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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

Essays on the Festival of Sukkos

by

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on the Festival of *Sukkos* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

Most of the essays here were published previously in junction with our fortieth wedding anniversary, which took place on the day after Yom Kippur (11th of Tishrei) 5732 (1971).

In the introduction there I wrote:

In the spirit of the belief of all Jews in the imminent coming of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption, all of the essays conclude with the application of the specific message of Sukkos and the Four Species to the theme of Moshiach and Geulah. Indeed, our Sages have made explicit connections from this Festival to the coming of Moshiach.

May the Almighty bring to fruition our greatest wish for the Redemption through our righteous Moshiach imminently!

ESSAY ONE

THE ETERNAL EMBRACE

Sukkos is when we celebrate the "victory" we enjoyed on our Day of Judgment.

We carry the Lulav (Palm branch) because, our sages tell us, its scepter-like appearance is a symbol of victory.

Sukkos is when we "throw a party" for all of the bounty we received from G-d during the High Holy Days.

ESSAY ONE

THE ETERNAL EMBRACE

The Unknown Holiday

Who has not heard of Yom Kippur? Even some of the most assimilated Jews, even if they do not participate in the High Holiday services, are at least aware of the fact that it is the most solemn Jewish day of the year. Perhaps, it was the Yom Kippur war, when the very existence of Israel was imperiled, that reinforced Yom Kippur's role as a time when all of existence hangs in the balance.

What about Sukkos? This relatively obscure Holiday is in truth no less formidable a day than Yom Kippur.

In Talmudic literature, it is Sukkos—and no other Jewish Festival—which is accorded the simple title "Chag/Festival," because it is the Festival par excellence.

What is it about this colorful and joyous Holiday that has accorded it this singular role as the Festival of the year?

The Link

To be sure, the juxtaposition of Sukkos to Yom Kippur—it occurs only four days after—establishes a link between these two Holy periods. Indeed, our celebration of Sukkos is a direct consequence of our achievements on Yom Kippur.

We are convinced that G-d has accepted our pleas to forgive us and give us a good year. We are confident that our entreaty to G-d on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that He accepts our request of Him to be our King, was accepted.

Sukkos is thus the time to celebrate the "victory" we enjoyed on our Day of Judgment. Sukkos is when we carry the Lulav (Palm branch) because, our sages tell us, its scepter-like appearance is a symbol of victory. Sukkos is when we "throw a party" for all of the bounty we received from G-d during the High Holy Days.

Even Our Boots!

There is a more profound way of viewing the joy of Sukkos and its relationship to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The essential Mitzvah of Sukkos is, of course, the Sukkah itself. This little temporary booth becomes our home for seven/eight days. What is unique about this Mitzvah, which

commemorates the way G-d provided the Jews in the wilderness with shelter, is that it is the only Mitzvah that totally envelops the person who fulfills the Mitzvah. Moreover, not only is the entire individual surrounded by the Sukkah; even ones "boots" are surrounded by the Sukkah.

This all-encompassing nature of the Sukkah provides us with the key to understanding the deeper nature of Sukkos.

First of all, the fact that we are surrounded by the Sukkah—symbolic of Divine protection—suggests that G-d has responded favorably and acceded to our request that He become our King by taking us into His "embrace." Sukkos is a time when G-d showers all of His love on us.

Secondly, Sukkos is the time when we show G-d that to us Judaism is not just a one-day-of-the-year-observance, to assuage our guilt. Judaism to us is an all-encompassing experience which involves our entire being.

Envelopment and Joy

When we approach Judaism this way, contrary to what many would imagine, it is not a burden. It is the greatest source of joy. No other Biblical Holiday is associated with as much joy as Sukkos, designated in our prayers as "Zman

Simchaseinu-The Season of Our Rejoicing." The term "our" is said to mean that there is a reciprocal experience of joy. G-d rejoices with us as He takes us into His embrace. We then reciprocate by demonstrating our ecstasy at having the opportunity to enter into the Jewish experience - the Sukkah - with all of our being.

The two themes of total envelopment by the Sukkah and the joy associated with Sukkos are interrelated. When a person is fragmented; a part of him or her is in one place and another part is elsewhere, they cannot experience true joy. Only when a person is situated in one place can they feel the genuine joy of being.

Thus, the Messianic Age—which is the ultimate time of joy as it is stated, "Then our mouths will be filled with laughter"—is characterized as the time when we will all dwell in G-d's Sukkah. Our total envelopment in one Sukkah will be the greatest source of joy. We get a taste of that every time we enter the Sukkah.

ESSAY TWO

YOM KIPPUR AND SUKKOS: THREE LINKS

Both Yom Kippur and Sukkos enable us to “touch” the unknowable.

The difference is that the cloud created on Yom Kippur was seen by the High Priest exclusively who alone entered into that inner precinct of the Temple.

During the Holiday of Sukkos, however, the mystery of G-d’s hidden-ness and other-ness leaves the Holy of Holies and envelops every Jew who dwells in a Sukkah during this Festival.

ESSAY TWO

YOM KIPPUR AND SUKKOS: THREE LINKS

Contradictory or Complementary?

Yom Kippur is arguably the most solemn day of the year. One can almost cut the somberness of the atmosphere with a knife. Ironically, just four days later we observe what is referred to in our liturgy as “the season of our rejoicing,” highlighting the most joyous time of the year!

Are these two Holidays contradictory in any fashion? If they were, wouldn't it make more sense to have them in separate times of the year; at least in separate months?

In fact, these two holidays are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they are highly complementary.

What follows are three approaches to understanding the organic relationship between Yom Kippur and Sukkos (See preceding essay):

Yom Kippur is when we stand in judgment before G-d, beseeching and imploring Him to grant us our requests for a good year. Sukkos is G-d's response to us. Entering into the Sukkah has been compared to G-d taking us into His

embrace, in effect, telling us that He has heard our prayers and has accepted our pleas. Yom Kippur represents the outpouring of our souls to G-d whereas Sukkos represents G-d's all encompassing love for us. Yom Kippur and Sukkos are two sides of the same coin.

The Clouds

A second link:

One of the primary rituals of Yom Kippur was the offering of incense in the Holy Temple's innermost and holiest precinct—the Holy of Holies. The ritual required that the smoke generated by the burning of incense should fill the entire chamber. This smoke is characterized in the Torah as a cloud.

Sukkos too is associated with the idea of a Divine cloud. Sukkos, the Torah tells us, as our Sages clarify, is to commemorate the miraculous **Clouds** of Glory that surrounded the Jewish people in the desert upon their departure from Egypt.

Both Yom Kippur and Sukkos revolve around the theme of Divine clouds. On Yom Kippur we generate the cloud that will ultimately envelop us on Sukkos.

What is the significance of a cloud? And why, of all metaphors, is a cloud employed to describe G-d's manner of revealing Himself to us?

In English, when we speak of something hidden, we will say that the matter is clouded. In theological terms, a cloud is an expression of a force that is unknowable and mysterious.

Touching the Unknowable

Both Yom Kippur and Sukkos enable us to "touch" the unknowable. The difference is that the cloud created on Yom Kippur was seen by the High Priest exclusively who alone entered into that inner precinct of the Temple. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, not even an angel was allowed to be present when the High Priest would offer that incense.

Every one of us has an inner precinct that is able to feel and touch the unfathomable essence of G-d, but only in the most hidden recesses of our soul.

