

END DAYS OF SUCCOS TALKS

**HOSHANNAH RABBAH
SHEMINI ATZERES
SIMCHAS TORAH**

**COLLECTION OF DRASHAS FROM THE
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SEPARATING FROM “EREV RAV”¹

UNDERSTANDING THE DEPTH BEHIND HOSHANAH RABBAH

On *Succos*, we take four species², one of which is the *aravos*³. The *aravos* serve two purposes. They are part of the four species, and they are also used as “*hoshanos*”⁴ [the additional pair of willow branches that we take on the day of *Hoshanah Rabbah*]. On the seventh day of *Succos*, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, in the *Beis HaMikdash*, we would circle the *Mizbeiach* (Altar) seven times and then bang the *Hoshanos* on the side of the Altar. There is an argument in the *Gemara* if the *Hoshanos* were shaken along with the other Four Species or not. *Succos* is for 7 days. The 7th day of *Succos*, though, is different than the other days of *Succos* entirely; it is a day that is all about the *Aravos/Hoshanos*. We would circle the Altar for 7 times on the 7th day of *Succos* with the *hoshanos*, and it had special *halachos*.

The 7th day of the week is Shabbos, which comes after the 6 days of the week. Shabbos is from the word *shevisah*, to rest, and it is also called *yom hashvii*, the seventh day. We have Shabbos and we have the three festivals; Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and *Succos* both have a seventh day. What is the difference between the 7th of Pesach and the 7th of *Succos*, though? The 7th day of Pesach is a *Yom Tov*, whereas the 7th day of *Succos* is *Hoshanah Rabbah*, which is not a *Yom Tov*; as we see that we may perform work on *Hoshanah Rabbah*. It has some *halachos* similar to *Yom Tov*⁵, but it does not have the status of an actual “*Yom Tov*”. Shabbos is called “*shvii*” (the seventh), and it is also called “*zecher l’maaseh Beraishis*”, a remembrance of the act of Creation. Where else do we find the concept of “*shvii*” in time? We find a concept of *shvii* on Pesach and *Succos*, which each have 7 days of *Yom Tov*. But there is a difference: On Pesach, the seventh day is a *Yom Tov*, whereas the seventh day of *Succos* is not a festival like Shabbos or *Yom Tov*. The 7th day of *Succos*, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, therefore, reveals an entirely novel concept to us.

GENTILES AND SUCCOS

The *Gemara* states that a non-Jew who keeps Shabbos is liable to the death penalty⁶. Shabbos is called the “inheritance of the Jewish people”, which the gentiles have no connection with, and

1 סוכות 038 הושענא רבה חותם בתוך חותם תשעד

2 *Lulav* (palm branch), *esrog* (citron), *hadadim* (myrtle branches), and *aravos* (willow branches)

3 Willow branches; “*aravos*” is plural for “*aravah*”

4 On the seventh day of *Succos*, which is called *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we bang five *Aravos* on the ground after we recite *Halel* and *Hakafos*.

5 See *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim* 664 and *Mishnah Berurah* *ibid*.

6 *Chagigah* 13a

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therefore, they have no right to keep it. But what about *Yom Tov* (the festivals”) - do the gentiles have connection with any of our festivals?

With Pesach and Shavuot, we see clearly that gentiles have no connection to these festivals. Pesach is about the redemption from Egypt, in which the Jewish people were made into the nation of Hashem, which clearly has nothing to do with gentiles. Shavuot is about the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people; it also has nothing to do with the gentiles. When it comes to the festival of *Succos*, however, we find that the gentiles do have some kind of connection with it.

1) First of all, the 70 *korbonos* brought on *Succos* are parallel to the 70 nations of the world, as the *Gemara* said. This was not merely to ward off the impurity of the nations. It shows us that they have some connection to *Succos*, because if they would have no connection to *Succos*, then there would be no need to have the 70 *korbonos* on *Succos*!

2) A second proof is that it is brought in the book of *Zechariah*⁷ that gentiles in the future who brought *korbonos* will merit to rejoice in Yerushalayim. So we see that gentiles can have a connection with *Succos*.

3) Even more so, the *Gemara*⁸ states that the gentiles will want reward in the future, and Hashem will give them an “easy *mitzvah*” – *sukkah* - which they won't be able to keep. This hints to us that gentiles do have some connection with *Succos*. Hashem will allow the gentiles to enter the *sukkah* on *Succos*, so it must be that they do have some connection to it.

4) Our Sages state that each of the festivals are parallel to one of our *Avos*. *Succos* is parallel to Avraham *Avinu*, for Avraham had the Clouds of Glory, and the *Succos* are in remembrance to the Clouds of Glory. *Succos* is also parallel to Yaakov *Avinu*, who made *Succos* (huts) when he camped. Of Yaakov the *posuk* says, “*U'lmikeneihu, asah Succos*”, that when he camped, he made *Succos*/huts for his family. The Sages state that the gentiles in the future will serve the Jewish people, so we see that they will connect with us. The *Gemara* states that the Jewish people are called *adam* (man), while gentiles are not called *adam*; if they are not *adam*, what are they? They are called “*miknehu*” (possessions), for in the future, they will become the possessions/servants of the Jewish people. The concept of *sukkah* is connected with the *posuk* “*U'lmikneihu, asah Succos*”, thus, once again we see that there is some connection between *sukkah* and gentiles.

5) Furthermore, the *Zohar* says that the three guests who came to Avraham were told to wait under the “shade” of the tree, and this alludes to the “shade” of the *sukkah*, so again we see that gentiles have a connection with *sukkah*.

The question is, though: What do gentiles have to do with the *sukkah*?

When the guests came to Avraham *Avinu*, the Midrash says that they looked like “*aravayim*”, Arab nomads. The word *aravayim* is from the word “*aravah*”.

⁷ One of the books of “*Trei Asar*” of the Prophets.

⁸ *Avodah Zarah 3a*

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From all the four species, the *aravah* is considered the least important [as the Sages compare the *esrog* and *lulav* and *hadassim* to the righteous, and the *aravos* are compared to the wicked]. Yet, although the *aravah* is the least prominent, it is still part of the Four Species; it can connect to the other species and become lifted together with them.

If gentiles have a connection with *sukkah*, it must mean that they also have a connection with the Four Species. This we can see from *Aravos*. *Aravos* have no taste and no smell, as *Chazal* say; they are parallel to the wicked people of the world. Yet, we take the *aravos* with the Four Species in one *agudah*/bundle and we shake all of them together, so that the *aravos* can become rectified.

Thus, we see that the nations of the world (represented by the *aravos*) are able to connect themselves to the Jewish people.

HOSHANOS/ARAVOS AND “EREV RAV”

Sukkah is called “a remembrance of the redemption from Egypt”. When we left Egypt, the Torah says that “*Erev Rav*” (the Mixed Multitude) also came with us. The *Erev Rav* connects themselves to the Jewish people, who are called the *agudah achas* (one bundle). The *aravos* represent the *Erev Rav* souls who annex themselves onto the *agudah* (bundle) that is Yisrael.

The *Yom HaShvii* (seventh day) of *Succos* is called *Hoshanah Rabbah* – why is it called so? Why do we call it *Hoshanah Rabbah* specifically? The simple meaning of this is because we take many *hoshanos* on this day; we have a *ribuy* (plethora) of *hoshanos*, hence, it is called “*Hoshanah Rabbah*.”

However, the *Shulchan Aruch* states in the name of the *Rokeiach* that on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we remove the knot binding together the four species; normally, the Four Species must be tied together, but on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we remove the binding of the Four Species [which symbolizes a breach in our *agudah achas* – caused by the *Erev Rav* amidst us].

But what causes the disconnection from amongst ourselves in the first place? What causes the disparity amongst us that we need to bind ourselves together? The *Erev Rav*. The Sages state that *Erev Rav* married the women of the tribe of Shimeon; they mix with us, and this breaks up our unity.

There is the *Erev Rav*, and there is also a small group of Egyptian souls that converted, who are called “*Erev Zeir*” [whom Yosef circumcised]. The *aravos* of the first six days represent the *Erev Zeir*.⁹ The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* represent *Erev Rav*; for the word “*rav*” is the same concept as the word “*rabbah*” (they both mean “many”).

⁹ Editor’s Note: It seems that the souls of “*Erev Zeir*” requires a lower kind of rectification, for they are not as evil as *Erev Rav*; for we only take two *Aravos* in the first six days. Whereas the *Erev Rav* souls require five *Hoshanos* to rectify them, which implies that it is harder to rectify them.

There are five groupings of *Erev Rav*¹⁰, and we take five *aravos* on *Hoshanah Rabbah*. It is because on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, a new mixture enters us: the *Erev Rav*. The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* represent the mixture of the *Erev Rav*, who connect themselves to the Jewish people.

HOSHANAH RABBAH – THE “SEAL WITHIN A SEAL”

Thus, *Hoshanah Rabbah* is called the “seal within a seal” (*chotam b'toch chotam*). On Rosh HaShanah, our decree is written, and on Yom Kippur, we are sealed. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are “sealed within a seal”, similar to the *halachah* that wine must be sealed within a seal [or else it becomes *yayin nesech*, wine which is suspected of being used by a gentile for idol worship].

Why isn't one seal enough, though? Why it is necessary for us to have to be sealed again within the seal?

“The seal of Hashem is truth”. There are levels of truth – *emes* (truth), and *emes l'amatib*, a more refined level of truth. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are within the seal [being that we were already sealed on Yom Kippur], but we are still not sealed from the *Erev Rav*, because the *Erev Rav* connects themselves to the Jewish people; they are amidst us, so it is not enough if we are merely sealed once. *Erev Rav* is within the bounds (*techum*) of the Jewish people; thus, one seal/*chotam* is not enough to be sealed from them.

Therefore, we need another “*chotam*” **within** the *chotam*”. (*Chotam/techum* have the same letters). That is why we need *Hoshanah Rabbah* to save us from the influences of the five kinds of *Erev Rav*.

BANGING THE HOSHANOS ON THE GROUND

This is the deeper meaning of why we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground. Why do we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground? The simple understanding is that when we bang them on the ground, it causes the Heavenly sustenance to descend from Heaven down to this lowly earth.

But there is also a deeper understanding, as following.

The tree of Avraham *Avinu*, which came before the *Succos* of Yaakov, is the root of the concept of *sukkah*. Avraham *Avinu* converted the gentiles who came to him; however, he did not convert everyone. *Chazal* state that the guests would first take shade under the tree outside his tent. If the tree allowed the guest under its shade, it was a sign that the guest was proper, and then Avraham would allow him to become converted; but if the tree did not take the guest under its shade, it was a sign that the person was not worthy.

We find two roots of trees in Creation - the root of the tree of the *Eitz HaChaim* (the Tree of Life), and the root of the tree of the *Eitz HaDaas* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). By Avraham's guests, only those who were worthy were allowed by the tree to come under its leaves.

¹⁰ *Tikkunei HaZohar* 41b

Avraham's tree is parallel to the *Eitz HaChaim*. The guests who weren't worthy were rooted in the *Eitz HaDaas* (which is the root of the *Erev Rav*), thus, the "*Eitz HaChaim*" did not take them.

The tree of Avraham, which provided shade (for worthy guests), is reminiscent of a *sukkah*, which is called the "*tzeila d'hemunasa*" (to sit under "the shade of *emunah*") – otherwise known as the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Presence on this world); otherwise known as the "*Eitz HaChaim*".

On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we take five *aravos* and bang them on the ground, which is the earth – in other words, we take the "tree" and bang it on the earth, which alludes to the sin, for sin is associated with the element of earth and the curse of death.

Of a Torah scholar, it is written, "*And his leaves will not wither.*"¹¹ The Torah scholar resembles a perfect tree, whose leaves do not wither; this is parallel to the *Eitz HaChaim*. When we bang the *hoshanos*, the leaves fall off, and this is parallel to the leaves of the *Eitz HaDaas*, whose leaves can wither.

The *Erev Rav* parallels the leaves of the *hoshanos* that that must be banged, so that the leaves fall off; this shows that we want to knock off the *Erev Rav* from amidst us.

Thus, the *aravos* that we take on the seventh day of *Succos*, so that we can bang *hoshanos* with them, have a special role which the *aravos* of the first six days aren't able to accomplish. The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* which we bang contains the mystical power to separate the *Erev Rav* from us, who wish to latch onto us.

The *Erev Rav* is the root of all the nations of the world, which want to connect to us. Whereas the other nations of the world are given some degree of connection with us, the *Erev Rav* may not ever be allowed into our nation.

On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that was when the *Erev Rav* first came to mix with us. At Shavuot, right after we received the Torah, they mixed with us again to cause the sin of the Golden Calf. On *Succos* once again they come back once again to connect with us, but on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are given the power to separate them from amidst us.

Thus, when the *aravos* are banged on the ground on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we separate them from us by sending them down to the earth.

THE SEAL OF HOSHANAH RABBAH AND THE SEAL OF THE BRIS KODESH

Hoshanah Rabbah is called a "*chotam b'toch chotam*", a seal within a seal. The *Bris Kodesh* (or *Bris Milah*) is also called "*chotam*", the sign that is stamped into our flesh, "*And on the covenant which You have sealed in our flesh*" [as we say in *Birchas HaMazon*].

