'He formed'." 'Dust from the ground': He collected dust from the whole earth, all four directions... Another opinion, He took his dust from the place about which it says 'an altar of earth you shall make for Me.' The *kohen* pours water on the very spot that Hashem did in creating Adam! Clearly, Rav Hutner z.t.z.l.<sup>25</sup> comments, the *Nisukh Hamayim* is in a sense, a mimicking of the creation of humanity. We mix water with the place from which our bodies were formed and through the music and song we breathe a new soul into ourselves just like Hashem did for us after mixing water and soil. According to Rav Hutner, we are actually celebrating our ability to create ourselves!

The Holy Zohar<sup>26</sup> teaches that when the water is poured during the 7 days of Sukkos, all of the seven days of creation are infused with spiritual light and loving-kindness. The act of גיסוך המים not only re-energizes human

<sup>19</sup> Chidushei Agadot vol. 1, p. 14

<sup>20</sup> Sukkos 1874

<sup>21</sup> The name Elokim can be seen in the verse from Yeshayahu 40:26 – Lift up your eyes and see, *MI bare EILeH*. Also note the famous Gematria equation of "Elokim" and Hateva, both 86

<sup>22</sup> Sukkah 50b

<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> Sefas Emes al HaShas Sukkah 50 b

<sup>25</sup> *Pachad Yitzhak*- Sukkos

<sup>26</sup> *Hashmatos Bereishis* 262a+b

beings, it brings spiritual benefit to all of creation! Through our action we bring restoration and balance to the world- a *Tikun*. Surely, we can take this spiritual lesson and literally bring it down to Earth. Again, we see that this is clearly an appropriate holiday to contemplate and assess our own lives, and see how our actions affect the natural world around us.

### Well-diggers and Water-pourers

Avraham and Yitzhak were well-diggers. Many Biblical stories happened at wells. Literarily<sup>27</sup>, whenever a well is mentioned, the Torah alludes to some profound action or shift in the story. Chasidic thinking points to a well as a physical symbol of revealing what was once deeply concealed. In psycho-spiritual terms, digging a well is a metaphor for allowing deep subconscious inspiration to nurture and provide sustenance.<sup>28</sup>

In *Sefer Bereishis*, when Yaakov Avinu meets Rachel Imenu a.h., he reveals the waters that had been covered by a boulder. The Midrash<sup>29</sup> offers several *derashos*, one of which is that the well is Zion and the three flocks are the shalosh regalim and the stone represents *Simchas Beis HaShoevah* - "אבן הגדולה-זו שמחת בית השואבה"! Later, upon his return to Eretz Yisrael, the Torah explicitly<sup>30</sup> tells us that Yaakov came to Sukkos. He subsequently pours a libation on his pillar. The *Targum*<sup>31</sup> maintains that he was performing ג'יטוך המים on Sukkos. Thematically, this works well seeing that Yaakov was celebrating both the protection during his journey, as well as his joy at being back in the Land of Israel- most appropriate reasons for a Sukkos celebration!

Yosef HaTzadik is called<sup>32</sup> "בן פורת עלי עין" - a fruitful vine by a fountain- another image of a nurturing well. We of course have Moshe sweetening the waters at *Marah* and immediately the people have access to the 12 springs and 70 date trees. This could be seen as a reference to the national tribes of Israel nurturing the universal family of nations with bountiful supplies of water, just as all of our tribes together offer 70 sacrifices during Sukkos. Obviously, water in the desert was a recurring theme, but beyond the scope of this *shiur*.

Later in Tanakh, we find water libations by both Shmuel HaNavi<sup>33</sup> and David HaMelekh<sup>34</sup>. The Targum and Mahar"i Kra both mention this as a metaphor of pouring out the heart- the most intimate form of supplication one can make. "Pour out your heart like water toward the presence of Hashem". Rashi teaches that pouring water is a symbol of submission, a form of emptying ourselves before Hashem. Radak comments that libation is a sign of forgiveness-a clear connection between Yom Kippur, Sukkos and the ג'יטוך המים. The Metzudos sees pouring water as an expression of Tefillah. The common theme threading through all of these perspectives is that pouring water is a way of creating a connection with Hashem that is more intimate and intense.