During the Holiday of Sukkos, however, the mystery of G-d's hidden-ness and other-ness leaves the Holy of Holies and envelops every Jew who dwells in a Sukkah during this Festival. What Yom Kippur is for the High Priest for the few moments he would spend in the Holy of Holies becomes the "normal" residence for every Jew for the

duration of an entire week, day and night—an entire expanse of time. Dwelling in a Sukkah should therefore engender both incredible joy and awe for the unparalleled privilege of sitting in such close proximity to G-d's transcendent presence.

Two Enveloping Experiences

Another parallel can be drawn between Yom Kippur and Sukkos:

In all of Jewish life there are just two Mitzvot that involve the totality of the Jew: The Mitzvah of dwelling in a Sukkah and the Mitzvah of immersion in a Mikveh.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, our Sages say is comparable to a Mikveh. Citing the Biblical verse: “G-d is Israel's Mikveh” our Sages in the Mishnah explain that the word Mikveh (that is literally translated as “hope”) can also be translated as a Mikveh, a body of water that totally envelops the person and purifies him or her. When a person approaches G-d on Yom Kippur with profound feelings of repentance and a sincere desire to return to Him and His commandments, G-d envelops that person and thereby cleanses him or her.

The other Mitzvah that involves and envelops the totality of the person is, of course, the Sukkah.

But there are two salient differences between the two forms of envelopment:

The first difference is that a body of water is not man's natural state. Immersion in a Mikveh is therefore, of necessity, of but a short duration. The Sukkah, by contrast, is quite a natural setting and is eminently habitable for long periods of time, in which one can breath and live normally (unless it is during the October surprise in Buffalo...).

The second difference is that although the Mikveh envelops the entire body, one cannot immerse himself or herself in a Mikveh with their clothing on. When we immerse in a Mikveh we obviously do not take our food and drink, table and cutlery with us in the water. A Sukkah, by design, requires that we enter it fully clothed and equipped to have a hearty Festival feast.

Holy and Normal

These two differences are reflective of a qualitative shift in the manner of G-d envelops us during Sukkos as contrasted with Yom Kippur.

During Yom Kippur we enter into the Holy of Holies, a normally forbidden area; an area we must not enter at all other times of the year. Yom Kippur transports us to a

different world. We cease to be normal humans and we adopt the identity of angels. Into that world we cannot take our clothing, i.e., our external identities and possessions, just the innermost aspects of who we are. The hope is that it will leave an indelible mark on us as so that even after Yom Kippur we will still feel the effects of that total immersion.

By contrast on Sukkos, we do not have to leave our own world to a foreign and more celestial world. We just change the venue of our world; from our solid structured homes to the frail Sukkah. This means that Sukkos affords us the ability to be totally enveloped in that G-dly aura even as we remain steadfastly connected to the normal world outside of the Holy of Holies. And as such, we enter the Sukkah even with our boots.

To be totally encompassed by a Mitzvah during Sukkos an additional dimension to the atonement process of Yom Kippur is necessary.

No Compartmentalization

Many well intentioned individuals suffer spiritual and moral relapses partly because they compartmentalize their Jewish life. Part of them might be comfortable in the safe haven of the synagogue, but they leave and live the rest of their life in a different location. This dichotomous existence leaves us

vulnerable to the many pressures of life that conflict with our Jewish responsibilities.

By entering into the Sukkah right after Yom Kippur we eliminate that pitfall because the totality of the Jew is in the right place. It is not just our mind that understands Judaism. It is not just our heart that is passionate about G-d and Jewish practice. Every fiber of our being is included in and enveloped by the heavenly cloud and the G-dly embrace.

The Mikveh and Sukkah Synthesis

The Messianic Age has been compared to both a Sukkah as well as a Mikveh. In our prayers we say: "Spread upon us the Sukkah of Your peace." And the prophet Isaiah describes the future Messianic Age as one in which we will be submerged in the waters of Divine knowledge.

In the present limited context of exile, we can either be in a Mikveh or in a Sukkah. We cannot be in both of them simultaneously. A Mikveh, as stated above, requires removal of our garments, while a Sukkah requires that we are dressed.

Removal of garments is also a metaphor for total surrender and divestment of our way of thinking and feeling. A prophet before prophesying would strip of his garments as

a way of becoming receptive to the Divine message. Total nullification of one's ego and selfhood is necessary in a Mikveh as a prelude for a new birth that follows. A Mikveh has often been likened to the amniotic fluid in which a fetus swims, as a prelude to becoming something.

The Sukkah, by contrast, is where we are commanded to enjoy our meals fully clothed. This includes all senses of the word "clothed." Our individual personalities are intact and are even highlighted. True, in the Sukkah we are all united as one, but it is not at the expense of our own individual identities. Rather it is a sense that the other's identity does not conflict with my own. A Sukkah is a source of peace and unity.

However, within the constraints of life we cannot be in the Mikveh and Sukkah at the same time. In the Messianic Age, we will be able to experience both total immersion and nullification even as we retain our individual character. This will be possible because in the Messianic Age, we will be exposed to the infinite light of G-d in relation to which there are no limits. Infinite G-dly energy will fit comfortably within the parameters of the finite physical world.

The Sukkah that we dwell in today and the Mikveh that we immerse ourselves in presently are thus portents of the future Messianic Age at which time all the dichotomies will

disappear. We will then enjoy both the benefit of experiencing what Maimonides describes as the “waters of pure knowledge,” even as we—and our clothing, literally and figuratively—are all entered into the Divine embrace.

ESSAY THREE

THE SEASON OF OUR REJOICING

Sukkos is the primary Festival of joy.

**True joy is experienced only when there is a spiritual
component to it.**

**Any other form of happiness is more like a drug that
provides one with a fleeting sense of satisfaction.**

**True joy is defined by the degree to which our inner-G-dly-
self is allowed to surface.**

**When the soul gets a dose of spiritual pleasure, the soul is
energized and revels in its newly discovered spiritual
energy. That energy is then translated into a profound
sense of joy and satisfaction.**

This is what we experience during Sukkos.

ESSAY THREE

THE SEASON OF OUR REJOICING

Will the Most Joyous Holiday Please Stand Out!

Sukkos is one of the three joyous pilgrimage Holidays along with Passover and *Shavuos*. Yet Sukkos is the only one of these Biblical Holidays that is designated as “*Zman Simchateinu*—the Season of our Rejoicing.”

On the face of it, one would have argued for Passover as the season of rejoicing since it was when we were granted freedom. Some would have argued that *Shavuos*, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, is truly the most joyous holiday since it is when we really became a free nation, in the spiritual sense of the word.

Yet, Sukkos, the festival that commemorates the sojourn of the Jewish nation in the desert for forty years, is the one Holiday that is so designated. What is it about Sukkos that makes it more joyous than any other Biblical Holiday?

On the surface the explanation is that Sukkos is also an agricultural celebration. In the Torah it is called *Chag Ha'asif*—The Festival of Ingathering, at which time people in

Israel would bring all of that year's harvest into their homes.

And while this explanation is a valid one, there is still a need to understand what is the relationship between the physical cause of celebration—the ingathering of the produce—with the spiritual nature of the Holiday.

Ingathering and Dwelling

To understand the connection between the “ingathering” aspect of Sukkos and the dwelling in the Sukkah, and to also understand why it is the Season of Rejoicing, there is a need to answer another basic question:

Why do we observe the commemoration of the Jewish people dwelling in booths at this particular time? Unlike Passover and *Shavuot* that are anniversaries of the pivotal events of the Exodus and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Festival of Sukkos is not an anniversary.

The Holiday Continuum

The key to answering all of these questions is to view Sukkos in the context of the preceding Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During these Days of Awe, the Jewish people generate all of their “spiritual produce.” It is

during the Festival of Sukkos that we gather in this spiritual yield into our lives.

