

With Joy

“*With joy shall you draw waters out of the wells of salvation (Yeshua)!*” (Isa. 12:3)

The Eight days of Sukkot are known collectively as the days of our rejoicing / gladness. Major events have taken place during this festival throughout Scripture. Today’s festival is known as *Shemini Atzeret*: the eight-day of assembly in Scripture. It is also referred to as *Simchat Beit Hashoavah*: Rejoicing in the place of the Water Drawing. This is the name of the water libation ceremony. We don’t know exactly when the water libation ceremony was actually instituted, but it predates the second temple based on the Talmud and the Mishnah. It can be easy to dismiss many of the traditions found in the oral law, however, there is so much beauty in many of them. In fact, *Yeshua* even participated in many of them, which should cause us to evaluate them in greater detail.

Simchat Beit Hashoavah

“*He who has not seen the Water-Drawing Celebration has never seen joy in his life (Talmud).*”

Every Jewish festival is celebrated with joy. Often there are additional emotions added to the mix: awe on Rosh Hashanah, regret on Yom Kippur, freedom from oppression on Passover. But the holiday of Sukkot is pure joy. In our prayers, we call it simply “the season of our rejoicing.”

One of Sukkot’s most joyous observances was known as *Simchat Beit Hashoavah*, the Celebration of the Water-Drawing. When the Holy Temple stood, every sacrifice included wine libations poured over the altar (1/4 Hin up to a full Hin = 6 liters). On Sukkot, water was also poured over the altar in a special ceremony. This ritual engendered such joy that it was celebrated with music, dancing and singing all night long. Every morning of Sukkot at daybreak, a group of Levites and priests went down to the *Shiloach* stream (pool of Siloam), which ran south of the Temple Mount, and drew three log (a Talmudic liquid measurement) of fresh water to be poured on the altar after the daily morning sacrifice. Their arrival at the Temple with the water was accompanied by trumpet blasts. (For Shabbat, the water was collected before the onset of Shabbat and stored in a golden vessel in the Temple.)

There were two holes in the altar into which liquid was poured. One hole was for the wine that accompanied every sacrifice, and a second, smaller one was reserved for the Sukkot water. The holes were different sizes to allow the wine and water, which have different consistencies, to drain at the same speed. The nights of Sukkot were spent celebrating this once-a-year offering. The Talmud describes the celebrations of *Simchat Beit Hashoavah* in detail: Priests kindled fires on great candelabra, lighting up Jerusalem as if it were the middle of the day. Throughout the night pious men danced holding torches, scholars juggled and Levites played music while the lay people watched with excitement. The Temple courtyard was specially furnished to accommodate this event, and a balcony was erected for women so they could observe the revelry.

Though not explicitly mandated in the Torah, the water libation is part of the oral tradition. For this reason, the Sadducees, who rejected the Oral Law, bitterly disputed the practice. Once the priest honored to do the libation was sympathetic to the Sadducees and, instead of pouring the water into the hole in the altar, he spilled it on his own feet. The onlookers were horrified and pelted him with their *etrogim*. From that time on, whoever poured the water libation lifted the jug of water high in the air, so that all could see him perform the mitzvah properly.

At dawn, as the rejoicing subsided, the priests enacted what some have identified as the transformation of another folk rite, one to rekindle a diminishing sun approaching the autumnal equinox. With trumpet blasts, the *Kohanim* (priests) descended the steps to the Women’s Court, marched to the Eastern Gate, turned their faces west to the Temple, and proclaimed, “*Our fathers who were in this place stood with*

their backs to the Temple and their faces eastward and worshipped the sun, but our eyes are unto the Lord" (based on Ezekiel 8:16).

Even today, when we no longer have a Temple, and the water libation ritual is discontinued, many communities still celebrate *Simchat Beit Hashoavah* with music and dancing during the nights of Sukkot, in keeping with the Torah's directive, "You shall rejoice on your holiday." Why was this event accompanied by such fanfare and celebration? Part of the answer is that Jews of old were happy to demonstrate their fealty to tradition, even those traditions not specified in the Torah. In addition, the water-drawing was said to be accompanied by a great awareness of Godliness, to the degree that it is said that, along with water, people would "draw" prophetic revelation. The Chassidic masters explain that the water celebration signifies a joy caused by a connection to God so deep and so true that, like water, it has no describable taste. And like water, it sustains all life.

The Feast of Yeshua's Birth

Sukkot is the time prophesied by Isaiah when the entire world would see the light, that is, the salvation of *יהוה*, our Messiah *Yeshua*. We would expect that *יהוה* would reveal these details to His servants the prophets as it is written: "⁷For the Lord Adonai, will do nothing, unless He has revealed His counsel to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7, see also John 15:15) Indeed, the events that surround the greatest gift given to mankind were revealed to *Isaiah*.