Erev Rav mixed with Yisrael by marrying the women of Shimon, meaning, they attempt to connect with Yisrael through the *Bris Kodesh* [because marriage is called "*bris*"]. The fact that the

¹¹ *Tehillim 1*

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Erev Rav connects to Yisrael through *Bris Kodesh* is what causes damage to our *Bris Kodesh*. On Hoshanah Rabbah, though, we have a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” – the seal within a seal - we seal ourselves from even the *Erev Rav*.

HOSHANAH RABBAH: RECTIFYING THE GENTILE NATIONS OF THE WORLD

Shabbos, besides for being called Shabbos, is also called *shvii*, the seventh day. The festivals which have seven days are Pesach and *Succos*. The 7th day of Pesach is called *shvii* because it's a *Yom Tov*, and also because it is called “*Shabbos hi lachem*”; it is forbidden from labor, just like Shabbos. It is a *Yom Tov* on the level of Shabbos. But the 7th day of *Succos*, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, which is also called *Yom Tov*, is not on the level of Shabbos, because it is permitted to work on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

What, indeed, is the difference? If a gentile keeps Shabbos, the *Gemara* says that he is liable to death. This shows us that a gentile has no connection with Shabbos. On *Succos*, however, there is a “seventh day” which is not Shabbos – *Hoshanah Rabbah* - which enables a gentile to connect to *Yisrael*. They can connect to us either for good purposes or for evil purposes.

Hoshanah Rabbah is thus the point in time that enable the gentiles of the world to come into the Jewish people and connect with us, whereupon they can be uplifted and rectified. The evil side of this, however, is the *Erev Rav* coming in. The holy side of this is the converts which Adam and Sarah converted.

So *Hoshanah Rabbah* contains both evil and good kinds of connection. The good part of it is the fact that gentiles have the opportunity to connect with the Jewish people and become rectified, but the evil side is that *Erev Rav* is coming in, who cannot be rectified and who must not be allowed entry.

Thus, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we need to separate from the *Erev Rav* coming in to us through the many *hoshanos* that we bang. At the same time, it is the time which enables converts to come into the Jewish people; as we see that the souls of the converts can come under Avraham *Avinu's* tree, the “*Eitz HaChaim*”, and become rectified. Herein lays the light of the redemption: *Moshiach* comes from converts, from Dovid, who is from Rus, a convert.

SUCCOS – THE CONNECTING POINT BETWEEN ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

In the seventh month of Tishrei, we have Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and *Succos*.

The world is judged four times a year – Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShanah, and *Succos*. That is one revelation of Tishrei: Rosh HaShanah is the root day of judgment, and the three festivals are branches of the judgment of Rosh HaShanah.

Yom Kippur is about atonement, and it extends into Rosh Chodesh, which is called *moed*, and the Sages said that Rosh Chodesh is a time of *kaparah*, atonement, because on Rosh Chodesh the moon is lessened.

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So we have two roots of judgment: Rosh HaShanah, the root judgment of the three festivals (which each have specific judgments), and Yom Kippur, which is the root of Rosh Chodesh.

Yom Kippur and Rosh Chodesh are both about atonement. On a more subtle note, however, there is *kaparah* also on Rosh Hashanah, as the shofar is blown to cover up sin from the Satan.

Even more so, however, it is *Succos* which connects Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. What is the connection? Rosh Hashanah is the time of judgment; therefore, *Succos* is related to Rosh HaShanah. *Succos* is the time of judgment over water. *Succos* is also a continuation of Yom Kippur, so it is a time of atonement: Yom Kippur was when we were atoned from the sin of the Golden Calf, which was caused by the *Erev Rav*. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are atoned from the *Erev Rav* - through banging the *hoshanos*.

Thus, *Succos* contains two different aspects: it is part of the three festivals and therefore it is a judgment, which makes it similar to Rosh HaShanah, but it is also a time of an atonement, similar to Yom Kippur; it is an atonement from *Erev Rav*, and it is the time to ward off the effects of the *Erev Rav*.

This is the depth behind the time of *simcha* (joy) that is *Succos*. There are ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which are about getting sealed for the judgment. *Succos* combines Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur together because *Succos* is a time of both judgment and atonement, which enables us to have *simcha*. Thus, we have seen here another facet of understanding in the concept of the “*chotam b'toch chotam*” that is on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

HOSHANAH RABBAH – COMBINING THE SEALS OF ROSH HASHANAH & YOM KIPPUR

Another facet of understanding to the concept of “*chotam b'toch chotam*” is as follows: there is another *chatimah* taking place, even after we have been sealed on Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashanah, there is a *chatimah* (seal) on the *tzaddikim* (for a good year) and the wicked (for a bad year), and on Yom Kippur there is a *chatimah* on the *beinonim* (the average people). On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, though, there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” - meaning, the *chatimah* of Rosh Hashanah is combined with the *chatimah* of Yom Kippur.

On Rosh HaShanah, we sing, “*If we are like children, have mercy on us like a father on his children, if we are like servants, have mercy on us like a master on his servant*”. Either we are like a *ben* (child) to Hashem or we are like an “*eved*” (servant) to Hashem, but either way, we asked to be sealed. On Yom Kippur, we have either been sealed as a “*ben*” or as an “*eved*”. When it comes *Hoshanah Rabbah*, there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” – meaning, the levels of “*ben*” and “*eved*” are combined, through the inner seal that takes place on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

A SEAL WITHIN A SEAL: THE POINT OF NO SIN

There is yet another facet of understanding to this concept of “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, as follows. The *Gemara* says that Adam delayed his *Bris Milah*; he was born circumcised. The fact that he

delayed his *Bris Milah* is linked to the sin. In other words, he only had one *chotam* on his flesh. A “*chotam b'toch chotam*” on his flesh would imply that when there is no possibility for evil.

There is *orlah* (foreskin) on the *Bris Kodesh*, which we remove, and there is also *orlah* on trees, which forbids the fruit of the first three years to be eaten. Connect this with the fact that there was a tree outside Avraham's tent, which was like the *Eitz HaChaim*, which only allowed proper guests. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, when there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, it represents the level in which it is not possible for there to be any damage to the *Bris*.

Thus, the “tree” which we see under in *Succos* – the *sukkah* - is not affected by *orlah*. An *esrog* is the only fruit which has the same taste as the bark, therefore it has no *orlah*. This refers to a tree which has no *orlah*, the tree of Avraham *Avinu*, the *Eitz HaChaim*, the *sukkah*.

The “*tzeil*” (shadow) of the *Eitz HaDaas* is the *tzeil* that symbolizes death, whereas the “*tzeil*” of the *Eitz HaChaim* is like the “*tzeil*” of *sukkah*. The *esrog* is a fruit which has no *orlah* - like the *Eitz HaChaim*.

THE ARAVOS OF SUCCOS: RECTIFYING THE NATIONS

Of the Four Species, it is the *esrog* which is a fruit. The *lulav* is not a fruit, but it bears fruit. The *hadasim* have a scent, while the *aravos* have no taste and no fruit. The Sages revealed that *aravos* represent the wicked, who have no Torah and no mitzvos, and that they are rectified through taking them together with the other species, which symbolizes that they can have become connected to the Jewish people and become rectified.

On *Succos*, we are judged on the water. Water has no taste – which really means that it is above taste. We make a blessing of *shehakol* on water, which says that everything belongs to Hashem. Water symbolizes “everything”, that “everything” belongs to Hashem. Thus, when we are judged on *Succos* for the water, we are being judged for the *klal*, for the collective unit of things.

A gentile asked one of the Sages, “When is the entire world happy?” The Sage answered, “When it rains.” When it rains, the whole world is happy. On *Succos* we are judged on the water, and on *Succos* we have happiness; it is universal happiness, because the entire world needs water. *Succos* is a joy about water - and the *aravos* grow near the water. So the judgment on water is not just about *Klal Yisrael*; it is about the *klal* (collective unit) of the entire world.

Every day we make a blessing that we are not a gentile. A woman makes the blessing, “That You made me according to His will”. This alludes to the concept behind the *shehakol* blessing we make on water that everything is according to Hashem's will.

Succos is the judgment on water. Rosh HaShanah is judgment over all the people in the world, Yom Kippur is an atonement only for the Jewish people, and *Succos* comes to connect Rosh HaShanah with Yom Kippur together, so that there can be an atonement for the rest of the world as well; thus, *Succos* is the concept of how converts can enter the Jewish people, that it is possible for the nations of the world to become elevated.

'EREV RAV' IS RECTIFIED ONLY THROUGH BEING DESTROYED

But there is *Erev Rav* too coming along with them, who also wish to connect with the Jewish people. We are not allowed to let them come in. Therefore, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we bang the *hoshanos*, to nullify the *Erev Rav*, the root of the nations. The only way to rectify them is to destroy them, so we send them back to the “earth”, by banging them on the ground.

This is contrast with the rest of the nations of the world, whom we can accept, and these are rooted in the converts that Avraham took in. This is the depth of why the rest of the nations of the world can be atoned for on *Succos*.

On the last day of *Succos*, we bring 7 *korbonos*, parallel to the 7 root nations of the world, which each became 10 nations; that is how the 70 nations were formed. These 7 root nations can be allowed to convert. Thus, the 7th day of *Succos*, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, represents the idea of converting the 70 nations of the world and elevating them to holiness. This is another depth behind the “*chotam b'toch chotam*” on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

In contrast to Yom Kippur which atones only for *Klal Yisrael* and not the gentiles, *Succos* connects the gentiles to *Klal Yisrael*, so that they can be atoned for. The gentiles will go to the *Beis HaMikdash* in the future, as the possuk in *Zecharya* says, so we see that the nations will become rectified.

This is revealed through the concept of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, through the “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, which represents the point that is above all *cheit* (sin) - the point in time before there was even a possibility of sin: the point of before Creation. This is the original, pure light which can rectify the nations of the world in the future. Thus *Hoshanah Rabbah* represents that idea of rectifying the entire world.

But the *Erev Rav* cannot be rectified. They can only be rectified when we destroy them. And so, we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, to nullify the effect of the *Erev Rav*, to symbolize how their rectification will only lay in their destruction.

Succos thus reflects the concept of returning all of the nations [except *Erev Rav*] of the world to the perfected level of Creation before the *cheit* – and that is the pure point which rectifies them.

THE DEPTH OF SHEMINI ATZERES AND SIMCHAS TORAH

In the future, the gentiles will be rectified, as the verse in *Zecharyah* says. However, *Klal Yisrael* will still be more important than the gentiles, even when the gentiles are pure again.

This is the secret behind *Shemini Atzeres*. The *Midrash* states that on *Shemini Atzeres*, Hashem tells us to remain with Him for one more day. The deeper meaning of this is because on the 7th day of *Succos*, we have unified the gentiles with Yisrael, and when the 7 days are over, now comes the next level: *Shemini Atzeres*, which contains *Simchas Torah*.

There are two kinds of *simcha* (joy) found in the month of *Tishrei*. On Yom Kippur, we received the second pair of *Luchos*, which can be considered to be a degree of *Simchas Torah* to us. And we also have the actual *Simchas Torah* that is on *Shemini Atzeres*. So there are two kinds of *Simchas Torah* that we have.

What is the difference between the two kinds of *Simchas Torah*? The *Simchas Torah* that we have on Yom Kippur was that the second *Luchos* rectified the sin of the Golden Calf. But the *Simchas Torah* of *Shemini Atzeres* comes after *Hoshanah Rabbah*, after we have been sealed in the “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, which is the level that is beyond any possibility of sin.

The Sages said, “Praiseworthy is the one who never sinned” – this refers to the inner light, the original light that was around before Creation, the point in the soul in which there is no possibility of sin. The revelation of this point is on *Shemini Atzeres*, after we have the “*chotam b'toch chotam*” of *Hoshanah Rabbah*; it calls for a new kind of *Simchas Torah*, which we have on *Shemini Atzeres*.

The *simchah* that we have on *Simchas Torah* is called a “*simcha l'gomrah shel Torah*”, a joy upon completing the Torah. When we make a blessing in the morning to learn the Torah, we ask Hashem, “*V'haarev na*”, that Hashem should make the words of Torah sweet to us. The sweetness of Torah learning, which is called “*areivus*”, is especially what can counter the *Erev Rav*, the evil souls in Creation who wish to take us away from the Torah.

On *Simchas Torah/Shemini Atzeres*, it is revealed the light in which there is no sin, thus, it is the time where we make a *simcha* over the completion of the Torah. After *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we can come to the level of *Simchas Torah*.

The *Shemini Atzeres* we have in today's times is a lower kind of “*shemini*”, for on the eighth day there is a *bris*, which removes *orlah*. But the perfect level of *Succos* [which will be in the future] is to have a kind of *Shemini Atzeres* in which the concept of *shemini* is not about removing *orlah* - rather, it will be a level of “*shemini*” which reveals the “*gomrah shel Torah*”.