The covering of the Sukkah—known in Hebrew as *Schach*—is symbolic of the Divine energies that envelop us. However, these Divine energies were around before; we just did not have the ability to feel their effects until the Ingathering Holiday of Sukkos.

We can now appreciate the reason for the intense joy on this Festival. True joy is experienced only when there is a spiritual component to it. Any other form of happiness is more like a drug that provides one with a fleeting sense of satisfaction.

In truth, the difference between joy that is generated by a physical cause is not only fleeting, it is also not real even when it is experienced.

Genuine Joy

True joy is defined by the degree to which our inner-G-dly-self is allowed to surface. When we enjoy something material, the soul—because of its closeness to the body—is led to believe that it has just been given something it craves. In a way, when we experience a purely material pleasure, we are teasing the soul. After a few moments, when the soul realizes that the pleasure was not of a

spiritual nature, the soul feels a let-down and the fleeting sensation of pleasure turns into a downer. We then need a new and stronger dose of material pleasure to induce the same feeling.

However, when the soul gets a dose of spiritual pleasure, the soul is energized and revels in its newly discovered spiritual energy. That energy is then translated into a profound sense of joy and satisfaction.

There is, however, one “drawback” when it comes to spiritual joy. A person, who is in possession of a very materialistic and assertive body, will not feel the soul’s sense of joy. And even a more refined individual will have to make an effort to tap into and appreciate the soul’s euphoria.

When do we feel the joy in the most real and palpable way? It is when the material and spiritual go hand in hand.

Spiritual and Physical in Tandem

This is precisely what Sukkos is all about. It is when the spiritual energies that we’ve generated in mega doses during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur parallels the intense joy and satisfaction at having gathered in all of our material goods. Here the body and soul experience harmoniously the maximum sense of happiness.

Sukkos is thus understandably the ultimate Season of Rejoicing. And this perhaps is also alluded to in the possessive and plural usage—the Season of **our** rejoicing—not just the “season of rejoicing.” It is the possessive and complementary nature of the rejoicing of both our body and our soul.

Moshiach=He shall Rejoice

This is also why the Messianic Age is noted for its intense sense of joy. Indeed, the word Moshiach in Hebrew rearranged forms the word *yismach*-he shall rejoice, or *yisamach*-he will bring joy to others.

To explain:

The Messianic Age is when we will experience the greatest and unprecedented spiritual energy. However, what makes that age truly extraordinary in terms of the joy is that the spiritual energy felt by the soul will coincide with the incredible physical joy that we will experience as well. The barriers and boundaries between the physical and spiritual will be no more.

One of the names associated with Moshiach is *peretz*, *ben partzi*, or *haporets*, all of which point to Moshiach's power to break through barriers. Chief among the barriers is the barrier between body and soul. The body and physical

existence will no longer pose any barrier to the soul and the spiritual.

Moreover, in the Messianic Age we will feel the complementary nature of these two dimensions of joy, guaranteeing us a perpetual *Zman Simchateinu*-Season of Our Rejoicing.

ESSAY FOUR

THE THREE NAMES OF SUKKOS

When we leave our comfortable homes and enter the fragile Sukkah that is unprotected from the elements, we demonstrate that the commitments we made on Yom Kippur were genuine and enduring.

When the Jew goes against the natural order of “ingathering” and goes out with his food and other needs into the Sukkah, this is the sign that our love for G-d is complete, and that our prayers to G-d on Yom Kippur were sincere and emanated from the depths of our heart and soul.

ESSAY FOUR

THE THREE NAMES OF SUKKOS

Sukkos, Ingathering and Rejoicing

Sukkos is known by three different names in the Torah and in our liturgy. Sukkos is the name it was given because of the central Mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah during this Festival.

The Holiday is also known in the Torah by the name *Chag Ha'asif*, the Festival of Ingathering, because it was the season that all the crops that were left outside during the summer would be gathered and brought into the house.

In our liturgy, Sukkos is referred to as *Zman Simchateinu*, the Season of Our Rejoicing. This reason for this name is self-evident; it is the time for celebration and joy. And though all the Festivals are Festivals of Joy, nevertheless only Sukkos is designated as the Season of our Rejoicing.

When we reflect, even superficially, on these three names, we come to the conclusion that they are problematic and contradictory.

The Sukkah is the structure that reminds of the time we were housed by G-d in the desert after our Exodus from Egypt.

Joy for a “half-baked” measure?

At first glance, one could ask a rather obvious question. Imagine a person who was unjustly taken away from his home and thrown into a slave-labor camp. The liberator, who promises to take him back home, comes through for the person, but only half way. He is taken out of bondage, but is not allowed to go home.

Furthermore, the individual is taken to a desert, but provided for with huts. While the liberated slave ought to be grateful for being liberated, it is hard to imagine that he would be ecstatic and would want to commemorate that expression of gratitude by dwelling in a similar hut every year for posterity.

Why then is **Sukkos** designated as the Season of our Rejoicing?

If anything, Passover, when they were actually taken out of Egyptian bondage, was certainly a significant event for which erstwhile slaves would be eternally grateful. While they were not yet back home, the mere sense of freedom is exhilarating.

The Festival of *Shavuot*, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, is also a major reason for celebration and joy. It was our wedding day with G-d. It was the day about which G-d says that He had chosen us and appointed us as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” It is the day in which we experienced the most sublime spiritual feelings; it is certainly a day for rejoicing.

But to designate the Festival of Sukkos as the most joyous of the Holidays because G-d sheltered us in huts is hard to comprehend. While we should be grateful for every kindness, it hardly warrants the dramatic and unparalleled display of joy that is required on Sukkos.

The designation of Sukkos as the Festival of Ingathering and the theme of the Sukkah also seem to be diametrically opposite themes. Ingathering involves bringing things into one's home, whereas the Sukkah involves going out of our homes into the temporary dwellings of the Sukkah.

The Wedding Canopy

Upon deeper reflection, all three names are complementary.

The joy of the Holiday of Sukkos is the ultimate joy because it is related to sitting in G-d's home, enveloped by Him.

During Yom Kippur we reconciled with G-d after our “marriage” to Him was shattered by our worshipping of the golden calf. Moses finally procured G-d’s consent to forgive us and give us a second set of tablets in place of the ones that were shattered by Moses.

If *Shavuot*, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, is a time for extreme joy, then Yom Kippur, when we reconciled with G-d and cemented our relationship with Him, the joy of reconciliation is indescribable. And this is what the Sukkah represents. It is the *chupah*, the wedding canopy. It is symbolic of G-d’s embrace of us, and the showering of His love on us.

But what does this have to do with the booths in which the Jews dwelt when they were in the desert?

The ultimate test and expression of G-d’s love for us was not when He saved us from Egyptian slavery and persecution. At that point, if He did not save us we would have been lost for all eternity. When G-d provided us with our basic needs after we were saved, and there was then no emergency; that was a sign of the depth of G-d’s love for us.

Moreover, G-d’s providing us with booths in the desert was at a time when we were in transit. It was a temporary situation; it was not so crucial to take care of us as much as it would become necessary when we finally reach our

destination. That was the sign that G-d's love is all pervasive.

The love that He showed us in the desert was consistent and commensurate with the giving of the second tablets on Yom Kippur. It was an expression of profound love.

Sign of Our Love for G-d

The same is true from our perspective. When we leave our comfortable homes and enter the fragile Sukkah that is unprotected from the elements, we demonstrate that the commitments we made on Yom Kippur were genuine and enduring.

There is added poignancy to our act of leaving the Sukkah considering the fact that this is precisely the time when we gather everything into our homes. The winter season is approaching and it is natural to withdraw from the outside world into the comfort and security of our homes. At this time we gather our food from the outside and bring it in our homes with us.