This idea is reinforced by a source<sup>35</sup> that teaches us that after his expulsion from *Gan Eden*, *Adam HaRishon* immersed himself in the waters of the ג'יחון *Gichon* spring where the *Nisuch* waters were drawn from (We will discuss this fountain further in a few minutes). Adam immersed up to his neck in the water for seven weeks and then prayed: 'Forgive my sins and accept my Teshuvah, so that all future generations may know that repentance is efficacious and that You will forgive those who return to you'

The Midrash Rabbah<sup>36</sup> learns that the Yom Harishon of Sukkos refers to the forgiveness and purity following Yom Kippur. Rebbe Levi Yitzchack of Berditchov Z'tzl.<sup>37</sup> says that on Rosh Hashana we do *Tashlich* and throw our sins

<sup>27</sup> The Art of Biblical Narrative by Robert Alter, 1981, p 93?

<sup>28</sup> Rebbe Yosef Shalom on Yitzhak digging wells

<sup>30</sup> 33:17

<sup>31</sup> Yonatan (Pseudo-Jonathan) Also see Ibn Ezra on that pasuk 35:14

<sup>32</sup> 49:22 For a naturalists definition of Ben Porat, see Prof Yehuda Felix in his Nature and Man in the Bible, 197

<sup>33</sup> I Shmuel 7:6

<sup>34</sup> II Shmuel: 23:16- see also Yerushalmi Sanhedrin: end of 5:5

<sup>35</sup> Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 20

<sup>36</sup> Parashas Emor

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Yeshivat Bat Ayin Parsha Daf

away into running water, but by Sukkos, when we do Teshuva, we repent out of love for Hashem, and now our former sins can become merits. Now, realizing that the "sins" we threw out were really merits in disguise, we do *Nisuch Hamayim* and offer up the "sins" with love before Hashem.

The Alexander Rebbe z.t.z.l. writes<sup>38</sup> that a state of sin creates a barrier through which the *shefa*, the divine flow of blessing, cannot pass. When we do *teshuvah*, we fix this state of separation, and it could be suggested that the pouring out of water on Sukkos is a symbol to the renewed channel between heaven and earth.

Rav Kook z.t.z.l.<sup>39</sup> maintains that Sukkos is also a bridge between the natural world, as epitomized by the harvest, and the supernatural world, in that this holiday reflects our protected status in the desert in particular, and the meta-historical dimension of Jewish history. The water libations were a uniquely "Sukkosish" way to unify the most natural with the most spiritual.

Where was Yaakov when he saw the famous ladder that stands firmly on the ground, yet reaches the uppermost heaven? It is well-known in the Jewish tradition that *Yerushalayim* is where heaven and earth kiss. After all, her very name is in the plural. We all have our own stories as to how Jerusalem serves as a cosmic bridge for us as individuals. Yet Sukkos seems to be the *Chag* in which this aspect is most clearly revealed to us as a people.

### Living Waters of Yerushalayim

"How was גִּיסוּךְ הַמַּיִם performed? ... The *Kohanim* used to fill a gold flagon holding three logs with water from the *Shiloach* (*Sukka* 4:9). The *Shiloach*, i.e. *Ma'ayan Gichon*, is the most abundant of the three natural sources of water in the Jerusalem area.<sup>40</sup> The name *Gichon* comes from the Hebrew root, גִּיחַ meaning "breaking out". Some have suggested that the name is an onomatopoeic reflection of a gurgling gush of water flowing from the rocks.<sup>41</sup> The *Gichon* water is channeled into a pool called the *Shiloach* because the excess water was used for irrigation and the name *Shiloach* is derived from SHELACH, "irrigation canal". Scholars believe that the spring supplied about 200-1,100 cu. meters daily.