The “*shemini*” of the future will be about this. Concerning the future, it is written [in the Shabbos Zemiros] that *sasson* and *simcha* (joy and happiness) will remove all *yagon* and *anacha* (worry and groans). The word for being “joyous”, *sameich*, has the same letters as the word *chamesh*, which means “five”, because it will counter the “five” kinds of *Erev Rav*¹².

This will not just be *sasson*, a deep joy; it will be the original heavenly light, the light of *shmini* - which was around before Creation. The Sages revealed that Shabbos is really the eighth day, because there was a Shabbos that came before the world. This is not a Shabbos in the sense of resting from labor. The Shabbos that came before the world is like *Hoshanah Rabbah*, where there is no *shevisah* (rest) from *melachah* (labor). The root of this is before creation, in which there was no *melachah* yet. That power is what will rectify the entire world in the future.

¹² Refer to the shiur of Amalek In-Depth

Klal Yisrael is essentially that power that preceded the world. It is *Klal Yisrael* in the future will rectify all the other nations. Thus, we see that even though all the nations will be perfected in the future, the nation of *Yisrael* will still be above them.

The *Shemini Atzeres* of the future will reveal that even in the future, when there will be no possibility of sin, the nation of *Yisrael* is still above the nations. For on *Shemini Atzeres*, Hashem requests that *Yisrael* stay with Him for one more day after *Succos* ends, alone with Him. And when that perfected level of *Shemini Atzeres* comes in the future, it will be revealed the perfect level of “Hashem, the Torah, and *Yisrael*, are one.” That will be the perfected level of *simchah* on *Succos* which is followed by *Shemini Atzeres*.

ATONEMENT OF HOSHANAH RABBAH FOR YISRAEL & YISHMAEL¹³

THE HOSHANOS CONTAINS ALL ASPECTS OF TORAH

There are two different kinds of “*aravos*” (willow branches) that we take on Succos. We take *aravos* on the first six days of *Succos*, with the Four Species that we shake, and on the seventh day of *Succos* (“*Hoshanah Rabbah*”) we take another pair of *aravos*, which are called the “*hoshanos*”. In the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, they would encircle the Altar with these *aravos* and bang them on the side of the Altar.

The *Gemara* says that the custom of *hoshanos* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was either a *minhag neviim* (a custom of the prophets) or a *yesod neviim* (firmly established by the prophets). According to Rabbi Yochanan, *hoshanos* are a *halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai* (oral law received from Sinai which was not recorded in the written Torah), which was forgotten and later remembered. According to a third opinion in the *Gemara*, *hoshanos* are a *minhag neviim*.

The depth behind this argument is that *hoshanos* includes all the levels of the Torah – Biblical law, Oral law, Rabbinical law. The Sages weren't just arguing if *hoshanos* are a *halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai*, *minhag neviim* or *yesod neviim*. Rather, the depth of this matter is that the concept of the *hoshanos* “unifies” together all of the levels of the Torah – Torah law, *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai*, and *minhag neviim*. Let us try to understand how the *aravos* [the *hoshanos*] “unify” together all the parts of Torah.

YISHMAEL WAS JUDGED WITH WATER: THE JUDGMENT OF HOSHANAH RABBAH ON WATER

The *Gemara* teaches that there are four times a year where the world is judged¹⁴; on the festival [of Succos], there is a judgment on water. Where else do we find judgment with water? We find the world was judged with “a lot” of water, and times where there is judgment involving “a little” water. The world was judged with “a lot of water” by the Flood, where the world was sentenced to become filled with a lot of water. We also find an instance where someone was judged to have “a little” water: Yishmael. When Yishmael was sent out of Avraham's house into the desert, Avraham sent him with a little flask of water. In this sense, Yishmael was “judged” with “a little” water.

Sarah wanted to expel Yishmael from the home, when she realized that Yishmael was fooling around with Yitzchak and laughing with him. *Chazal* explain that Sarah foresaw that Yishmael would be the cause of making the Golden Calf. Yitzchak represents the concept of *tzechok d'kedushah*, holy laughter (as Yitzchak is from the word *tzechok*), whereas Yishmael is associated with

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tzechok d'kilkul, evil laughter. Yishmael was the evil offspring of Avraham. Avraham represents the element of water, for Avraham epitomized kindness, and kindness is symbolized by water, which nourishes and sustains. Thus Yishmael is the “ruined water” who came from Avraham. Here we see further how Yishmael is further associated with water – the evil, impaired, ruined kind of water.

Avraham was afraid to send away Yishmael, but Hashem told him to listen to Sarah, telling him that only Yitzchak is the main son, and not Yishmael. Sarah saw through *ruach hakodesh* (and this is also the root of how there was *ruach hakodesh* by the *simchas beis hashoeivah* on Succos) that Yishmael would be a bad influence on Yitzchak, and Hashem agreed with her view on the matter, and told Avraham to listen to Sarah’s opinion on the matter. Since Sarah’s vision was the root of the *ruach hakodesh* on Succos, the time of Succos is when the world is judged with water, which Yishmael was judged with.

Chazal say that the verse “*And his leaves will not wither*” refers to Avraham *Avinu*, whose “leaves” did not wither – whose offspring remained righteous, including Yishmael. From here, we learn that Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life. Even though Avraham sent Yishmael away from his home, sending him away with only a little water that would not be enough to keep him alive, and even though Yishmael was expelled from the home because of his bad influence on Yitzchak, we see that Yishmael still did *teshuvah*.

On Succos, the world is judged with water, and this judgment is more specifically on Hoshanah Rabbah. On Rosh HaShanah, the judgment is “written”, on Yom Kippur it is “sealed”, and on Hoshanah Rabbah there is a *chotam b'toch chotam*, a “seal within a seal”. This is also hinted to by the *cheimas mayim* (jug of water) which Avraham sent with Yishmael, which stands for the acronym of “*chotam b'toch chotam*”.

The well-known time to do *teshuvah* is in between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, but there is also another time to do *teshuvah*, as explained by the *Arizal* and others: between Yom Kippur and Shemini Atzeres. The day immediately preceding Shemini Atzeres is Hoshanah Rabbah; thus, Hoshanah Rabbah is where the sealing takes place. Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, and so is Hoshanah Rabbah the end of the year. Thus, Hoshanah Rabbah is the time that shows us that even Yishmael can do *teshuvah*.

This reveals a new facet to *teshuvah*. Clearly, the *teshuvah* of the Ten days of Repentance is a different level of *teshuvah* than the *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah. During the Ten Days of Repentance, it is a time of *teshuvah* uniquely for the Jewish people. Only the nation of Yisrael receives atonement on Yom Kippur, and not the other nations. But Hoshanah Rabbah is a day where we have increased *tefillah* (prayer), which is the trait of Yishmael, for Yishmael increasingly prayed with his mother Hagar in the desert to be saved; this is the *teshuvah* (and subsequent atonement) that the nations of the world can attain – through increased prayer.

Therefore, there is a concept that the gentiles can do *teshuvah*, which began with Yishmael, who did *teshuvah*. Yom Kippur is a time for *teshuvah* only for the nation of Yisrael, whereas *Hoshanah Rabbah* is a time of *teshuvah* for the nations of the world, symbolized by Yishmael’s *teshuvah*.

YISHMAEL – THE ROOT OF THE EREV RAV

Sarah saw that Yishmael was laughing with Yitzchak. *Chazal* explain that when Sarah saw Yishmael laughing and trying to be of bad influence to Yitzchak, she saw a vision of the future, where the “*Erev Rav*” (Mixed Multitude) will influence the Jewish nation to fashion the golden calf.

How did the *Erev Rav* mix with the Jewish people in the first place? *Chazal* state that the members of the *Erev Rav* married women of the tribe of Shimon. The word “Shimon” has the same root as the word “Yishmael” [because they are both from the term *shemiah*, to “hear”]. On the side of holiness, in the Jewish people, there was “Shimon”, and on the side of evil, there is “Yishmael”.

When Sarah saw Yishmael laughing with Yitzchak, she saw that the *Erev Rav* will come through the tribe of Shimon, the descendants of Yitzchak, because once Yishmael could mix with Yitzchak, she knew that it would produce a descendant with similarities to Yishmael.

Through Shimon, the *Erev Rav* was allowed to enter and influence the Jewish people, thus, Shimon was like a force of “Yishmael” within the Jewish people.

TESHUVAH – RETURNING ALL OF THE DISCONNECTED PARTS TO HASHEM

What indeed is the connection between the concept of *shemiah*/hearing, with the concept of mixing in foreign influences? Hearing is *shemiah*, which can also mean to “gather”, to connect and unify people together. Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, and Hashem also “heard” his prayers in the desert, “*b’asher hu sham*”, “for he is there” – these are both rooted in the same matter. The connection is, that when something becomes separated from its root, it can be returned to its root. That is the concept of *teshuvah*: returning the separated parts to their root.

The word “*teshuvah*” is from the words “*tashuv hei*”, “return to *hei* (Hashem)”, and the letter “*hei*” is also equal to the number 5, alluding to the 5 *aravos* that we take on Hoshanah Rabbah and bang them on the ground. That is the “*tashuv hei*” that is revealed on Hoshanah Rabbah.

On Yom Kippur, this concept is also revealed, with the 5 *tefillos* on Yom Kippur. On Hoshanah Rabbah, this concept is revealed through the 5 *aravos/hoshanos* we take, and this symbolizes the *teshuvah* of Yishmael, where Yishmael returns to his source. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish people returns to Hashem, through the 5 *tefillos* of Yom Kippur, and on Hoshanah Rabbah, through the 5 *hoshanos*, there is another kind of return to Hashem.

HOSHANAH RABBAH : A DEEPER MUTUAL CONNECTION IN THE JEWISH PEOPLE

During the first days of Succos, we take the Four Species together, in one *agudah* (cluster). Each of the four species symbolize four different kinds of Jews (those strong in Torah and in good deeds, those strong in Torah but not in good deeds, those strong in good deeds but not in Torah, and those who have neither Torah nor good deeds). What connects all Jews together? *Chazal* state that the *agudah* (cluster) binds all of the Four Species together. On Succos, all of the Jewish people become bound together, symbolized by the knot that binds together the *lulav*, *esrog*, *hadasim* and *aravos*; and

it reveals the concept that all the Jewish people are in one “*agudah*”, one cluster, who all wish to do the will of Hashem with a complete heart.

Concerning Hoshanah Rabbah, though, it is brought in *Shulchan Aruch* that we take off the upper knot from the *lulav* on this day. What is the reason for this custom? The reason for this is because on Hoshanah Rabbah, we do not need the *agudah* to unify us all together.

On Hoshanah Rabbah, instead of taking the Four Species together, instead, we take only the *aravos*. Why do we replace the four species with only the *aravos*? We put aside the four species and take the *hoshanos*, according to one opinion; and according to another opinion, we shake the *aravah*. But in either case, on Hoshanah Rabbah we take the *aravos* alone. The deep understanding behind this is because it is really the *aravah* which unifies all of the Jewish people together.

The *aravah* reflects the concept of *areivim zeh l'zeh*, that the Jewish people are all mixed with each other; that there is a mutual unity between all of the Jewish people.

During the first six days of Succos, the unity of the Jewish people is expressed in taking all of the four species together, in one cluster. On Hoshanah Rabbah, the unity of the Jewish people is expressed through just the *aravos* alone, the *hoshanos*, which shows us that there is a deeper level of unity.

THE REASON FOR INCREASED PRAYERS ON HOSHANAH RABBAH

What is this deeper unifying power that is contained in Hoshanah Rabbah? It is because on Hoshanah Rabbah, we are all united together, through the power of the *aravah/hoshanos* alone, which parallels the concept of *shemiah/hearing*, in the sense that Hashem is especially attentive to hearing our prayers on this day.

Thus, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we make sure to pray especially with fervor, with an audible voice, so that we can be “heard”. For this reason, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we have increased prayer. The increased prayers of Hoshanah Rabbah are because the One Who hears us all is unifying us all together. When Hashem listened to the voice of Yishmael praying, “*b’asher hu sham*”, “for he is there” – it shows that He “hears” all of the nations [when they pray to Him].

HOSHANAH RABBAH REVEALS A UNITY BETWEEN ALL THE NATIONS

This is another way to understand how the festival of Succos reveals a connection between all of the nations in the world [there are many other correlations as well]. This is how Succos unifies everyone together: the concept of Hashem listening to Yishmael, “*b’asher hu sham*”, when He heard his prayers, reflects the level of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, where all the nations of the world can return to their Source and thereby become unified again, under their Source, when they are all being heard together.

The fact that Yishmael did *teshuvah*, which is the concept of the unique level of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, reveals to us a new facet of understanding about Succos. It shows us that there is

a deep dimension where the Jewish people, the nation of Yishmael, and the rest of the nations, can all become unified together.

Everyone in the world comes from Avraham *Avinu*, who epitomized kindness, who is symbolized by the element of water. Avraham sent Yishmael with a little jug of water. Sarah expelled Yishmael from the home because she foresaw that he would be of bad influence to Yitzchak. But Yishmael did *teshuvah*, and he returned to his root. This shows us that Succos is a time to have a unique revelation of *emunah*.