And precisely then, the Jew goes against the natural order of "ingathering" and goes **out** with his food and other needs that are usually reserved for the home. This is the sign that our love for G-d is complete, and that our prayers

to G-d on Yom Kippur were sincere and emanated from the depths of our heart and soul.

Messianic Peace, Ingathering of the Exiles and Unadulterated Joy

All three names of the Festival are related to the future Redemption.

Our liturgy, based on prophetic verses, speaks of the Sukkah as a symbol of peace, and that G-d will spread His Sukkah over us in the Messianic Age. It symbolizes ultimate peace because it represents the expression of total love between G-d and us, which leads to total peace.

The name the “Festival of Ingathering” alludes to the ingathering of the exiles that will occur. As an expression of G-d’s love for us, He will return the Jews who were alienated and lost. He does not give up on anyone, and no Jew will be left behind.

The Season of our Rejoicing alludes to the Messianic Age because then, and only then, will we experience unadulterated joy, as the Psalmist says: “**Then** our mouths will be filled with laughter.”

Dwelling in a Sukkah, rejoicing and gathering in all the inspiration of Yom Kippur this Festival of Sukkos, will

certainly be the catalyst for the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE

DETACHMENT

The requirement of using detached branches to cover the Sukkah is to repudiate the pantheistic conception that equates G-d with nature.

While G-d can be found in nature, and manifests Himself within it, G-d is not synonymous with nature. He created it and He transcends it.

ESSAY FIVE

DETACHMENT

Payback for Hospitality

According to the Midrash, the Mitzvah of Sukkah was given to the Jewish people as a reward for their Patriarch Abraham's incredible hospitality. The Midrash thus states that G-d said to Abraham:

“You said [to your guests] ‘And recline under the tree,’ I will therefore give them, [your descendants, the Jewish People] the Mitzvah of Sukkah.”

On the surface, the connection between Abraham's offer to his guests and the reward of Sukkah is that Abraham's hospitality was not restricted to feeding them, but he also provided them with shelter from the scorching sun of the desert. In return, G-d gave the Jewish people protection in the desert that they lived in for forty years, shielding them from the desert sun. And, similarly, the Sukkah that we dwell in today is our way of reminding ourselves of the protection we receive from G-d, who is our Sukkah.

Was Abraham's Sukkah Kosher?

Upon deeper reflection, one can raise a question about the connection between Abraham's tree and the Sukkah that we dwell in during the Festival of Sukkos.

One of the requirements of a Sukkah is that it is covered with branches. A second requirement is that the branches **not** be attached to the ground. In fact, if one had built a Sukkah under the branches of a tree, the entire Sukkah may be invalid.

Isn't it odd then that the very first "Sukkah"—Abraham's tree— did not conform to the rule that a Sukkah must not be covered with branches that are attached to the ground?

Vegetation, Yes; Attached Vegetation, No!

To answer this question it is helpful to analyze the rule that demands the use of vegetation for the covering of the Sukkah, yet proscribes the use of vegetation that is attached to the ground.

Presumably, the use of branches that have not been altered by human efforts symbolize the pristine Divine dimension of life. Wouldn't it be more fitting then to sit in the shade of the branches of a tree in its original and natural state rather than under the cut off branches and leaves?

One answer to this question is that dwelling in a Sukkah is intended to teach us that there is a Higher force that provides us with all of our needs. To symbolize G-d's protective power, we cover our temporary homes with branches which, as stated, are unaffected by human hands. They represent the pristine Divine force that is inherent within nature.

Not Mother Earth!

Were the branches to still be attached to the ground, however, we might have mistakenly imagined that the source of our protection ultimately comes from nature – Mother Earth – itself.

In other words, the requirement of using detached branches is to repudiate the pantheistic conception that equates G-d with nature. While G-d can be found in nature, and manifests Himself within it, G-d is **not** synonymous with nature. He created it and He transcends it.

However, this analysis strengthens our question. Why was the “Sukkah” that Abraham made— and is the model for all future *Sukkos*—attached to the ground?

Pre and Post Sinai Dynamics

It may be suggested that the difference between Abraham's "Sukkah" and ours lies in the different objective of those who lived before the revelation at Sinai and those who came later.

Before Sinai, the objective of a Mitzvah was to use it to connect to the Divine force that manifests itself **within** the parameters of the world. Prior to Sinai the world was not ready for the revelation of the G-dly force that transcends the world. That realization; that there is a G-d that utterly transcends nature and existence, would first come at Sinai.

Thus, when Abraham built his "Sukkah" he tried to impress upon his pagan guests that there was a unified force that pervades all of nature that is responsible for our protection and well-being. This did not suggest, G-d forbid, that his notion of G-d was pantheistic, but that the G-d who created the universe can be reached and perceived from within the universe that He animates.

In and Above Nature

Once he laid the foundations for the existence of a deity that was present within nature, the Jewish people were ready for the next level of understanding, that G-d utterly

transcended the world of nature and the nature of the world.

Our Sukkah thus must have its covering of branches totally detached from its natural source of life—its roots—that symbolize that the essence of our G-dly protection derives from a force that transcends nature, even as it manifests itself within it.

Were the branches still attached to the ground in its most natural state it might have been misconstrued that we are paying homage to a G-d who is restricted to His manifestation within nature. Detached branches, which no longer exist through their natural source, alerts us to a trans-natural Divinity.

Secret of Survival

And in doing so it conveys an additional message.

The Sukkah is a reminder of the way the Jewish people have survived throughout their long and arduous history. The Jewish people are not subject to the natural order. If we had followed the rules of nature we would have become extinct ages ago. Our existence, sustenance and survival derives from a supernatural force—from a transcendent G-d who is not bound by the laws of nature.

Perpetual Transcendence

The future Redemption that will be ushered in imminently by Moshiach has been characterized as a monumental and all-encompassing Sukkah.

One of the reasons for this analogy is that while we can be aware of G-d's transcendent nature even now, it is an awareness that comes only sporadically, such as during the Festival of *Sukkos*. For the lesson of the Sukkah to pervade **every** day of our lives and **every** facet of our existence, we must wait for the Messianic Age at which time, we will be perpetually be exposed to G-d's true transcendent nature.

Moreover, this aspect of G-d will be seen by all as the source of our very existence.

The fact that we are only exposed to the transcendent aspect of G-d on special occasions and it may not be universally appreciated is evidence that we have not really been exposed to the ultimate transcendent level. For if that were to happen, there can be no place or time or personality that is not permeated with that awareness. That will occur when we all perpetually dwell in the ultimate Sukkah of transcendence.

ESSAY SIX

OUTSIDE IN

Whatever we experience through the sounding of Shofar on Rosh Hashanah manifests itself during the days of Sukkos.

On Rosh Hashanah we ask G-d to be our King and show us His delight in maintaining an intimate relationship with us.

During Yom Kippur we remove any and all impediments to our relationship with Him.

G-d responds enthusiastically by telling us to enter into His Sukkah; to allow Him to envelop us and take us into His embrace.

ESSAY SIX

OUTSIDE IN

Why Sukkos in the Fall?

Sukkos is the Festival during which we are commanded to dwell in a temporary dwelling place called a Sukkah for seven days. This, the Torah tells us, is to let us know that G-d provided the Jewish nation with Sukkos when they were liberated from Egypt.

What is the definition of the historical Sukkos on which the modern day Sukkah is modeled?

The Talmud explains that this refers either to the booths that they built for shelter in the desert, or to the “clouds of glory” that miraculously surrounded the Jewish camp in the desert and protected them from the elements and enemies.