"¹The people walking in darkness will see a great light. Upon those dwelling in the land of the shadow of death, light will shine. ²You will multiply the nation. You will increase the joy. They will rejoice before You like the joy in the harvest, as they revel when they divide spoil... ⁵For to us a child is born, a son will be given to us, and the government will be upon His shoulder. His Name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, My Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:1-2; 5)

The Feast that Messiah Revealed Himself

The Bible records an incident during the Feast of Tabernacles that merits our attention. During the water libation ritual *Yeshua* stood up and cried out declaring that He was living water (*Mayim Chaim*):

Sukkot is a time of simcha, and what a rejoicing there was in the Beit Hamikdash on Sukkot. Especially during the Simchat Beit Hashoavah – the Celebration of Drawing the Water. Water is a blessing. No one can live without water. Therefore, on Sukkot (which is the beginning of the rainy season in Israel) we ask Adonai to send enough rain and water for the entire world. Each evening during Chol Hamoed Succot (the intermediary days of the Feast of Sukkot), a great celebration was held in the Temple. Tens of thousands of people came. The golden lamps were lit. The Levi-im sang and played their harps and lyres and cymbals. The people danced all night long holding torches and singing songs of praise to Adonai. All of Jerusalem rejoiced. Then, just as the roosters began to crow and announce the beginning of a new day, the people marched out of the Beit Hamikdash and down to the pool of Shiloach, an ancient spring of water outside the walls of the city. They drew up pitchers of cold, pure water from the spring and brought them back to the Temple. They prayed the morning prayers, brought the daily offering, and then poured the water from the Shiloach on the mizbeach – the alter in the Beit Hamikdash. The Rabbis state "Whoever has not seen the joy of Simchat Beit Hashoavah has never seen joy in his life!" (1991 ArtScroll Sukkot)

Imagine the festivities, it was morning, right after the *Shaharit* service... *Yeshua* was there but not everyone knew He was coming. He apparently spent several days at the Temple teaching the people. Night after night and day after day, they would rehearse the water libation ceremony and ask the Almighty to bring the rain that the entire world needs! Can you see how it must have been for our Messiah? They were praying for the rain to come, but the answer to the prayer was standing there, literally!

"²Now the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near. ³Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, so Your disciples also may see the works You are doing'... ¹⁴About halfway through the Feast, Yeshua went up to the Temple and began teaching. ... ³⁷On the last and greatest day of the Feast,

Yeshua stood up and cried out loudly, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture says, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' ³⁹Now He said this about the Ruach, whom those who trusted in Him were going to receive; for the Ruach was not yet given, since Yeshua was not yet glorified. ⁴⁰When they heard these words, some of the crowd said, 'This man really is the Prophet.' ⁴¹Others were saying, 'This is the Messiah.' Still others were saying, 'The Messiah doesn't come from the Galilee, does He?' ⁴²Didn't the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, David's town?'" (See John 7:2-3; 14; 37-42)

Sukkot - The Feast of Dedication of the First Temple & the Shekinah

"¹⁴Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel—all the heads of the tribes and the ancestral chieftains of the children of Israel—to King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring the ark of the covenant of Adonai up from the city of David, which is Zion. ²All the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Solomon at the Feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the 7th month." (1 Kings 8:1-2) (See also 2 Chronicles 5, Neh. 8:14-18)

The First Festival Observed by Israel upon returning from the Babylonian Captivity

"¹⁴They found written in the Torah that Adonai had commanded through Moses that Bnei-Yisrael should dwell in sukkot during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵So that they should proclaim and spread this message in all their towns and in Jerusalem saying, 'Go out to the hill country and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees to make sukkot, just as it is written.' ¹⁶So the people went out and brought branches, and made sukkot for themselves, each on their own roof, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God, in the plaza before the Water Gate and in the plaza of the Ephraim Gate. ¹⁷The entire assembly who had returned from the captivity made sukkot and dwelt in the sukkot. Since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day Bnei-Yisrael had not done so – and the joy was very great. ¹⁸Day after day from the first day to the last day, he read from the scroll of the Torah of God. So they kept the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, according to the regulation, there was a solemn assembly." (Nehemiah 8:14-18)

The Time of the Restoration of the Second Temple

"¹On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of Adonai came through Haggai the prophet: ²Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, kohen gadol, and to the remnant of the people: ³'Who remains among you who saw this House in its former glory? So how do you see it now? Does it not seem as nothing in comparison in your eyes? ⁴But now, Zerubbabel, chazak!' – it is a declaration of Adonai – 'and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, kohen gadol, and all people of the land, chazak!' – it is a declaration of Adonai – 'and work! For I am with you!' – it is a declaration of Adonai-Tzva'ot. ⁵'According to the word I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. My Ruach is standing in your midst. Do not fear!' ⁶For thus says Adonai-Tzva'ot: 'In just a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, ⁷and I will shake all the nations. The treasures of all the nations will come, and I will fill this House with glory,' says Adonai-Tzva'ot. ⁸'The silver is mine and the gold is mine!' – it is a declaration of Adonai-Tzva'ot. ⁹'The glory of this latter House will be greater than the former,' says Adonai-Tzva'ot. 'In this place, I will grant shalom' – it is a declaration of Adonai-Tzva'ot.