HOSHANAH RABBAH IS ABOVE THE LEVEL OF SUCCOS

There is a *Mishnah* in Tractate Succah which states that on Hoshanah Rabbah, we do not take away the *sukkah*, but we take away the utensils from inside the *succah*, to show that it is the final day of the festival. If there are no utensils in the *succah* to remove, the *Gemara* says that one should remove the *s'chach* of the *succah*, to remind himself that he will not be eating in the *succah* for the second days of Succos.

Thus, Hoshanah Rabbah reveals a level that is above the level of *succah*. During the first six days of Succos, we shake the *lulav* in the six directions, parallel to the six directions of the *succah*; and on Hoshanah Rabbah, we remove the knot on the *lulav* and we remove the *s'chach* from the *succah*, which symbolizes a new revelation, as follows.

SUCCOS REPRESENTS THE VIEW OF SARAH IMEINU, AND HOSHANAH RABBAH REPRESENTS THE VIEW OF AVRAHAM AVINU

We mentioned earlier that the concept of Succos is rooted in the *ruach hakodesh* of Sarah, who was called *Yiskah*, from the words “*sakah b'ruach hakodesh*”, she “saw through the holy spirit”, which is a hint to the word *succah*. Sarah told Avraham to expel Yishmael from the home, because she saw he will be of bad influence. But why didn't Sarah foresee that he would do *teshuvah*? If she had *ruach hakodesh*, why couldn't she see the end of Yishmael, which ended with *teshuvah*?

The answer to this is that her *ruach hakodesh* was showing her a lower dimension, which sees up to six dimensions, and therefore all she could see was the fact that Yishmael would be of bad influence to Yitzchak. Indeed, she was correct. But through the seventh day of Succos, which is above Succos/the six directions – the day of Hoshanah Rabbah, which reveals a seventh dimension that is above the normal six directions – there is a point where Yishmael returns to Avraham *Avinu*, where Yishmael does *teshuvah*.

This was the depth of why Avraham was afraid want to send away Yishmael; he saw this deeper seventh dimension, where Yishmael will do *teshuvah*. Avraham's fear of sending away Yishmael was actually a sign that Yishmael would be returned to him. Hashem told Avraham to listen to Sarah, but that doesn't mean that Avraham was completely wrong. Both Avraham and Sarah were correct. Sarah's view towards Yishmael represents the level of the first six days of Succos, parallel to the normal six dimensions. Avraham's view towards Yishmael, his fear of sending him away, was actually

a catalyst that helped Yishmael do *teshuvah*. Yishmael eventually influenced Hagar, when she became known as Keturah, whom Avraham remarried after she repented.

THE TESHUVAH OF YISHMAEL REFLECTS THE TESHUVAH ON HOSHANAH RABBAH

This idea that Yishmael did *teshuvah* was enabled by the unique power of *teshuvah* that is on Hoshanah Rabbah. Yishmael returned to his root, Avraham *Avinu*, when his prayers were heard by Hashem.

That is the power of Hoshanah Rabbah, which reveals a new level of hearing/connection. What enables this connection? The descendants of *Yishmael* are called *aravim* (Arabs), from the word “*aravos*” – and as explained above, it is the *aravos/hoshanos* we take on the seventh day of Succos which reveals a power to unify. This is the point where the ruined offspring of Avraham *Avinu*, Yishmael, can be rectified and returned to the house of Avraham, to holiness.

Chazal state that the verse “*And his leaves will not wither*” refers to Avraham, whose offspring did not wither, for even the “leaf” that fell from him, Yishmael, did *teshuvah*.

We bang the *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah, until the leaves fall off (either totally, or mostly). With the regular *aravos* we take on Succos, which we do not bang, we want the leaves to stay. Yishmael represents the leaf that fell away from Avraham, for he was sent out of Avraham’s home. The regular *aravos*, where we want the leaves stay, represents how Yishmael is the leaf that can still remain connected, even after it has become separated from its source. Yishmael will ultimately be returned to holiness, because he is still connected to Avraham, through his *teshuvah*.

BANGING THE HOSHANOS ON THE GROUND & THE TESHUVAH OF YISHMAEL

Even more so, we find that Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, but this was after Avraham was *niftar*. Avraham was his source, his wellspring of “water”, which enabled him to survive in the desert. We bang the *hoshanos* on the ground because only after Avraham went into the “ground”, when he was buried, did Yishmael do *teshuvah*. Yishmael did *teshuvah* and returned to his root only after Avraham left the world. Therefore, Yishmael’s return to holiness is only when the *hoshanos* are banged onto the ground. But why is this so? And why is the banging of the *hoshanos* considered to be the “*teshuvah*” of Yishmael?

Chazal say that Yishmael was circumcised when he was 13, therefore, he merited to dwell in *Eretz Yisrael*, especially in the final days. Yishmael is represented by the *aravah*, which are called *arvei nachal* (willows that grow by the stream). In a person’s body, the *nachal* (stream) is represented by the *Bris Kodesh* (his place of circumcision), for *Bris Kodesh* is a person’s source of life, his inner wellspring. Yishmael has a merit in the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, in its earth, because he only did *teshuvah* when Avraham died and went back to the “earth”; because Yishmael only merits *teshuvah* when he is banged on the “earth” through the *hoshanos*.

The fact that “*Yishmael*”/*aravos/hoshanos* is banged on the earth, by the time of *hoshanos*, is to show that he has a merit in the “earth” of *Eretz Yisrael*; Yishmael merits *Eretz Yisrael* because he was

circumcised [soon, it will be explained the nature of Yishmael's connection to *Eretz Yisrael* and why it is incomplete].

DIFFERING CUSTOMS OF HOW THE HOSHANOS ARE BANGED ON THE GROUND

When banging the *aravos*, there are differing customs. The *Tur* says to bang it inside a “*kli*”/vessel, but the *Arizal* says to bang it on the ground without a *kli*/vessel. What is the deep meaning behind these two views?

Eretz Yisrael is called “*Eretz HaTzvi*”, “land of the deer”, because it is a land which will expand in the future, just a deer runs, which is a kind of expansion. Yishmael only merits *Eretz Yisrael* on a level of “*kli*”/vessel [an external connection to *Eretz Yisrael*], and therefore, Yishmael's connection to *Eretz Yisrael* is only to the “*kli*” of *Eretz Yisrael*, which is limited, and not to the “*Eretz HaTzvi*” aspect of *Eretz Yisrael*, which is its eternal and unlimited aspect.

This is the deeper reason of why the *Tur* says that the *hoshanos* must be banged only in a *kli*/vessel, and not directly on the ground. Just as a *kli* is measured and thus limited, so is Yishmael's share in *Eretz Yisrael* limited, for he is only connected to the “*kli*” aspect of *Eretz Yisrael*. For this reason, Yishmael only has temporary control over *Eretz Yisrael*, because Yishmael can only connect to the “*kli*” of *Eretz Yisrael*, its limited aspect, and not to its unlimited aspect, “*Eretz HaTzvi*” (which only the Jewish people received, through Yitzchak).

When Avraham remarried Hagar as Keturah, who was brought to him by Yishmael, what was Hagar now to Avraham? She was only a “*kli*” to him. Avraham did not continue through Yishmael, he continued only through Yitzchak, as Hashem said to him, “*For Yitzchok shall be called your offspring*”, and Yishmael was no longer regarded as the offspring of Avraham. Therefore, Hagar's children were not a continuation, and even after she later married Avraham as Keturah, she was still not a continuation to Avraham, so she was nothing more than a *kli* to Avraham. The *Gemara* says, “A woman does not consent to be betrothed by a man unless she first makes herself into a *kli* (“container”) to him”. But all she could be to him was a *kli*.

But Yitzchak, who was called the offspring of Avraham, unlike Yishmael who was expelled, is the eternal continuation of Avraham. Sarah, therefore, who bore Yitzchak, was therefore not just a *kli* to Avraham as any woman is to her husband, but a source of continuation for him, for she is the mother of Avraham's continued descendants.

Thus, when we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground, according to the *Tur* that it must be banged within a *kli*, this reflects Yishmael, and according to the *Arizal* that it is banged directly on the ground, this reflects Yitzchak. Either of these opinions is true and holy. The *Tur*'s custom that *hoshanos* should only be banged within a *kli*/vessel, is referring to the lower level, “Yishmael”, who can only be a *kli*/vessel to the “ground” of *Eretz Yisrael*, its “limited” aspect, and not more than that. The *Arizal*'s custom is reflecting the higher level, “Yitzchak”, who has the intrinsic connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, to its unlimited and “expanded” aspect [which will be in the future, when it will

expand], and that is why the *Arizal* says to bang the *hoshanos* directly on the ground, without being inside a *kli*/vessel.

We explained here that *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah represents a connection between Avraham and Yishmael. The Jewish people began with Avraham, and they also separated from Avraham, through the separation that occurred between Yitzchak and Yishmael. We have explained that on Hoshanah Rabbah, through the concept of the *hoshanos*, there is a return to this connection of Yishmael to Avraham, rooted in the fact that Yishmael did *teshuvah*.

On the other hand, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we also bang the *hoshanos* on the ground until the leaves fall off, to show that the nation Yisrael is ultimately separated from the nations.¹⁵

HOSHANAH RABBAH ON SHABBOS: A NEW DIMENSION OF TESHUVAH

Hoshanah Rabbah is called “*shvii shel chag*”, the seventh day of the festival of Succos, but is not just the seventh day of the festival. The Talmud [in *Sukkah 32b*] says that the *aravah* taken on Shabbos is called “*aravah shel shiva*”. The *lulav* is not taken on Shabbos, but the “*aravah shel shiva*” was taken on Shabbos, because we are not concerned that a person will carry it outside the *techum Shabbos* (boundary to carry within, on Shabbos). So on Hoshanah Rabbah it’s possible to have *aravos* without *lulav*, when it’s Shabbos.

This shows us that Shabbos reveals a concept of *aravos* without the *lulav*. In a regular Shabbos, there is *eruv techumin*, where one may only carry within the *techum*. But when Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, the *aravah* may be taken and there is no reason to suspect it will be carried out of the *techum*, and the deeper understanding of this is because it is within its own *techum* (boundary), like a *techum* within a *techum*, similar to the term “*chotam b’toch chotam*” (seal within a seal) which is Hoshanah Rabbah.

Hoshanah Rabbah, which is called the “*chotam b’toch chotam*”, “seal within a seal”, reveals a level where there is no reason to suspect that one will leave the *techum shabbos* with his *lulav*. This is the unique power of the “*aravah*” on Hoshanah Rabbah. When Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, where *aravah* was practiced, it reveals a new facet to Shabbos. The seventh day of Succos, when it falls on Shabbos, reveals this new dimension on Shabbos.

The word “Shabbos”, besides for meaning rest, is also from the word “*teshuvah*”, “return”. When Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, the *hoshanos* were taken on Shabbos because this is there is a special power of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, and in this level of *teshuvah*, there is no concern that a person will sin, and that is the depth of why he may take the *hoshanos* on Shabbos and there is no concern that he will carry outside the *techum*.

This level of *teshuvah* revealed on Hoshanah Rabbah, where there is not even a suspicion that a person will sin, is a reflection of the level of the *teshuvah* of Yishmael, and the return of the nations, where all the nations including Yishmael return to the house of Avraham where they come from;

¹⁵ See the *derashah* of Succos 038 – *Hoshanos – Separating From Erev Rav*

Avraham made converts from the nations, and this shows us that all the nations are unified under Avraham.

THE TESHUVAH OF HOSHANAH RABBAH: RETURNING TO THE PERFECT SHABBOS

The *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah is the time that is called “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, “seal within a seal”, where everything becomes “sealed”; it “seals” all that has come after Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos. What does it accomplish? It is a return to the Shabbos of *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come) which Adam never reached, because of the sin. It is a return, a “*teshuvah*”, to the Shabbos of *Olam HaBa*, had Adam never sinned, which would have been the complete “seventh” day of Creation. That perfected level of Shabbos is for the Jewish people as well as all the nations. A gentile who keeps Shabbos is liable to capital punishment, but that is only in the current level of Shabbos. In contrast, the future Shabbos will be kept by even the gentiles.

THE ATONEMENT ON HOSHANAH RABBAH: THE PLACE ITSELF ATONES

The *aravos/hoshanos* on Hoshanah Rabbah are banged on the ground, which is like a “return” to their place. The *hoshanos* remain in their place, and they are not shaken, in contrast to the Four Species, which are shaken. The Four Species are shaken and moved, in contrast to the *hoshanos*, which were placed on the side of the Altar, and the place itself beside the Altar atoned. Moving and shaking the Four Species, as well as encircling the Altar with the *hoshanos*, reflects a lower level of atonement, where the place itself does not atone. Placing the *hoshanos* on the side of the Altar, where the place itself atones, reflects the higher level of atonement, which is the *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah.