Commentators ask: why we don’t celebrate Sukkos on or right after Passover. It was, after all, at that time of year when the Jews actually began to dwell in Sukkos?

Counterintuitive

One answer is that Passover occurs in the mild spring season. At that time it is most natural for people to leave their homes and take up residence outdoors, in tents or huts. If we were to observe Sukkos in the spring, no one would recognize that dwelling in the Sukkah was to commemorate G-d's kindness in the desert, but rather because of convenience.

By scheduling Sukkos in the fall—at the commencement of the cold and rainy season, which is counterintuitive—when most people leave the outdoor accommodations to return to their homes, it demonstrates how we acknowledges G-d's kindness and miracles.

Return of the Protective Clouds

Another reason offered is based on the teaching that when the Jews worshipped the Golden Calf, the protective clouds that surrounded them disappeared. They did not reappear until G-d forgave them on the first Yom Kippur-Day of Atonement. However, the process of forgiveness was not complete until they built the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert, which expressed the sentiment that G-d was willing to once more dwell in their midst.

Thus it was a few days after Yom Kippur—the time it took for the contributions to the Mishkan be made and for it to be built—before the clouds returned. This coincides with the beginning of the Holiday of Sukkos.

Sukkos: the Culmination of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

A third explanation — based on Chassidic sources — informs us that Sukkos follows immediately after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because it is actually the culmination of the process of these holidays.

In the book of Psalms we read: “Sound the Shofar on the hidden day, on the day of our festival.” Commentaries explain that the “hidden day” refers to Rosh Hashanah, the only holiday that occurs on the occasion of the new, but still hidden, moon. Commentaries further note that the words “on the day of our festival” refer to Sukkos. This verse is therefore telling us that whatever we experience through the sounding of Shofar on Rosh Hashanah manifests itself during the days of Sukkos.

To explain: Rosh Hashanah is when we ask G-d to be our King. By sounding the Shofar we coronate Him as our Monarch. To be sure, without Rosh Hashanah, G-d would still continue to rule, but it would be without any feeling or pleasure. Rosh Hashanah is thus when we petition G-d

to show us His love and His delight in maintaining an intimate relationship with us.

Yom Kippur is a natural continuation of Rosh Hashanah. It is when we ask G-d for forgiveness; when we remove any and all impediments to our relationship with Him. When Yom Kippur is over, we immediately proceed to demonstrate our zeal and excitement to be close to G-d, by busying ourselves with the building of a Sukkah, preparing the Lulav and Esrog etc.

At this point—after pleading with G-d to be our King and have this intimate relationship with us (Rosh Hashanah) and after removing all obstacles (Yom Kippur), and by translating our commitment in action (the days before Sukkos), G-d responds enthusiastically by telling us to enter into His Sukkah, i.e., to allow Him to envelop us and take us into His embrace. Indeed, the Sukkah, as the only Mitzvah that one enters into totally, is expressive of G-d's total and unqualified acceptance of us.

Intertwined

Upon deeper reflection all three explanations are interconnected. When a person is in love with someone they will live with them even if it means that they have to leave their comfortable home. The love that we cultivate throughout the month of Tishrei is what makes us feel

comfortable even in the dreary weather that often accompanies the Holiday of Sukkos. It gets us to do the unconventional and to feel joy living in the Sukkah at precisely the time that most “normal” people move inside.

Likewise, when the Jewish people demonstrated to which degree they wanted G-d to dwell in their midst by contributing to the construction of the Mishkan, it was an indication of their great love. Indeed, the love of a Ba'al Teshuvah, one who repents for past transgression is more intense than the love of a tzadik, one who has never sinned. Our Sages thus state that “in the place where a Ba'al Teshuvah stands, a perfect tzadik is incapable of standing.” And this Teshuvah that is motivated by the unprecedented passion for G-d engendered by the sin is what transforms the sins of the penitent to a virtue.

Stepping Out of Bounds

When one is so in love it translates in doing things that are out of the bounds of propriety and normalcy. As our Sages state regarding the love of our Patriarch Abraham, “love causes stepping over the bounds.” It is no wonder that precisely at this time of intense love that we are more than willing to leave the comfort of our homes and spend the week in a flimsy Sukkah.

This approach can explain the custom of many Chassidic leaders and their followers who would eat in the Sukkah even when Jewish law exempts them such as when it rains. Jewish law clearly exempts one who is distressed by the Sukkah, why then would they insist on remaining there?

In light of the above it makes sense. The Sukkah is the hut we go into with joy because of our love for G-d regardless of the lack of comfort. Indeed, not eating in the Sukkah is a greater pain and cause of distress to someone in love than the rain.

Lovesick

There are many reasons why we pray for the coming of Moshiach. From material benefits that will come our way to the introduction of true security and peace for our entire nation and indeed for the entire world.

However, the ultimate reason is for us to dwell together in the “Sukkah of Peace” which is a metaphor for the heightened awareness of and closeness with G-d. As long as we are in exile, we cannot reach the highest level of G-dly awareness and the love that it engenders. We are therefore lovesick for G-d, waiting impatiently for Him to take us into His embrace.

How do we express that anticipation and love?

One way is by dwelling in a Sukkah because of the love for G-d that we generated during the preceding days and weeks. It expresses the reality that our anticipation for Moshiach is primarily based on the fact that no matter how hard we try we cannot now get into the ultimate Divine Sukkah where we will experience unfiltered and unfettered G-dly energy. By dwelling in the Sukkah now despite the lack of comfort it may entail, we demonstrate how much we are in love with G-d and how hard we try to be in G-d's Sukkah and that we will not be satisfied until Moshiach takes us out of exile and brings into G-d's rebuilt Sanctuary.

ESSAY SEVEN

SUKKOS: THE THREE VARIETIES

The Sukkah that has three complete walls, but is open on one side—represents the individual who has a solid base—much like the letter *chaf* that has a bottom line that gives the letter support—but is nevertheless open to all the alien and threatening influences from the outside.

This individual, while always struggling with temptation and evil, has the inner strength—and utilizes it—to remain morally strong.

This describes the personality type referred to in the Chassidic classic, the Tanya, as the *Benoni*, who is exposed to all of the threatening influences but is capable of mustering the requisite energy to resist the temptation.

ESSAY SEVEN

SUKKOS: THE THREE VARIETIES

A Three Letter Word

The word Sukkah in Hebrew consists of three letters: A *samach*, *chaf* and a *hei*. It has been pointed out that these three letters reflect the three types of Sukkos.

Biblical law—as was passed down orally from Sinai through Moses to subsequent generations—requires that the Sukkah be made of, at least, two complete walls, and a third wall, the width of a handbreadth. This shape resembles the letter ה *hei*, which has one horizontal line on the top that is connected to a vertical line on the right, and a small vertical line on the left that is detached from the top.

Rabbinical law requires that we make the Sukkah of, at least, three complete walls. This shape resembles the letter ח *chaf* that has three lines: one horizontal line on top, one on the bottom and one vertical line that connects the two horizontal lines on the right.

Jewish tradition encourages making a Sukkah of four complete walls. And although, a Sukkah with three walls is perfectly Kosher, many conscientious individuals seek to have four walls. This reflects the shape of the first letter of the word Sukkah, the *O samach*, which is closed on all sides.

There is a deeper understanding to the three letters and configurations of the Sukkah.

Escape Hatch Sukkah

According to the Talmud, the letter *hei*, which is open on the bottom (like the letter *chet*) also has an opening on the top. This signifies the person who has fallen morally and spiritually, but through Teshuvah, sincere repentance and return to G-d, find a way to escape through a little opening on the top.