David HaMelekh hinted to how he conquered the city by going up the *tzinor*, some sort of opening or channel most probably to access water. Visitors to the *Ir David* excavations can actually see the rock platform where Shlomo HaMelekh was anointed on top of the spring.<sup>42</sup> Later on in Jewish history, King Hizkiyah saved the city from the Assyrians by digging an underground canal to bring the waters of the *Gihon* within the ancient city walls.<sup>43</sup>

There are some beautiful images in the *Neviim* that are relevant to our discussion. The *Navi Yechezkel*<sup>44</sup> writes so poetically of his vision of how ultimately a stream of water will emerge from the *Beis HaMikdash* and nurture all of *Eretz Yisrael*: all the fish, all the trees bearing fruit and medicinal plants, (and the *Midrash*<sup>45</sup> adds- will divide into 12 rivers symbolizing the tribes), to heal all polluted waters in the world. It is obvious to even a novice biologist, that when we pollute waters we also affect the flora and fauna even beyond our immediate vicinity. We also know that polluted bodies can heal. The Hudson river cleanup project is a classic example of how a once toxic soup can significantly rebound with the help of human communities.

We clearly have a universal environmental mission to accomplish. Yet today, if you drive, or better yet, hike down *Nahal Soreq* from *Yerushalayim*, you smell the putrid waters that we have polluted. How we yearn for the time

<sup>38</sup> *Yismach Yisrael* on parashat *Vayera*

<sup>39</sup> From Chanan Morrison's adaptation of Rav A.Y. Hakohen Kook z.t.z.l. in *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, p. 247

<sup>40</sup> The *Midrash* (*Eicha Rabba* 19) tells us: "Had you been worthy, you would be dwelling in Jerusalem and drinking the waters of the *Shiloach*, whose waters are pure and sweet." Unfortunately, the now filthy water have been polluted most recently, by the sewage of the Arab village, Silwan.

<sup>41</sup> The *Midrash* notes the similarity of *Gichon* to *Gachan* - he bent down, i.e. he repented.- Much of this information can be found online from Catriel Sugarman

<sup>42</sup> I *Melachim* 1:33-35).

<sup>43</sup> *Divrei Hayamim Bes* 500 32:2-4- These walls are not the relatively new, year old walls we see today.

<sup>44</sup> *Yechezkel* 47 1-12

<sup>45</sup> *Yalkus Shimoni Remez* 383

when the Jewish people in general, and specifically, *Yerushalayim* at our heart, will lead in fixing the damage we have done to the precious water sources on our planet!

The Talmud connects the שמחת בית השואבה with the *Nevua* of Zechariah 14:8: who writes of the end-of-days: "It will be in those days that living waters will come out from *Yerushalayim*". We may be proud that environmental awareness in Israel and throughout the Jewish world is rising. Surely, a key element of a Jewish understanding of the messianic era would be a return to the perfect ecological balance<sup>46</sup>. In fact, many *Olim* from our communities here in the US are leaders in the growing field of environmentalism from a Torah perspective.<sup>47</sup> For the sake of fulfilling our role in bringing about Redemption, we must take action to find ecological balance in our own homes and in *Yerushalayim* in particular.