The *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah reveals the *teshuvah* which began on Rosh Hoshanah. The *hoshanos* are not shaken like the *aravos* on the *lulav*; rather, they were placed on the side of the Altar, and they are like the “*aravah shel shiva*” that could be taken on Shabbos, the *aravos* of *teshuvah*, from the word *Shabbos*, and *teshuvah* returns one to his place. Thus the *hoshanos* were put on the side of the Altar and remained there, in place, to symbolize this idea.

There is a *halachah* on Motzei Yom Kippur to immediately start building the *succah*, to show that we are going into exile. The *succah*, and the first six days of Succos, is compared to the situation of exile. But this is from the perspective of the six thousand years we are in, which is the exile, represented by the six directions we shake *lulav* in, on the first six days of Succos. But Hoshanah Rabbah reveals the seventh dimension, which will be after these six thousand year years, where there is no exile, no six directions; where we remain in place, and the place itself atones, with no need to move from place. Thus, the six directions of Succos reflects the exile, which is an atonement achieved through movement; in exile, we move from place to place. But Hoshanah Rabbah is a deeper level of atonement, where the place itself atones, where there is no exile, and this is the *teshuvah*/return to the perfect Shabbos.

“B’ASHER HU SHAM” – “FOR HE IS THERE”

This idea, that on Hoshanah Rabbah, the very place itself atones – reflects the concept of “*b’asher hu sham*”, when Hashem judged Yishmael for being “there”, in a place where he was repenting. That is the power of the *aravah* on Hoshanah Rabbah – a new level of atonement for the Jewish people, where the place alone atones. This is a deep revelation about the atonement of Hoshanah Rabbah. The atonement of Yom Kippur is possible because the Satan has no permission on this day; the evil inclination has no control. On Hoshanah Rabbah, there is an evil inclination, but the place itself atones.

This is a higher level of atonement than on Yom Kippur. On Hoshanah Rabbah, there is a rectification even for the wicked, through the *aravah* of Hoshanah Rabbah, which represents the wicked. The *aravos* represent the Arabs – Yishmael - who was judged “*b’asher hu sham*”, for where he was, when Hashem accepted his *teshuvah*.

The word “Yishmael” is also from the word “*sham*”, “there”, alluding to how Hashem judged him in the place he was in - “*b’asher hu sham*”. There, in that place, he did earnest *teshuvah*; in spite of the fact that his descendants would later cause suffering to the Jewish people, Hashem accepted his *teshuvah*, because in that place where he did *teshuvah*, he was with Hashem, and Hashem looked at this “place” alone, which atoned for him. That is the unique atonement and *teshuvah* of “*b’asher hu sham*”, which is the very concept of the *teshuvah* available through *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

THE DEPTH OF PRAYING ON HOSHANAH RABBAH FOR RAIN

This concept is also what enables us to pray for rain, on Hoshanah Rabbah. On Hoshanah Rabbah, when we pray especially to receive rain, on a deeper level, we are praying from the level of “*b’asher hu sham*” – “there” – we are referring to the source of the waters, and not where the waters come to. If we are praying from the place where the waters descend to, which is here on this earth, then we are not deserving. But if we are praying to receive the waters from the source where they come from, “*sham*”, “there”, where the upper waters are, in Heaven – we are then deserving.

Since the *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah contains this special atoning power of “*b’asher hu sham*”, we are able to *daven* for rain on Hoshanah Rabbah. We are not *davening* on Succos for rain from the place we stand in on this world. If we would be, that would not be the level of *b’asher hu sham*, and we wouldn’t be deserving. Rather, we are asking for rain from where it comes from in Heaven, which is “*sham*” – there, not here.

[There are higher waters, which are rain of blessing, and lower waters, which are destructive rain]. On Succos, when the world is judged for water, this is not referring to the “lower waters”, but the “higher waters”. The “higher waters” we pray for on Succos are waters of blessing, unlike the “lower waters”, which are waters that bring destruction, of which *Chazal* say are cursed waters that ruin the festival. We are praying to receive the “higher waters”, which refers to the level of “*b’asher hu sham*”, for the higher waters are “*sham*” (there) in Heaven.

PRAYING FROM OUR SOUL'S ROOT – OUR POINT OF MUTUAL UNITY IN THE JEWISH PEOPLE

When we *daven* to Hashem, we *daven* with our mouths, from our lips. But there is also a deeper way to *daven*: when we *daven* from our “*shoresh haneshamah*”, the “root of all the [collective] soul” [from the point where the entire Jewish people are unified together].

The two *aravos* we take together with the *lulav* on Succos are parallel to the two lips; thus the level of Succos represents the normal level of prayer, where we *daven* from our lips. But there is a verse, “*With their lips they honor Me, but their hearts are far from Me.*” Therefore, praying with our lips alone is the incomplete level.

But on Hoshanah Rabbah, the *aravos* are all taken together, alluding to the unity of the Jewish people, “*areivim zeh l'zeh*”, for all Jewish souls are rooted in one unit. When we pray from this unified place, it is the level of “*b'asher hu sham*”, where our prayers are not coming from our lips, but from our unified essence, the root of all our souls. With such prayer, a person's prayers may be answered by Hashem even before he calls out to Hashem, as in the verse, “*Before they call out, I answer.*”

This is the level of the higher unity, called “*areivus*”, revealed through the *aravos* of Hoshanah Rabbah. This is the depth of the connection between Hoshanah Rabbah and water, where we pray for water, from its source, alluding to the concept of *b'asher hu sham*, “there”. This is the “seal within a seal” on Hoshanah Rabbah – it refers to the concept that Hashem judges us based upon the place we are in, “*b'asher hu sham*”, for being “there”, in our original, upper, heavenly source. There, in the source, everything is pure, clean, and good – thus when one is “there”, everything will be good.

THE RECTIFYING “WATERS” OF HOSHANAH RABBAH

Moshe was saved by water, which symbolizes the “higher waters” of Heaven that can save a person; unlike the “waters of strife” which prevented Moshe from entering the land. The waters that saved Moshe's life alludes to the rectifying “waters” of Hoshanah Rabbah which can save a person, which is the “*sham*” (there) of “*b'asher hu sham*” – for a person to return to his upper, heavenly source, “there”. It is that place which reveals the highest level of atonement which seals the entire Jewish people for a good year.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*¹⁶

THE SHATTERING OF LIMITATIONS

HOSHANAH RABBAH – THE “SEAL WITHIN A SEAL”: THE SHATTERING OF LIMITATIONS

There is a secret depth behind why we bang the *aravos/hoshanos* on the seventh day of *Succos* (*Hoshanah Rabbah*). It is really a matter which needs understanding: why do we set aside a special day on *Succos* to awaken mercy that we receive rain, and why do we specifically use the willow branch, which is the species that represents the wicked, who have no taste (Torah) and no scent (*mitzvos*)?

But the depth is as follows. The fact that the *aravos* have no taste and no scent is but the external aspect of the *aravos*. The inner dimension of *aravos* is that their absence of taste and scent is, itself, the very taste and scent of the *aravos*!

When we pray for mercy on our water on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are referring to the original waters that were created on the first day of Creation, where there was nothing but “*the spirit of G-d*” that hovered over the face of the waters.”

The Sages say that the “spirit of G-d” here refers to “the spirit of Mashiach”.¹⁷ These were the waters of the spiritual dimension (“*ayin*”) and not of the physical dimension (“*yeish*”). And it is precisely the *aravos* which awaken the original waters of Creation, for the *aravos* have no taste and no scent, thus they contain “nothingness”, which is the key to the spiritual dimension. Its nothingness, (“*ayin*”) is essentially its taste and its scent.

This is the secret that lies behind the words of the Arizal¹⁸ that there is a *piska tava* (good message) given over on *Hoshanah Rabbah* which takes effect on *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*. The *piska tava* is essentially the external layer of the seal, whereas the seal that was signed on Yom Kippur is the inner seal. Together, the seal of *Hoshanah Rabbah* and the seal of Yom Kippur form the *chotam b'toch chotam*, the “seal within a seal”.

The seal represents a boundary, a limit, for the word *chosam* is from the word *techum*, “boundary”. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, where the dimension of *ayin* is revealed, all boundaries become integrated with the limitless dimension.

Thus, the *chotam b'toch chotam* is essentially the point where boundaries are nullified. When the boundaries are nullified, when limitations are shattered, we can then taste and smell the dimension

סוכות_004_ולמקנהו עשה סוכות | ספר בלבבי משכן אבנה סוכות – עמ' כז 16

17 *Beraishis Rabbah* 2:4

18 *Shaar HaKavanos: Succos, derush* 6

of *ayin* [which we cannot taste and smell with our physical senses]. And then we can merit a “*chasimah tovah*” – a “good signature”.

When we perceive the seal of Yom Kippur as a limitation that cannot be broken, that itself awakens judgment upon ourselves. But when our physical dimension (*yeish*) joins with the spiritual dimension (*ayin*), when our limited dimension merges with the limitless dimension, we are then able to truly have a “*piska tava*”.

SHEMINI ATZERES AND SIMCHAS TORAH: TWO DIMENSIONS JOINING EACH OTHER

This concept continues into *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*, of which “the end is contained in the beginning”¹⁹; the finishing of the Torah, which commences with beginning the Torah.

The finishing of the Torah represents our limited dimension. From this viewpoint, the Torah is referred to as “*Toras emes*”, “the Torah of truth”, and the “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth” – which means that we are confined to certain limitations. But when we consider the concept of “the end is contained in the beginning” – the fact that as soon as we finish the Torah, we begin the Torah – this reveals to us the concept that the limitless dimension beyond our own time and space can pour into our own limited dimension. This point is known as “*emes l’amitah*”, the absolute level of truth – and this is the point that describes the “*chotam b’toch chotam*” of *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

The concept of the “*piska tava*”, which appears after the signature that was written and sealed during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, is essentially the point that reveals the root of the *chotam b’toch chotam*; it is the point of *hiskalelus* (integrating) with Hashem.

The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth”; when we reveal the point of *emes l’amitah* (absolute truth), we see that there are levels to the truth, and that not all truth is the absolute truth. What is *emes/truth*, and what is *emes l’amitah/absolute truth*? The limited dimension we normally are contained in is a truthful dimension, but there is a more inner dimension that is beyond it, where there are no limitations; that is the *emes l’amitah*.

Thus, our limited dimension we are normally in is not the *emes l’amitah*, although it is certainly *emes*. The *emes l’amitah* is the point where the limitless dimension meets with our own limited dimension and it is shined upon it.

This is the secret of the “*chotam b’toch chotam*”. The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”, which is essentially the *chotam b’toch chotam*, is the *emes l’amitah*. It is the point where the limitless dimension is revealed upon our own limited dimension, and this is how what the *chotam b’toch chotam* accomplishes. It shows us that our own limited world is ultimately a part of a higher, limitless dimension, which shows us that there is more to the truth that we see. It is because we really do not

¹⁹ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:6

understand the truth at all, for all truth is ultimately bound up with Hashem, and “no thoughts can comprehend Him”.²⁰

This is the depth that is behind these 22 days of *Tishrei* that spans Rosh HaShanah through *Shemini Atzeres*. Since Rosh HaShanah, we are being drawn closer to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*'s embrace²¹. But Succos is the time where we actually become integrated (*miskalel*) in Hashem, for the *sukkah* is where we sit in the *tzeil* (shadow) of Hashem. It is the point of *ayin*, which we cannot grasp or comprehend in any way; it cannot be physically sensed.

The secret of these days is that they reveal to us the concept of *hiskalelus* in Hashem, where we can see that everything is really *ayin* (nothingness), and as Shlomo HaMelech says in *Koheles*: “For everything is *hevel* (nothing).” And when *ayin* becomes integrated with the Creator, it is revealed the depth of “*Ain Od Milvado*” – that there is nothing besides for Hashem.

²⁰ *P'sach Eliyahu*

²¹ *Arizal: Shaar HaKavanos: Yom Kippur, derush 4*

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*²²

SUCCOS & SHEMINI ATZERES – TWO LEVELS OF CLOSENESS WITH HASHEM

THE INNER MEANING BEHIND THE FOUR SPECIES AND THE SUKKAH

In the *Yom Tov* of *Succos*, the main *mitzvos* are to shake the four species and to sit in the *sukkah*. (Aside for the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, when we had the *mitzvah* of *nisuch hamayim*²³ in the *Beis Hamikdash* on *Succos*).

The *mitzvah* of the four species involves the concept of movement: we shake them and move them around. On a deep level, this act symbolizes how we want to “move” away from evil - and instead “move” ourselves closer to Hashem. By contrast, the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *sukkah* involves no movement at all; we sit in it, and don’t move at all. This symbolizes a different aspect of our *Avodas Hashem*: the point of “non-movement.”

In other words, there are two steps in our *Avodas Hashem*. In our *Avodas Hashem*, sometimes we have to “move” - and sometimes we don’t “move”.²⁴

SUCCOS OF TODAY AND SUCCOS OF THE FUTURE

There is a *halachah* on *Succos* that we have to sit specifically in the “shadow” (“*tzeil*”) of the *sukkah*. This is the *sukkah* of nowadays – we sit in the *sukkah*’s shadow, which symbolizes how Hashem’s radiance is concealed from us.