Hence the basic structure of the Sukkah, the one that has two complete walls and a portion of a third wall represents the Jew whose "Sukkah (read: structure that defines the Jew) is barely enough to keep him or her from falling to the nethermost levels of spiritual existence.

Stable but Vulnerable Sukkah

The more stable Sukkah—the one that has three complete walls, but is open on one side—represents the individual who has a solid base—much like the letter *chaf* that has a bottom line that gives the letter support—but is nevertheless open to all the alien and threatening influences from the outside. This individual, while always struggling with temptation and evil, has the inner strength—and utilizes it—to remain morally strong.

This describes the personality type referred to in the Chassidic classic, the Tanya, as the *Benoni*, the intermediate person; the one who is part saint and part sinner. They are regarded as a sinner because they are exposed to all of the threatening influences and possess the same desires as the *hei* personality, but are capable of mustering the requisite energy to resist the temptation.

The Righteous Sukkah

The Sukkah that has all four walls intact can be said to represent the Tzadik, the righteous person whose existence is completely insulated and protected from any external threats; a person who has risen to the greatest spiritual heights.

Not only does the “four walled” personality not succumb to the negative influences from the outside, he or she is impervious to all of the external threats. They do not even harbor the slightest desire to leave the Divinely protected environment of the Sukkah.

All Sukkos are Special

And while there is an advantage to this exalted *samach*-Sukkah-personality, there is an obvious advantage to the *chaf*-Sukkah-personality, who is constantly struggling with evil and succeeds in suppressing it.

And while there is an advantage to the former two levels—the common denominator of which is that they are not affected by evil—the third and apparently lowest category, the *hei*-Sukkah-personality is, in one important sense, superior to the others. In the words of the Talmud: “Where a Ba’al Teshuvah (penitent) stands, completely righteous people cannot stand.”

The lesson of the Sukkah—which comprises all three letters—thus is that in order for our Sukkah to be complete, it must incorporate all three levels of spirituality, for they complement each other.

The Three Sukkos of the Future

With the above analysis of the three modes of Sukkos we can explain why the Sukkah is employed in the Torah as a metaphor for the Messianic Age. The Sukkah exemplifies the total unity of all classes within the Jewish people.

Moreover, in the Messianic Age, we will see how each one of the three classes mentioned above contributed to the creation of a new world. The new world will be one of sublime and unadulterated spirituality—the world of the *samach*; a world that is completely holy, a taste of which the tzadik experiences even now.

However it is the struggle of the average person and the penitent throughout the ages that generates the spiritual energy that will ultimately bring about the future Redemption. In the words of Maimonides: “The Jewish people were promised that they will do teshuvah and they will be immediately redeemed.”

Moreover, not only does the Ba'al Teshuvah serve as the catalyst to bring Moshiach, it is the ultimate goal of Moshiach to usher in an age when—as the Ba'al Teshuvah who transforms his past evil ways into good—evil will ultimately be transformed into good.

Indeed, the Zohar states that Moshiach's accomplishment is that he will introduce the ideal of Teshuvah to the tzadik as well. The unique energy that

only a penitent sinner can generate today will become the standard for everyone in the future Age of Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHT

SEEING, HEARING, SMELLING, TOUCHING AND EATING G-DLY ENERGY

Judaism is simultaneously the least demanding and the most demanding religion.

It is the least demanding because even one Mitzvah lasts a lifetime.

Yet, Judaism paradoxically demands that we never limit ourselves. It demands of us to do everything with our “everything.”

This paradox is represented by the Sukkah.

ESSAY EIGHT

SEEING, HEARING, SMELLING, TOUCHING AND EATING G-DLY ENERGY

Anything and Everything

It has been noted that Judaism is simultaneously the least demanding and the most demanding religion. It is the least demanding because whatever good we do is said to have cosmic and infinite value. Even one Mitzvah lasts a lifetime and is therefore cherished. And where can we find a person who did not perform even one Mitzvah in his or her lifetime?

Yet, Judaism paradoxically demands that we never limit ourselves. It not only wants us to do everything, it also wants us to give our “everything” to all that we do. It is not enough to do a Mitzvah, or, for that matter, all of the Mitzvot; we must apply every sense and power we have to that Mitzvah.

Nowhere is this paradox more pronounced than in the Holiday of Sukkos and its primary Mitzvah: dwelling in a Sukkah.

Light and Heavy

On the one hand, the Talmud describes the Mitzvah of Sukkah to be a “light” or easy Mitzvah. It is considered an extremely easy Mitzvah to fulfill because one can construct a Sukkah with incurring virtually no expenses.

On the other hand, it is the only Mitzvah that encompasses all of our bodies. No part of us is left out of the Sukkah; even our clothing. It is a Mitzvah that hallows even the most minimal of efforts even as it demands the maximum; involving the totality of our being and “giving-it-all-we-have.”

Another reflection of the all encompassing nature of Sukkos is the way this Holiday uniquely involves all of our senses.

The Visual Sukkah

First, the visual sense is alluded to in the very word Sukkah that is etymologically connected to the word socheh, which means to see. To dwell in the Sukkah affords us the opportunity to see G-d's providence. This vision aspect of the Mitzvah is the basis for the law that we not place the covering of the Sukkah known as “*schach*” higher than 20 cubits, for the eye will not easily see it. We must see the protective covering of the Sukkah because it reminds us of

G-d's protection of us in the past when we sojourned in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt, and invokes His protection over us in the present.

The Audio Sukkah

The auditory sense is also represented on this Holiday. The word Sukkah is also etymologically connected to the word *hasket*, which means listen. Indeed the sitting in the Sukkah exposes us to all the sounds of the outside world that are blocked out of our consciousness when we celebrate other holidays in our homes. We can also hear the rustling of the branches of the Sukkah in the autumn wind. In addition, we can hear the rustling of the Lulav (palm) leaves when we take it and shake it, as is required during this Holiday.

Hearing also has the connotation of understanding. The word Shema, which we translate as "Hear" is also interpreted to mean "understand." And with regard to Sukkos the Torah indeed states that the reason we must dwell in Sukkos is so that "the future generations shall **know** that I settled the Children of Israel in booths." There is an emphasis on "knowing" that comes through hearing and understanding.

The Touchy Feely Sukkah

The sense of touch applies to the Mitzvah of shaking the Lulav. The Torah expresses itself concerning this Mitzvah with the words: “And you shall take... the fruit of a beautiful tree, leaves of date palms etc.” In other words the Mitzvah is to hold the “four species” in our hands. There is to be nothing interfering with our hand and the Lulav. We must touch the Lulav and Esrog.

A case can even be made that the word Sukkah is etymologically related to the word “sach,” which means to anoint, or to cover—the sense of touch.

The Culinary Sukkah

The sense of taste is also prominently experienced in the Sukkah. The preeminent Mitzvah of the Sukkos Holiday is to eat our meal the first two nights in the Sukkah. We are further enjoined not to eat any substantial meal out of the Sukkah for the entire Festival. And whereas all other Holidays have a more specialized menu (Rosh Hashanah: sweet and symbolic foods; Chanukah: latkes; Purim: Hamantashen; Passover: Matzah, bitter herbs etc.; *Shavuos*: Dairy foods), on Sukkos, the Mitzvah of eating in the Sukkah extends to and incorporates **all** food.

The Olfactory Sukkah

Which sense have we left out? Ah it is the sense of smell. However upon closer examination even this sense is ubiquitous during Sukkos. This Holiday, with its abundance of fragrant greens hovering over us, contributes its fair share of the olfactory side of Judaism as well.