### All My Wellsprings are in You (O Zion)

We also must pray for water for the coming winter. As the *Midrash HaGadol*<sup>48</sup> notes in discussing the division of water during creation, the upper "male" waters are responsible for rain and dew, while the lower "female" waters are accessible to us through rivers (which emanate from springs). So aside from praying for rain to receive the bounty of the upper waters in the form of *Tefilas Geshem*- the prayer for rain on *Shemini Atzeres*, we must somehow offer prayers for the waters flowing up from the Earth. Perhaps for this reason, the presence of women was necessary, to the extent of building a special *ezras nashim* for the שמחת בית השואבה.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most popular eco-Jewish texts of our era is *Perek Shira*. It is an obscure *Midrash* that attributes spiritual songs to various parts of nature based on verses from *Tanakh. Maayanot*, Wellsprings say: “שרים כחוללים, כל מיניו כן”- Singers as well as flutists, all my wellsprings are in you (Holy mountain of Zion)- *Tehillim* 87:7. Rashi and Radak both note that "wellsprings" represent the outpouring of the inner dimension. Rav Yoel Shwartz<sup>50</sup> notes that unlike rain, the *ma'ayanot* are generally constantly flowing. Perhaps this serves as a spiritual lesson indicating that the *Yamim Noraim* will continue nourishing us with inspiration even after we return home for the winter.

In his commentary to *Perek Shira*, Rabbi Binyamin Hakohen<sup>51</sup>, explains the meaning of the *pasuk*, in a simple, yet most profound way. "Singers and flutists, all my wellsprings are in you"- Through our music, we directly influence the *ma'ayanot*- the springs. Our songs direct the waters to Hashem, and in turn, they lead us to new spiritual heights.

*Beis Yaakov* of *Izhitz* also comments as to our active role in drawing up water. He contrasts this ritual with the nature of a purifying *Mikveh* which must be *mayim hayim*- living waters. The Mishna<sup>52</sup> teaches that a *Mikveh* cannot have 3 *lugin* of drawn water, the very same measurement of water we draw and pour on *Sukkos*! On the one hand, *Mikveh* serves as a purification process where the individual completely submerges and essentially vanishes. *Mikveh* is a passive process. On this holiday, however, the *avodah*, the divine service, is to embrace our talents, and to actively inculcate human actions into the spiritual realm. The שמחת בית השואבה, is in a way, a celebration of our activism! We **do** affect the natural world around us; We **do** affect the waters of our seas and aquifers; And in our generation we **must** be pro-active.

<sup>46</sup> See Rav Avraham Greenbaum's Torah-Nature mini course at <http://www.azamra.org/earth.shtml>

<sup>47</sup> American yeshivos such as Bat Ayin and Simchas Shlomo have instituted learning programs connecting Torah and the environment. The key leaders in the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel who are teaching about Judaism's perspective are US born. And academic programs such as the Heschel Center and the Arava Institute are also inspired by American Jewish environmentalists.

<sup>48</sup> *Bereishis* 6- Found in *Torah Sheleimah* by Rav Kasher

<sup>49</sup> Additionally, for the water libation, as opposed to most other services, the Kohen circled from left to right around the altar (*Succah* 48b) and in Kabbalistic thought, the left side corresponds to the feminine.

<sup>50</sup> In his commentary to *Perek Shira* called *Dvar Yersushalayim*

<sup>51</sup> the *Av Bes Din* of Riggio 1651-1730

<sup>52</sup> *Mikvaos* 2:4

## **Mayim, Mayim, Mayim**

If this ritual is so deeply connected to the physical aspects of water, why do Chazal in the often-quoted *Yerushalmi* portray the event as a drawing of the Holy Spirit? We mentioned earlier, that Yerushalayim is the bridge between heaven and earth. We will now explore how water, specifically, integrates the natural, ecological aspects, with the religious, spiritual dimensions.

Whenever water is mentioned in the scriptures- it means Torah- “**אין מים אלא תורה**”<sup>53</sup>. One of the beautiful *Midrashim*<sup>54</sup> that compare water to Torah reads as follows: "Just as rain water comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the Torah; one learns a bit today and some more tomorrow, until in time becomes like a flowing stream. Just as water has no taste unless one is thirsty; So too, Torah is best appreciated through great effort and yearning. Just as water leaves a high place and flows to a low one, so too, Torah leaves one whose spirit is proud and remains with one whose spirit is humble. Water is a great equalizer, no matter your station or class - all can drink water. So, too - a scholar should not be ashamed to say to a simpler fellow, 'Teach me a chapter, a verse or a letter'. Just as water is a source of life for the world, as it says, A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters (Song of Songs 4:15), so the Torah is a source of life for the world. Just as water restores the soul, so too, does the Torah. Just as water is cleansing, the words of Torah are purifying.”