²² <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-0001-Succos-shemini-atzeres-2-levels-closeness-hashem>

²³ The offering of the water libation

²⁴ Editor’s Note: Refer to *Succos_07_The Jew’s Inner Self*.

(The *Rov* has been brief here in this fundamental concept; we will elaborate here to give more background. Generally speaking, the lower mode of *Avodas Hashem* involves “movement”, such as the six days of the week, when we move and work, representing the mundane. On *Shabbos* we don’t move, because we do not work; thus non-movement is always seen as the higher aspect of our *Avodas Hashem*.

The concept of non-movement is also explained more in *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Shabbos Kodesh*, as well as in *sefer Da Es Hargoshosecha* (“Getting To Know Your Feelings”). This footnote does not nearly exhaust the topic; it is a very vast subject which the *Rov* frequently discusses, and the references we have given here are the main sources where the *Rov* discusses it at length. Refer also to the pdf of *Search For Serenity*, an adaptation of *sefer Da Es Menuchasecha*.

However, in the future, *Chazal* state that the *sukkah* will be made from the skin of the *leviathan* (whale) – it will be a *sukkah* of entirely spiritual light. The *Sukkah* of the future will be the perfect *sukkah*, in which “all passerby” (“*kol ha’eizrach*”) will be enveloped within it; a hint to this is that the word “*eizrach*”, “passerby”, is rooted in the word “*zerichah*”, “light.” This alludes to the *sukkah* of the future, which will be totally a spiritual light. The depth behind is because the *sukkah* is not just about dwelling “in the shadow” of the *sukkah*, but to dwell in the light of Hashem.

Dovid Hamelech says, “*Hashem is my light, and my salvation.*” *Chazal* expound on this verse that the words “*my light*” is referring to Rosh Hashanah, while the words “*my salvation*” is referring to Yom Kippur. *Succos*, which is the continuation of this, is the actual revelation of “*my light*”, Rosh Hashanah – it is entirely Hashem’s light.

It is only nowadays that the *sukkah* is like a “shadow”, because since there is evil in the world, the evil places a “shadow” on the “light” of Rosh Hashanah and dims it from its full effect. But in the future, there will be no more evil, and then *Succos* will no longer be a concept of “shadow”; it will rather be a concept of complete spiritual light.

SHEMINI ATZERES – THE D’VEYKUS WITH HASHEM ABOVE ALL SPIRITUAL LIGHT

Even higher than the level of *Succos*, though, is the level of *Shemini Atzeres*, which is the day of complete unity between Hashem and the Jewish people. It is a power that is above even the spiritual light revealed through Rosh Hashanah and *Succos*.²⁵

Chazal say of this day that Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day”. This is the great desire of Hashem toward His people, and it was there even before Hashem created light on the first day; this great desire that He has to us returns on *Shemini Ateres*.

25 Editor’s Note: See sefer Sifsei Chaim: Moadim (Vol. I) who explains how the spirituality of Shemini Atzeres is deeper than the first days of Succos. On Succos, we have the mitzvah of sukkah and the four species, because we are given these tools on Succos to reach closeness to Hashem through them. However, Shemini Atzeres is a higher connection we have with Hashem, as it is the culmination of the entire Yomim Noraim; thus, it doesn’t require us to sit in the sukkah or to shake the four species, because it is more of a direct connection with Hashem.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*²⁶

THE JOY OF SHEMINI ATZERES/SIMCHAS TORAH

SHEMINI ATZERES AND SIMCHAS TORAH: TWO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF JOY

Shemini Atzeres is called by two names: *Shemini Atzeres*, and *Simchas Torah*. They represent two different kinds of joy. One kind of joy is the joy of “*Atzeres*”. “*Atzeres*” means to “remain”. This is hinting to the *Midrash* that says that Hashem desired to remain with the Jewish people even after *Succos* ends, saying to them, “Remain with me one more day.”

What exactly is this joy? It is the joy that one can have just in being attached to Hashem, to simply feel with Him in a sense of companionship.

Simchas Torah offers a different kind of joy. It is the joy one has in being attached to the Torah, and thus we make a celebration that we have completed the Torah.

JOY WITHIN NATURE AND JOY ABOVE NATURE

A *chosson* and *kallah*²⁷ have a certain joy; and it lasts for 7 days. The joy of *Shemini Atzeres* is a joy found on the “eighth day”, hinting to the fact that it is a joy that is connected with the number “8”. In other words, the regular kind of joy is represented by the number 7, whereas the higher joy is represented by the number 8. We always find how the number 7 corresponds with nature, such as that there are 7 days of the week. The joy of a *chosson* and *kallah*, which lasts for 7 days, represents the natural joy; the joy is that two natures are fusing together. Such joy is a joy within the bounds of nature.

But there is a higher kind of joy, the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. It is a joy that is above nature, for “8” is above “7.” Let us explain what it is.

ABOVE NATURE

It is the custom that when we finish the Torah, we immediately begin with *Beraishis*. The reason behind this is because the Torah is unlimited and endless, and we want to show that it has no end.

²⁶ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.284-286.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-284-joy-shemini-atzeres-simchas-torah>

²⁷ groom and bride

The last letter of the Torah is ל, and the first letter of the Torah is א, which forms the word לב (heart). The heart is king of the body; a king is above his people. A king is allowed to break fences, and no one can protest him.²⁸ A king – or the heart of a person – is not bound to the regular rules.

This is the joy of *Simchas Torah*; it represents the heart of a person, which is above the regular limits, for it is “king” over the body. The joy of *Simchas Torah* is thus a joy that is above the natural kind of joy. It is the unlimited joy one can have in the Torah.

The same is true for the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. Our *avodah* during the seven days of *Succos* is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world (see the chapter before)²⁹.

After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature³⁰ – he is now able to connect totally to Hashem, a state of being that is essentially above nature; that is the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*.

WITHIN THE STRUGGLES, AND ABOVE THE STRUGGLES

The word “*simcha*” (שמחה) comes from word *someach* (שמח), and if we rearrange the letters, we get the word *chamesh* (חמש). *Chamesh* can mean two different things:

It can mean the number “five.”

Chamesh is also from the word “*chamushim*”, which means “armies”; we find this when the Jewish people left Egypt, that they left in “armies.”³¹ Rashi states that these armies were unarmed with any weapons. From here we see that the word “*chamesh*” normally refers to weapons of war.

The words “*Simcha*” (שמחה) and “*chamesh*” (חמש) have the same root letters (ש, מ, ח); there is a rule in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that whenever there is a root word³², there are two opposite meanings to it. In our case, this will apply as follows. *שמחה Simcha* is when a person ends his wars, representing a level that is above nature. He has left the level of “*Seven times a righteous person falls and gets up*”, and he is above the regular ups and downs. He is above “seven” – and he is now on the level of “eight”. He no longer has the normal, natural struggles he used to deal with.

חמש Chamesh represents the lower kind of joy – when one is happy upon overcoming challenges. He wages war with the seven “nations” inside him – the seven primary bad *middos*. He still hasn’t completely overcome them yet – he’s still within the normal fights of nature, fighting with his natural abilities.

28 *Pesachim* 110a

29 Hence, we read *Koheles* on *Succos*, which talks about how futile this physical world is.

30 the seven *middos*: *chessed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, etc.

31 *Shemos* 13: 18

32 *shoresh*

AFTER YOM TOV IS OVER

When *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is over, what does a person remain with? The higher joy of “8” reached on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* has now gone; what does a person have left from *Yom Tov*?

Simcha is when a person is happy with something has become added onto his existence. We see that people don’t find happiness in the fact that they merely exist; people are naturally unhappy. (There is a kind of happiness that a person can have in just being happy with what he has, but no one is happy with their mere existence.) *Simcha* is only present when a person receives something, which adds on something to his existence.

If a person would take something he gets and make it a part of his essence, he would no longer be happy with what he has gotten, because now it’s part of who he is – and he needs something *more* than what he is in order to be happy.

Yet, this is actually our *avodah*: we need to take what we have gained so far, and make it into a part of our essence, even though this will no longer provide us with a feeling of *simcha*.

Our *avodah* on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is to find joy in Hashem and in His Torah – a joy that is above nature. After a person merits this joy, he has to take it and make it a part of who he is. One needs to feel a total connection with Hashem that transcends nature, and an attachment with Torah that transcends nature.

When a person takes the happiness of being attached to Hashem and the Torah (and this happiness can be reached on the *Yom Tov*) and he makes into a part of himself, the *simcha* goes away with this, because now there is nothing “more” to be happy about, for it is now part of the person.

For this reason, there is no *simcha* after *Yom Tov* ends. There can’t be. It is not because the great spirituality of *Yom Tov* has gone. It is because if we have succeeded in our *avodah* on *Yom Tov*, that means we have transformed the spirituality of *Yom Tov* into a part of our essence. It has gone from being something great that surrounded us into something that has been absorbed into our being.³³ With this attainment, our *simcha* has to go away with it, but the gain is far worth it.

What is the *avodah* now, as we start the rest of the year? It is now upon us to aspire for an even higher level than what we gained until now – and from there we will derive our next upgrade to our *simcha* next year.

³³ In the Hebrew sefer, the author calls this “going from the “*ohr makif*” (“surrounding light”) to an “*ohr penimi*” (inner light).

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*³⁴

ALCOHOLISM ON SIMCHAS TORAH & WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

THE INCREASE OF ALCOHOL IN OUR TIMES

The truth is that we all have a need to drink [intoxicating beverages]. We see from the Torah and from the words of *Chazal* that we all have times in which we must drink. On *Yom Tov*, we have a *mitzvah* to drink a *reviis* of wine; on Pesach, we drink the Four Cups, and on Purim, we have a *mitzvah* to drink until we are totally intoxicated. These are the specific times of the year in which we drink alcoholic beverages.

In previous generations, when our ancestors lived in the colder countries of the world - such as Europe - they were very accustomed to drinking [to warm their bodies]. Therefore, because they were accustomed to drinking, many of us carry on their *minhag* to drink, and this also includes eating certain kinds of meat and fish that they ate. There all kinds of *minhagim* like this.

But in our times, the situation of drinking has gotten out of hand. Anyone familiar with the situation today is well aware of how the *minhag* to drink has become so extreme and abused.

Much of the drinking these days, especially in the last couple of years, has gotten way overboard, and it has nothing to do with keeping the *Halachah* of drinking on *Yom Tov* or with the *minhag* of our ancestors to drink alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately, *Simchas Torah* today has become like ‘Purim’ to many young people. People are spending tons of money so they can be able to drink alcohol at night.

It has become ‘acceptable’ for people to sit and drink together. The large variety of alcoholic beverages today is not only taking place in the far countries of the world such as Africa. It is even in the most *Chareidi* supermarkets! There are whole sections of the supermarket just for alcoholic beverages, and it is not being sold to people who need to have enough to drink “a *reviis* of wine” for Shabbos. It is being sold to many people who simply drink for the sake of drinking. It is a very painful reality.

We can all recognize people whose entire *Simchas Torah* is about getting drunk, and it has nothing to do with wanting to fulfill any *mitzvah*.

There is a kind of desire for drinking that stems from fire in the soul, in which a person seeks to drink because he is seized with a feeling of inner emptiness, but we aren’t discussing this right now; we will discuss it later. We are discussing a desire for drinking that does not come from feeling a **temporary** emptiness, but rather a desire for drinking in which a person desires to drink on a regular and permanent basis.

³⁴ from *Fixing Your Water_010_Drinking Issues*

Drinking has become a staple in his life to this kind of person. Such addictive drinking stems from “earth” (permanence) of-“water-of-water-of-water” (the desire to experience the pleasure of drinking),

This is a particular problem that has become dominant in our current generation, in which many people are feeling empty all the time, and not just every once a while; people are feeling empty on a regular basis and are seeking to relieve this emptiness they keep feeling.

There are a few people who are really immersed in Torah and in holiness and with good *middos*, but sadly, most people, even in the Torah world, feel an ongoing inner emptiness in their life. There is therefore a very big pursuit of physical gratification in this generation, and a desire to drink on a regular basis.

When a person pursues the desire for drinking on a regular basis, the person is really disconnecting from himself. Some people are only drinking because they are influenced by their surroundings that are into drinking, but most people who drink are drinking because they keep feeling an inner emptiness in their life.

In the previous chapter, when we addressed addictions, we mentioned the solution of pulling away in steps from the addiction. But that solution won't help so easily to stop addictive drinking.

THE SOLUTION: BUILDING OUR P'NIMIYUS (INNER DIMENSION)

The desire for drinking is affecting even people who keep Torah and mitzvos – that is, those whose Torah learning hasn't yet penetrated into their being. Therefore, they feel an inner emptiness from their life.

The addiction to drinking can therefore be present even in a boy in *Yeshiva* who is smart and brilliant in his Torah learning, because he can still feel very empty inside himself from having any real inner content. His heart might be empty, even though his brain works very well and he knows how to learn Torah very well.