Furthermore, the Midrash in its description of the Esrog's characteristics emphasizes its good fragrance. The same is said of the myrtle leaves that are bound to the Lulav.

Fragrance is said to be the only sense that was not defiled by Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. While they were tempted by its sight and enticed by the cunning words of the serpent, touched the tree and ate of its fruit, nowhere does the Torah mention that they were seduced by its captivating aroma.

It is therefore fascinating to note that according to one opinion in the Midrash, the forbidden fruit was actually an Esrog. By us taking the aromatic fruit we counter the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve and thereby bring an end to the effects of that sin: physical and spiritual death.

Moshiach, is therefore described in the Book of Isaiah as one who will sense justice with his acute sense of smell. It is the one sense that was not tainted. And while, according to the great Kabbalist the Arizal, all souls are said to be part and sparks of Adam's soul, Moshiach soul is said

possess a soul that was not included in Adam's soul and thus free from the deleterious effects of his sin. This is all expressed in the sense of smell that is prominently on display during Sukkos.

Sukkos Anatomy

This all-encompassing nature of the Holiday of Sukkos is also the underlying theme of the Mitzvah to take the Four Kinds (Lulav-Palm leaves; Esrog-Citron; Hadasim-myrtle; Aravot-willows), recite a blessing over them, hold them together and shake them in all six directions.

The four species are said to represent four disparate parts of our anatomy: our spine (Lulav), heart (Esrog), eyes (Hadasim) and the mouth (Aravot). This symbolizes the need to invest our backbone, or our tenacity in the observance of the Mitzvah. We also need to instill our Mitzvah with heart and emotion. We must also delve more deeply into the deeper layers of meaning, as the word eye in Hebrew also means to examine or probe. And finally, the Mitzvah needs our power of speech to: a) recite the blessing before the performance of the Mitzvah, b) to study the laws and deeper explanations of the Mitzvah that are found in Torah literature, c) we must use our power of speech to teach this Mitzvah and impart its message to others.

Unites All Classes

Alternatively, according to a well-known Midrash, these four kinds represent four classes of Jews: The leaned and pious (Esrog, which has a good taste the symbol of knowledge and a good fragrance, the symbol of good deeds); learned but not so pious (Lulav, that comes from a date tree that produces good tasting fruit but no fragrance); pious but not so learned (corresponds to the myrtle that has fragrance but no taste); not so pious and not so learned (represented by the willows that have neither taste or smell).

The object of the Mitzvah is to take all four kinds and hold them together. The Mitzvah is not complete until we combine all of these diverse categories into one. In addition to its message of Jewish unity, this can also be personalized in the sense that we all have aspects of all four personality types that we must involve in the performance of this Mitzvah.

Here again, we see the idea of marshalling all of our resources for the performance of the Mitzvah.

Symbol of Messianic Age

There is no wonder then that the symbol for the Messianic Age is the Sukkah.

The difference between the present period of *Galus*-exile and the imminent coming of Moshiach and the Redemption he will usher in is that exile, by definition, compromises our ability to be whole and to give “our all” to any effort. Redemption, by contrast, removes all distractions and facilitates the marshalling and unification of all our faculties and resources in the pursuit of a Mitzvah.

Let us hope and pray that we get a taste of the unification of our resources during the upcoming Sukkos Festival; a taste that will whet our appetite for the whole feast, the imminent coming of Moshiach!

ESSAY NINE

WHERE'S THE TABLE?

No nation's existence seemed to be more precarious than ours.

Yet, miraculously, no nation has enjoyed such G-dly protection and shelter.

We have this incredible power of resiliency that is unmatched by any other group. We have seen G-d's protective power in the most obvious and overt manner just as we have seen the fragility and precariousness of our situation more than any other nation.

The Jewish people are the ultimate Sukkah.

ESSAY NINE

WHERE'S THE TABLE?

The Fragility of Nature

The central Mitzvah of the upcoming festival of Sukkos is to dwell in a Sukkah- a temporary hut for seven days. This Mitzvah requires of us to move our meals, among other functions, into the Sukkah for one entire week.

The simple reason for this Mitzvah is mentioned in the Torah. It is our way of demonstrating how G-d, upon liberating us from Egyptian bondage, provided us with shelter as we sojourned through the desert for forty years.

In addition to the Biblical reason for this Mitzvah, Jewish classical writings also discovered other symbolic explanations.

One of the most popular is the one that compares the frail Sukkah to the temporary nature of life itself. By going out of the more permanent and comfortable structure of our homes, we impress upon ourselves the temporary nature of life in the physical world.

Upon closer examination these two reasons are very much connected. As important as it is for us to realize the precarious and temporary nature of life—it is no more than a flimsy temporary Sukkah—we must also appreciate the converse; that G-d watches over and protects us, just as He did for the Jews who left Egypt.

The Jewish People: The Ultimate Sukkah

Jewish history is a perfect reflection of these two themes. On the one hand, no nation has known more threats to its existence as did the Jewish people. No nation's existence seemed to be more precarious than ours. We have been subjected to more persecution, expulsions, blood libels, pogroms, massacres, religious oppression, and unfortunately not culminating with the Holocaust, than other nation on earth.

And yet, miraculously, no nation has enjoyed such G-dly protection and shelter. We have not only survived these efforts at destroying us; we have thrived. Jews have this incredible power of resiliency that is unmatched by any other group. We have seen G-d's protective power in the most obvious and overt manner just as we have seen the fragility and precariousness of our situation more than any other nation.

The Jewish people are the ultimate Sukkah.

The Dimensions of the Sukkah

With the foregoing analysis of the “two sides of the coin” inherent in the symbolism of the Sukkah we can shed some light on a dispute recorded in the Talmud regarding to the minimum size of a Sukkah:

According to the School of Shammai (the Sage made famous by his stern demeanor, and display of indignation at the convert who wanted to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot) a Sukkah must be large enough to contain the person and his table. The more lenient School of Hillel however disagrees and they permit a Sukkah that can house just the person’s head and most of his body, even if the table remains in the house.

What is the conceptual basis for their dispute?

The Dominant Theme of Sukkos

It may be suggested that the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel argue about the dominant theme of Sukkos.

According to the School of Shammai, the emphasis should be on the flimsy and precarious nature of the Sukkah, i.e., our existence. True, even though G-d protected us we

should not take that protection for granted. Instead we should always accentuate how without G-d's protection we are so vulnerable. Shammai, whose soul, the Kabbalists tell us, derives from G-d's attribute of *gevurah*/judgment, wants us to focus on our vulnerability and weaknesses lest we become complacent, and arrogant, and that, in turn, will allow the evil to consume us.

To even allow one's table to be outside of the Sukkah—even if the person is in the Sukkah—undermines the essence of why we dwell in a Sukkah. We dwell in a Sukkah to underscore our vulnerability. How then could we afford to have the table remain in the house outside of the protective covering of the Sukkah.

The School of Hillel, however, put the emphasis not on our vulnerability, but on how the Sukkah is a constant reminder of how we are always under G-d's protective covering. As long as **we** are in the Sukkah and are under the influence of the *Schach*-Sukkah covering which symbolizes G-d's power, we will not be adversely affected by the table in the house.

Mussar and Chassidus: Two Diverse Approaches

This approach mirrors the difference between the two diverse approaches in Judaism that were popularized by the Mussar and Chassidic movements respectively.

The school of Mussar, which focuses on the negative aspects of the human being and his or her moral frailties, leaves no room for any exceptions to the rule of laying down the law. A strict disciplinarian cannot allow the recalcitrant student any relaxation of the rules. The school of Mussar—led by great Jewish leaders from mediaeval times until the present accentuated the need to keep away from and perpetually wage battle with evil. It has been said in the name of one of the great Mussar masters that the Mussar approach can find fault with everything and discover threats to one's spiritual life lurking everywhere. From this perspective, one must therefore never let down his or her guard against the potential for evil.