There is something about the physical nature of water that is most inspiring. The Gemara suggests teachers take "misbehaving" students to a body of water. There are many possible ways to understand this passage. Maybe the sight or sound is calming. Perhaps a pool offers the opportunity for literal self-reflection. It could be that the child simply needs to be re-hydrated. Of course, so many individuals find contemplation near water to be particularly inspiring.

Both Rav Eliyahu Kitov<sup>55</sup>, and Rav Yonasan Abraham<sup>56</sup> mention that water, a basic form of nature, is a reminder that even the simplest of people have access to the Divine spirit. The Lubavitcher Rebbe<sup>57</sup> also makes a similar point in his distinction between water and wine. Wine represents performing *mitzvot* that have "טעם"- taste or reason; Tasteless water, on the other hand, represents pure "קבלת עול"- absolute acceptance and devotion.<sup>58</sup>

Rav Dessler, quoted in a beautiful essay in *Seasons of our Joy* by Rav Feuer<sup>59</sup>, reminds us that many people aspire to achieve happiness but it is very difficult to attain. Sukkos reminds us that a key to bliss is to not be so obsessed with our manipulation and mastery of the material world. On Sukkos we so passionately celebrate the most basic element of nature, untouched by human processes. In the words of the Slonimer Rebbe, after Yom Kippur when we throw away our superficiality, we now rejoice with abandon at uncovering our simple essence.

## **"If I Am Here..."**

תניא, אמרו עליו על הלל הזקן כשהיה שמח בשמחת בית השואבה אמר כן:  
אם אני כאן - הכל כאן, ואם איני כאן - מי כאן ?<sup>60</sup> "If I am here, it is if everyone is here; If I am not here, it is as if no one is here." The famous line that Hillel was wont to say at the שמחת בית השואבה is quite perplexing. How can this great, saintly, and modest sage make such a self-centered comment? A commentary of Rav Soloveitchik<sup>61</sup> again proves to be relevant to our theme. Hillel declared in a loud and clear voice that an individual must hold her or himself accountable. One must not pass on one's own responsibility to others. If everyone said, "That party is

<sup>53</sup> Bava Kamma 17a

<sup>54</sup> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:19

<sup>55</sup> In his classic *Sefer HaToda'ah*

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.shemaisrael.co.il/yomtov/Sukkos/happy.htm>

<sup>57</sup> *Timeless Patterns in Time* page 61, adapted by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger from *Likutei Sichos Vol II Sukkos*

<sup>58</sup> In this vein, the Sochatchover in his *Shem Mishmuel* points out that Rosh HaShanah is the head, while Yom Kippur is the heart. The combination of water and wine on Sukkos represents a synthesis of mental (wine) and the emotional (water).

<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Shira Smiles brings this in her shiur found on [www.613.org](http://www.613.org)

<sup>60</sup> *Bavli Sukkah* 53a

<sup>61</sup> *Reshimos Shiurim Sukkah* by Rav Zvi Reichman 282

going to be so boring; I'm not going"- there would be no festivities. When one individual starts to enjoy and have a good time, the entire event is influenced.

In the face of the mounting evidence that the Earth's waters are in absolute crisis due to human civilization, it would be easy to assume that one person's action could not possibly help. The message of Hillel, in particular, and of the *ניסוך המים* and *שמחת בית השואבה* in general, is an unequivocal call to human action. We, as individuals and as a national community, need to evaluate our own relationships with the bounty of resources that Hashem has given us, and take actions in our own lives and in our community to protect them. There can be no greater joy than celebrating our partnership with Hashem in the sacred task of caring for creation.

הג שמחה!