Let us point out that the desire for addictive drinking has come into the Torah world from the outside world; it did not originate from within the Torah world. It has now recently entered the Torah world, and it is a painful reality that will be here until *Moshiach* comes.

When a *frum* person who learns Torah and keeps mitzvos is addicted to drinking, the problem will not be solved by simply trying to slowly pull away from the desire in steps (as it was explained in the previous chapter). This is because it doesn't solve the ongoing inner emptiness that he is feeling.

Since the source of the problem is that the person feels empty in his life, we will need to show him how he can build his *pnimiyus* (inner world).

This is a vast subject, but generally speaking, building one's *pnimiyus* will involve three things. (1) He needs to exert his mind in Torah (which he is already doing, and he must keep doing that), (2)

and he needs to be willing to really work on his *middos*, and (3) he needs to begin to put his heart into what he does.

We will not delve into this now, as it will get us off-topic, but this is the basic outline of the solution: the permanence of his addictive desire for drinking will get countered by building an inner kind of permanence in his life.

Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos³⁵

DEEP JOY ON SIMCHAS TORAH

THE JOY OF SIMCHAS TORAH

On *Simchas Torah*, there is *simcha* over the completion of the Torah. But does everyone have the same happiness? If a person only has enthusiasm in his learning, but he doesn't use his brain much to think in-depth as he learns, he is not truly connected to his learning.

Compare this to someone who spent a year learning Torah in-depth, and now it comes *Simchas Torah*. Is his happiness a feeling of enthusiasm? It's much more profound; he is enjoying now the fruits of his efforts, a year well spent on learning Torah.

When someone knows how to dance and jump up and down by *Hakafos*, he can do the same each thing each year; it doesn't show that anything in his learning changed since a year ago. If he was so enthused from the Torah, why doesn't he continue to learn Torah as soon as they close the Aron? Why does he keep jumping...? If someone keeps jumping, it shows that his entire learning comes from enthusiasm, and not because he is so connected to his learning...

But a person who dances on *Simchas Torah* after a full year's worth of learning in-depth has a much more profound kind of happiness. He doesn't have to feel enthused, because he has a more inner kind of happiness. He's connected to his learning - so he's automatically happy towards his learning.

People want *simcha* (joy) and *chiyus* (vitality) in their *Avodas Hashem*. But often this is a desire for superficial *chiyus*. It is not being truthful.

Compare this to the difference between a baby versus someone getting married; or someone dancing on *Simchas Torah* who learned Torah during the year, versus someone who didn't learn Torah during the year. The difference between them is vast.

³⁵ from *Rosh Hashanah_025_Changing The Mind*

May we merit from Hashem to understand that *Avodas Hashem* become properly built, and that our feelings of enthusiasm, joy, and our other feelings are only built through the power of utilizing our intellect. Using our intellect is what gives us the power of subtle understanding, which helps us understand and develop profound feelings that last – as opposed to feelings that are temporary feelings of elation and excitement.³⁶

This is the true *simcha* we can have in our *Avodas Hashem*.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Sukkos*³⁷

BEFORE & AFTER SIMCHAS TORAH

The Elevating Power of the Festivals

If a person is immersed in Torah during the rest of the year, the festivals can help a person raise the bar in his Torah learning.

It is not only Shavuot and Simchas Torah which gives a person a stronger power of learning Torah. The festival of *Succos* can also do it; when you read Koheles on *Succos*, you can realize how futile the world is (as Koheles says), and that in turn strengthens your desire for Torah learning. On Pesach, which is the time of our freedom, we can realize the statement of *Chazal* that “there is no free person except a person who learns Torah.” The festivals come to strengthen a point in you that’s already active. Rosh HaShanah and Purim can also accomplish it.

That is the sensible way to view the festivals, but most people have a different attitude about it. When we enter a high spiritual time, such as *Yomim Noraim*, we realize that it’s a higher level than our normal place, and can feel like an exile. It makes a person feel like he’s imprisoned from his regular routine.

So not only is it hard to deal with the “fall” after *Yomim Noraim* ends; it’s hard to enter in the first place, because it feels imprisoning, for we are entering higher levels.

FRUSTRATION ON SIMCHAS TORAH (AND AFTERWARDS)

Here is another simple example. On *Simchas Torah*, anyone who has learned a little Torah during the year will feel some joy on this day as he’s dancing by *Hakafos*. He feels elated after each *Hakafah*. But he’s feeling deep down, “Why can’t I love the Torah this much during the rest of the year as well?” He feels an inner contradiction in himself.

³⁶ To further develop this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part 2, Chapters 1-9*.

³⁷ from *Fixing Your Fire-Conceit.005.Knowing Your Capabilities*

Others experience a different problem: they enjoy *Simchas Torah* and they rise to high levels of loving the Torah on this day, but the day after *Simchas Torah*, they find themselves back to routine, and they wonder where all their high levels went.

Obviously, this frustration is not experienced by those who don't live an internal kind of life. Such a person doesn't even feel the changes, and he has no problem making the transition from *Simchas Torah* to the next day. But the more a person is sensitive to his inner spiritual world, the more he can feel the difficulty, of making the transition between the festivals to the normal routine of the year.

LESSENING THE FRUSTRATION

What, indeed, is the correct way to go about it? A person must be aware that before the festival, he will not feel as elevated, and that the festival will elevate him, and after the festival ends, he will go back to the regular routine of the year. In other words, he must know beforehand that it will be like this.

This is not because a person should simply despair from trying to acquire higher levels and to avoid the pain of the disappointment. It is because one must be aware that we simply cannot be on higher levels all the time. We can be aware that the elevation we feel on the festivals is temporary, and that it is not meant for the rest of the year to be on this level.

The point is to become aware that there's a part of ourselves that can jump to higher levels, but that doesn't mean we need to stay at those higher places we jump to. In this way, when the festivals end, instead of feeling a great fall from our level where we feel like we've fallen flat on the ground, we can fall away lightly from it, which will lessen the impact of the fall.

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

This concept is not only applicable with the festivals. It is an inner perspective towards living life, which applies to all aspects of spiritual growth.

Another application of it is when it comes to getting married. On the day of a person's wedding, he feels elated. The wedding is filled with holiness and aspiration. The next day, the newlywed returns to routine. But instead of feeling frustrated at this sudden transition, he should make himself aware from beforehand that there will be a point of "before" the wedding, and "after" the wedding, and the wedding itself.

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven for 40 days, where he resembled an angel, and he did not touch food or drink, but then he came back down, where he continued to eat and drink. If a person were to try fasting 40 days, he would be a sinner, because he is endangering his life. Similarly, *Klal Yisrael* was told to abstain from marital relations for three days, to prepare to receive the Torah. These were high levels that a person normally cannot do.

One must be aware that the higher levels we can reach are only for the time being, but after that, we need to return to routine, and there is nothing wrong with this, for it is supposed to be this way.

INTERNALIZING SUCCOS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR ³⁸

CARRYING OVER THE YOM TOV INTO THE YEAR

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the Three Festivals (*Succos*, Pesach and Shavuot), we say, “And lift us, Hashem our G-d, the blessings of Your festival, for life and peace, happiness and gladdening.”

There are those who explain³⁹ this prayer to mean that we are asking Hashem to let the blessings of *Yom Tov* carry over into the rest of the year. “Blessing”, *berachah* in Hebrew, comes from word *beraicha* – a pool, connoting that we want Hashem to pool upon us His sustenance⁴⁰; in other words, we want to be affected by the special power of the *Yom Tov* for the rest of the year as well.

It is well-known that not only is *Yom Tov* an opportunity for immense holiness and growth, but even *Chol HaMoed* is a holy time; *Chazal* forbade certain activities on *Chol HaMoed* so that we can be free to rejoice in festivity and have time to learn Torah.⁴¹

Having free time on *Chol HaMoed* is not simply meant to have free time – although that is certainly true in the simple sense; it is really because having this extra time on our hands give us the opportunity to have a calm and relaxed soul, so we can focus on more on serving the Creator and learning the Torah. When a person is busy with various matters other than *Avodas Hashem* and learning Torah, his soul is less open to receive matters of holiness. But on *Yom Tov*, a person is able to learn how to acquire spirituality, *Avodas Hashem* and learning Torah – and all of this is because on *Yom Tov* we are disconnected from materialism.

(It is not a total disconnection from materialism, only partial; as we see that certain labors are permitted on *Chol HaMoed*, in certain situations). *Yom Tov* can show us that even after *Yom Tov*, our *Avodas Hashem* and our learning of the Torah should be from a disconnection from the material world, a disconnection from how the rest of the world thinks – and from this, we come to truly learn the Torah and have true *Avodas Hashem*.

³⁸ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Succos*, chap. 1.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droshos-after-holydays>

³⁹ *Bad Kodosh on Moadim* (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also *Birchas Moadecha* (of Rav Margolin) on *Tishrei*.

⁴⁰ See *Rabbeinu Bachye*, *Parshas Eikev*, 8:10.

⁴¹ *Yerushalmi Moed Kattan*, 9a.

ACCESSING THE STATE OF YOM TOV EVEN DURING THE YEAR

Yom Tov is supposed to affect us and fuel us up with spiritual energy to last until the next *Yom Tov*. We need this burst of spirituality to keep us going. The days of *Yom Tov* are few, in comparison to the rest of the year which is much longer; if a person doesn't get affected by *Yom Tov*, he won't be able to acquire any matter of holiness during the rest of the year.

Let us think into how *Yom Tov* can affect our soul for the rest of the year.

On *Yom Tov*, a person is calm and relaxed from the busyness of the world. His mind is settled and he is a bit calmer than he is normally; each to his own level. On *Chol HaMoed*, we buy only food that we will need for *Yom Tov*, and not more than that. We are frugal and satisfied just with that amount of shopping. We also don't do any work on *Chol HaMoed* unless it will cause us to have a loss. Most stores are closed. Of course, a person might use the relaxation of *Chol HaMoed* for the wrong purposes and waste his time, *chas v'shalom*; but that is a different problem which we are not currently discussing.

It is impossible to live in *Yom Tov* during the year – that is, in the external sense. But in our inner world of the soul, we can live in a state of calmness that we have on *Yom Tov*, even when it's not *Yom Tov* – if we gain the proper kind of mind to do so.

When *Yom Tov* ends, we go back to our prospective jobs. Even a *Kolel avreich* has his jobs; life is full of responsibilities that surround us all day. Anyone who is married and has children has responsibilities to his family. He has to make sure that his wife and kids have a roof over their heads; that they have food, clothing, doctor visits, etc. That is one side of our life. But there is another side going on in our life – the fact that we are in between one *Yom Tov* and the next.

The Ramban writes that *Sefiras HaOmer* is like *Chol HaMoed*, and that Shavuot is like the *Shemini Atzeres* (of Pesach). By the same token, perhaps we can say also that the days in between Shavuot and *Succos* – and from *Succos* to Pesach – are like one big *Chol HaMoed*, the bridge that connects one *Yom* to another. There is a holiness we can gain from our “*Chol HaMoed*” year-round.

IN BETWEEN YOMIM TOVIM

Perhaps we can say also that *Yom Tov* is like a Shabbos, while the rest of the year is like the six days of the week. We find that Pesach is called “Shabbos”,⁴² and Yom Kippur is called “*Shabbos Shabboson*.”⁴³ This is because our whole essence is that we were redeemed from Egypt so that we could become a nation to receive the Torah, and we also know that every *Yom Tov* is *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – to remember our redemption from Egypt. Shabbos is also *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim*. If so, *Yom Tov* and Shabbos can be compared to each other. The rest of the year, by contrast, is like the six days of the week.

⁴² *Menachos 65b*

⁴³ *Vayikra 16: 31*

The six days of the week are blessed by Shabbos.⁴⁴ Perhaps we can also say that the days in between each *Yom Tov* are sustained by the blessings of the *Yom Tov*. Just like we have a concept of the afternoon⁴⁵ and a concept of “*bein hashemashos*”⁴⁶ (twilight) – times “in between” that serve to connect different times – so can we say that the days in between Yomim Tovim are what connect the previous *Yom Tov* to the next *Yom Tov*. If so, the rest of the year is in a sense like a *Yom Tov* of its own; it is a certain time, a bridge between the Yomim Tovim.

What are the days of the rest of the year like? They are not like *Yom Tov* itself, but they resemble *Chol HaMoed* – the time which connects one part of *Yom Tov* to the next. *Chol HaMoed* is the lower level of *Yom Tov*, and so can we say that the rest of the year is a lower level of *Yom Tov*, serving to connect *Yom Tov* to another.

The *Gemara*⁴⁷ says that when Haman wanted to get the Jews in trouble, he pointed out to Achashveirosh that the Jews are always busy keeping *Yom Tov*; “today is Shabbos, today is Pesach.” This hints to the fact that the Jewish people are always in a “*Yom Tov*” – because the whole year is really like a *Yom Tov*! (Just that it is on a lower level than the actual *Yom Tov*.)

WHAT WE LEARN FROM YOM TOV FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR

The Yomim Tovim given to us are not simply defined by their individual concepts they represent, but they are more than that: they reflect the level we are at during the time that the *Yom Tov* sets in. That is why we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Yom Tov*, “*You chose us from all the nations*”, and we also mention in the davening how *Yom Tov* is *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim* – that only the we, the Jewish people, merited to leave Egypt, while the other nations did not merit this special event. *Yom Tov* expresses how the Jewish people were formed into a nation, and how Hashem chose us as His nation.

The world stands on three pillars⁴⁸, and so does the Jewish people stand on three things – the three Yomim Tovim⁴⁹. The Yomim Tovim help the Jewish people survive for the rest of the year. There is much to learn from each aspect of *Yom Tov*.

For example, on *Chol HaMoed*, one is only allowed to purchase items that are necessary for *Yom Tov*.⁵⁰ We can learn two things from this. Firstly, we see that you only need to buy things for your house that you need right now, and not to shop for things you’ll only need in the future. Secondly, you have to be frugal and only buy things that you really need, not luxuries.

44 Zohar II, Yisro, 88a

45 Rashi, Shemos 12: 6

46 Avos 5: 6

47 Rashi, Megillah 13b

48 Avos 1:2 and 1:17

49 These are called *Shalosh Regalim*, the “Three Festivals”: Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos.

50 Tur, Orach Chaim, 130.

This is how someone lives throughout the rest of the year as well, when he has a deep connection in his soul with the Creator – he takes the lessons of *Yom Tov* with him for the rest of the year as well.

YOM TOV – OUR MEETING WITH HASHEM

Yom Tov is called *moed*, which comes from the word *vaad* (meeting). The place where we would meet with Hashem was the *Beis Hamikdash*, and from it a Jew would derive vitality from it for the rest of the year by visiting it three times a year.

The *Shechinah* was there. Now that it is gone, we express our loss in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Yom Tov*, “*And because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land, and we have been distanced from our earth.*” What do we mean that we have been exiled from our land? We are able to stand in *Eretz Yisrael* today. How are we exiled from it?

Simply, it is because the incredible holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, the holiness of the *Beis Hamikdash*, has gone away. There is a discussion if the land of *Eretz Yisrael* still maintains its sanctity even though we have no *Beis Hamikdash*.⁵¹ But there is a deeper meaning behind the *tefillah* we are saying. We have been exiled and distanced from our land, in the sense that we are far from the great spiritual revelations that one would experience on *Yom Tov* by the *Beis Hamikdash*. That spiritual light would illuminate the entire *Eretz Yisrael*.

Although this reality still continues to exist in our inner world, it isn’t revealed out in the open in the world we see, and thus we are “exiled” from our land. So although a person can be in *Eretz Yisrael* today, he is still exiled from it – he is missing what *Eretz Yisrael* used to be like.

When a person went up to the *Beis Hamikdash* three times a year, he saw the *Shechinah*. What does this mean? It means that he revealed in his heart a deep connection with Hashem, an utter awareness of His existence. It was called “*aliyah l’regel*,” (ascending on *Yom Tov*) – going up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an ascension in the sense that one who ascended spiritually from *Yom Tov* would stay at that high level, and he was able to maintain it and not to fall from it back to routine.

This is the meaning of the possuk, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place*”⁵² – in other words, the possuk is praising the one who would gain from the holy spiritual elevation of *Yom Tov* and maintain his level throughout the rest of the year.

YOM TOV- THE SHECHINAH WITHIN

The Torah is eternal, and thus whatever it imparts is eternal. If there is such a concept of *Yom Tov* in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* – when the *Shechinah* was revealed out in the open – then that concept, that point, continues to exist. We have no *Beis Hamikdash* today, but we still have *Yom Tov*, and we can have *aliyah l’regel* every *Yom Tov*, even nowadays. This is what we ask for in the

51 See *Megillah 6a* and *Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16*

52 *Tehillim 24:3*

Shemoneh Esrei of *Yom Tov*: “*V’hasieinu es birkas moedecha*” – (“And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...”). Our *avodah* on *Yom Tov* is that we ask Hashem to let the holiness of *Yom Tov* carry into the rest of the year, in spite of the fact that our level of revelation isn’t the same as it used to be.

It is written, “*And I will dwell amongst them.*”⁵³ The *Alshich* explains that the possuk is saying that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew! In our own heart within us, we can still have *aliyah l’regel* three times a year, on *Yom Tov*⁵⁴ – and see Hashem, so to speak; on our own level. We can access the *Shechinah* in our hearts, three times a year – each *Yom Tov* – and extend it to the rest of the year. But in order for this to happen, we need to know what *Yom Tov* really is.

If a person came to a stronger recognition of Hashem’s existence on *Yom Tov*, then the Torah he learns during the rest of the year will become more internalized in his mind and heart, as a result. If someone is truly searching for Hashem, the Torah he learns will become the real Torah – “*For from Zion comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*”⁵⁵ The true Torah of Hashem becomes revealed to a person, in his heart, when he earnestly pursues Hashem. Thus, the inner implication of *Yom Tov* is for one to connect to Hashem in his heart. What will result from this? “*For Hashem gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.*”⁵⁶

EXPERIENCE THE ELATION OF YOM TOV AND THEN SEEK TO MAINTAIN IT

If someone reaches this on *Yom Tov*, he has gained immensely; now it is his *avodah* to continue that growth into the rest of the year. This will fulfill the meaning of what we daven for on *Yom Tov* – “And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...”

But if a person didn’t try to grow from *Yom Tov* in the way described here, and he didn’t come to have a new feeling of a relationship with Hashem from the *Yom Tov* – then there is no point for him to wait to see if he will be inspired for the rest of the year. He hasn’t invested in anything over *Yom Tov*, so he won’t see any of the profits during the rest of the year. Only if a person is clear what he has gained from *Yom Tov* can he hope to maintain his inspiration for the rest of the year.

So first, a person has to make sure that he has gained from *Yom Tov* in the first place – before he seeks to let *Yom Tov* carry over into the rest of the year. Even if he has felt a small amount of recognition of Hashem over *Yom Tov*, at least he has gained somewhat, and he has now what to grow upon for the rest of the year.

On *Simchas Torah*, a person has to have at least felt a minimal amount of closeness towards the Torah. One has to feel the *Yom Tov*, to feel the *Simchas Torah*, to feel *Shemini Atzeres* – of which Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day.”⁵⁷ He has to feel that it was hard to part from

⁵³ *Shemos* 25: 8

⁵⁴ *Yom Tov* here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Succos.

⁵⁵ *Yeshayahu* 2:3

⁵⁶ *Mishlei* 2:6

⁵⁷ See *Rashi*, *Vayikra* 23: 36

Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of *Succos*. He has to have felt that he has the opportunity to feel the reality of Hashem for at least one more day.

THE CUSTOM IN KELM OF “ASIRI KODESH”

Let us think into how we can hold onto our gains from *Yom Tov* for the rest of the year.

In Kelm, there was a custom called “*Asiri Kodesh*.”⁵⁸ Every ten days following Yom Kippur, people who lived in Kelm would make for themselves a mini Yom Kippur and check to see if they had kept to the resolutions they made last Yom Kippur.

They started this custom because they realized that most people are only able to hold onto their inspiration during *Yomim Noraim*, and a few are able to keep the inspiration going until after *Succos*, but not beyond that; *Asiri Kodesh* made a person do some introspection every ten days and ask himself if he was still keeping to his level he reached on *Yomim Noraim*.

We can learn from this something very important: how to hold onto our gains from *Yom Tov*. If we really want to have a good year, we need to see after *Yomim Noraim* and *Succos* if we are still feeling that closeness to Hashem we felt during these holy times. For every ten days that go by – or once a week, for those who are able to – we should set aside time and see if we’re keeping to the level we were on during those days.

“*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place.*” This is not just a possuk, it is telling us the *avodah* we need to do throughout the year: we need to see where we are holding. We all know that Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, *Succos* and Simchas Torah will once again be here next year, and that we will once again return to making resolutions, developing our will for spirituality, to have yearnings for spirituality, to dance again on *Simchas Torah*. We will do it all again next year – with the help of Hashem.

But are we losing all of this, *chas v’shalom*, as the year goes on – and then we are just beginning again from scratch next year? Are we going to start over again next year simply because we have lost all those yearnings?

The truth is that the reason why many people can’t keep their resolutions for the new year is because they don’t believe in themselves enough. They didn’t believe to begin with that they were able to keep to what they took upon themselves. But this is really a denial of the words of *Chazal*. If *Chazal* established that we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* the *tefillah* of “*V’hasieimu*”,

it must be that it is definitely possible for us to keep to what we took upon ourselves for the coming year; even if we can’t keep to them as perfectly as we had hoped to, we can still keep to them on our own level.

⁵⁸ lit. “*Tenth Day Is Holy*”.

THE ADVICE OF THE RAMCHAL

If someone doesn't seek advice on how he can keep to his resolutions, we all know that it will be pointless for him to try to keep to them. There is one single advice we have for this, from the *Ramchal*, (author of *Mesillas Yesharim*) in sefer *Derech Eitz Chaim*. He writes as follows⁵⁹:

“It is therefore a duty upon each person to reflect with himself. If he doesn't reflect and think, wisdom will not come after him...a person, for many years of his life, thinks a lot about his various responsibilities, which are only his temporary responsibilities. Why can't he think for an hour about the things that really matter, such as: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does Hashem want from me? What will be with my end?

“This (an hour of self-introspection every day) is the greatest remedy once can have against his evil inclination. It is easy, yet it does so much. It bears much results. Every day, a person should reflect for at least an hour a day, and empty himself from the rest of his thoughts so that he can only think about just this (what he have said).

“And he should ask himself in his heart: “What did the forefathers do, whom Hashem found desirable? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid HaMelech do? What did all the great leaders before me do? “And he should realize in his mind how good it is to do this for all his life.”

What the Ramchal is saying is not just inspiration for Elul. It is something to think about the entire year. If we are really truthful with ourselves, and if we really want to gain from *Yomim Noraim* for the rest of the year – then we have to learn how we can protect what we have gained from *Yomim Noraim*.⁶⁰

MAKE A SELF ACCOUNTING

The Ramchal has taught us that that the essential tool we need is to set aside time for self-introspection. It can be every ten days; once a week is even better, and if one can do it every day, that's the most preferable. During the time you set aside, make the following self-accounting: “On Rosh Hashanah, I reached a certain level. Have I succeeded in keeping to it? How much have I kept to it? If I haven't kept to it, what can I do to make sure I keep to it?”

Hashem has decreed on each person on Rosh Hashanah whatever has been decreed upon him. But it is upon us to make sure that we aren't among those who don't keep to their words. We all know that the coming year will have its full amount of responsibilities, challenges, and difficulties. It will definitely not be that simple to keep to the level we reached *Yomim Noraim* during the year. But we at least need to have a hope that we *can* succeed; of course, we cannot blindly trust ourselves that we will for sure see success, but we must try to at least be *eligible* for success.

What a person has to do is designate for himself times of quiet in which he can make a self-accounting. We must bring our life to a halt and think about the purpose of life. We must be

⁵⁹ This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

⁶⁰ See also *Kedushas Levi: Shavuos*, and also *Ramban: Emunah UBitachon*, chap. 19

truthful with ourselves, and remember what we said to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You can write down what you said this way you don't forget it; take out the paper and read it during this time of quiet you set aside for yourself. One has to see if he's really keeping to what he took upon himself, and if he sees that he isn't, he has to ask himself: "How will I face Hashem next Rosh Hashanah...?"

One should be aware that he has free will to decide if he will be among those who merit the blessings of *Yom Tov* for the rest of the year, or if *chas v'shalom* he will not be among those who merit it.

HOW TO AVOID THE SLEEPINESS OF THE WINTER

Anyone who doesn't follow the *Ramchal's* advice can testify that he has never succeeding in keeping to his resolutions he made during *Yomim Noraim*. But if someone follows the *Ramchal's* advice and he sets aside time to think about what's important, he will definitely see results.

If someone sees a different piece of advice in another *sefer*, that's wonderful. But in Kelm, and in other places, they followed the *Ramchal's* advice, which is that one should set aside time to bring his life to a halt and see if he is keeping to his *Yomim Noraim* level.

We hope that those who are reading this feel that this advice is simple and true; it is the words of our great teachers, and nothing has been added here to their words. Anyone who is truthful with himself knows how necessary it is to make this self-accounting.

These words are not meant to be an inspiring lecture. Inspiration is for Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, and it doesn't last for the winter, when people get sleepy and lethargic. If we want to avoid becoming sleep-like to our spiritual situation during the winter, we need to make sure we are keeping to our level throughout the rest of the year. During *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, a person is supposed to act above his normal level.⁶¹ The rest of the year, however, we go back to our normal level. The high level of spirituality of *Yomim Noraim* has ended – each person, on whatever level he is at. But if we want to at least be on the true level we are supposed to be on, than we must take with us a point that we will have from the beginning of the year until its end.

May Hashem merit us that we should be able to set aside time to think about the purpose of life⁶², and that we should maintain our level for the rest of the year – and that we shouldn't be among those who only wait for the next Elul to become inspired.

61 *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203*

62 For more specific guidance on how to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, see *Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5*.

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