The Chassidic approach does not deny the existence of evil and its insidious nature, just as the school of Mussar does not deny the existence of the positive energy all of us possess. However, the Chassidic approach puts the emphasis on the positive. Instead of fighting the darkness, one can accomplish much more by simply letting in some of the light. Even one candle can dispel the darkness of an entire house.

Are We Better Off Not Being Created?

These two approaches have their antecedents in the Schools of Shammai and Hillel. In the very same passage of

the Talmud where the dispute between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel regarding the minimum area of the Sukkah is mentioned, another dispute is discussed. The School of Shammai argued that a person would have been better off not having been born since there are so many pitfalls in life, the prospects of failing and sinning outweigh the alternative. The School of Hillel disagrees and maintains that it is preferable to have been born over not being born.

What are these two schools arguing about?

The School of Shammai certainly did not mean to get us depressed and to hate life. Rather they wanted us to be prepared to deal with the danger that lurks beneath the surface. We should not be blinded by the veneer of goodness that belies the evil that exists within. This is perhaps the first statement that exemplifies the approach of Mussar.

The School of Hillel had a different focus. While not denying the power of evil and its ability to deceive us, they nevertheless argued that it is preferable to have a positive view towards life. Furthermore, they felt that one's obsession with evil—even to fight it—can lead to depression and even worse. But above all the other consideration, School of Hillel—whose very name Hillel is related to the words praise and light—believed in the power of light to dispel the darkness.

The Link to Chanukah

Another famous dispute between these two schools that echoes the foregoing analysis relates to the manner in which we light the Chanukah lights:

According to the School of Shammai, we are required to light eight candles the first night and decrease the number each successive night until the eighth night when we light only one light. The School of Hillel states the reverse. We begin with one and proceed to increase the number of lights each successive night until the last night of Chanukah when we light eight.

It has been explained that the School of Shammai sees the light of Chanukah as the fire that consumes the evil forces. As the evil is destroyed the need for light/fire becomes less pronounced since there is less evil to contend with. We therefore decrease the number of lights each night.

The School of Hillel maintains that the lighting of the Chanukah candles is primarily to introduce light and positive energy, not the battle against the forces of evil. As we progress we therefore add to the light.

Total Insulation

We can now appreciate their views concerning the size of the Sukkah.

As stated, according to the School of Shammai, if one's table does not fit into the Sukkah it is invalid.

In Shammai's world-view the only way to be fully protected against the deleterious effects of evil is to be completely insulated. Thus, the Sukkah that represents Divine insulation must encompass the entirety of the Jew; his head, body and even his table. One cannot afford to leave the table outside the protective influence of the Sukkah lest it will end up becoming the Achilles heel.

Trickle Down Positivity

The School of Hillel will counter this argument by invoking the positive aspect of the Sukkah; that it represents the Divine energy that embraces and envelops us. It is the expression of G-d's love for us after we demonstrated our devotion to Him in the preceding Days of Awe.

The School of Light therefore maintains that it suffices to have one's head and most of one's body under the influence of the Sukkah. Its salutary message of Divine love and protection will insure that no harm will come from that "table" that was left back "in the house." Moreover, the light of the Sukkah will "trickle down" and spread to the table that is currently outside of the Sukkah.

A Messianic Reversal

A question can be raised. The great Kabbalist, the Arizal (rabbi Yitzchak Luria) stated that in the Messianic Age, we will no longer follow the School of Hillel—as is the practice today—but we will then follow the School of Shammai. This would imply that the School of Shammai's views are more sophisticated, ahead of their times.

However, from our above analysis of their respective views it would seem that the School of Shammai sees the individual in a far less positive light, for he sees their weaknesses and vulnerability. The School of Hillel seems to be so much more sophisticated. If this is true, why will we “graduate” from the School of Hillel to, what seems to be the inferior philosophy of, the School of Shammai?

In truth, the School of Shammai can be understood on two levels. On the more basic level, the School of Shammai is concerned with our weaknesses and vulnerability. They thus admonish us to be more vigilant.

The Ability to Defeat Evil

On a deeper level, however, the School of Shammai represents a more advanced approach.

As we are in exile, we don't have the ability to deal with and defeat evil. We therefore are required by Jewish law to

follow the more positive and joyous approach of focusing on the good and letting the evil take care of itself. But, in doing so there will always be areas of evil on which we cannot have any enduring effect.

In the Messianic Age, however, we will be empowered to tackle evil head on without fear of the repercussions. Moreover, we will then even be able to transform the evil.

Translating the above in terms of the location of the table vis-à-vis the Sukkah this means that in the Messianic Age, even our table—our most mundane activities—will be fully ensconced in the Divine enveloping force—of the ultimate Sukkah.

ESSAY TEN

UNITY WITHIN UNITY

**In the Messianic Age we will experience two forms of unity
in their fullest.**

**We will all enter in one figurative Sukkah in which we are
all seen as one.**

**On the other hand, each of us will realize the fullness of
his or her individual qualities.**

**Yet, all of these qualities that reside in different classes will
all unify to form the most perfect mosaic of G-dly energy
that incorporates all of these elements.**

ESSAY TEN

UNITY WITHIN UNITY

The Underlying Theme of the Sukkah and the Four Species

Judaism is based on the principles of unity. There is one G-d, one Torah and one Israel. But, nowhere is the theme of unity more pronounced than in the Mitzvot that are associated with the Holiday of Sukkos.

The Sukkah, from which the Holiday gets its name, symbolizes unity. According to one opinion in the Talmud, the Sukkah we dwell in during the Holiday of Sukkos commemorates the Clouds of Glory that enveloped the Jewish people when they traveled through the desert. These were no ordinary clouds. They protected the Jewish people from their enemies as well as from the elements. In addition to all the great miracles that were associated with these Clouds of Glory, they were also unique in that they enveloped the entire Jewish people and unified them.

Unifying the Four Seasons

Sukkos is also the Holiday when we take the Four Kinds of plants and hold them together. The four plants known as “*lulav*, *Esrog*, *hadassim* and *aravot* (palm branch, Citron, myrtles and willows) are also illustrative of unity. The Esrog needs all four seasons within which to grow. Unlike other plants that grow in certain times of the year, the Esrog literally thrives on all seasons. It can thus be said that the Esrog unifies all of the four seasons.

This symbolizes the way we must look for growth not only in times when it would appear that the climate is right for it. On the contrary, all the vicissitudes of life contribute to the positive changes in our developments. Every experience, regardless of the way it appears, contributes to our spiritual growth and development.

Diverse Opinions: One Source

The theme of unity is similarly reflected in the shape of the Lulav. Despite its multiple leaves that – if left to its own devices – would spread in all directions, the Lulav is only fit for use when the leaves are still all together as one.

The message of unity conveyed by the Lulav is that all of the possible directions that our minds can take; all of the diverse approaches that the Torah allows for (and, indeed,

as we shall see shortly, according to the Midrash, the Lulav symbolized the Torah scholar), must all come together and point to the same G-dly source and objective.

Similarly, the myrtle branch has to have rows of three leaves each coming from one common stem, once again emphasizing the need for us to recognize that despite difference in the way we develop, we all come from the same source.

And finally, the willows' nature to grow together in clusters is expressive of the need for the recognition of our need for friendship and community. While there are many things we can accomplish on our own, Judaism believes very strongly in group efforts.

All Four Species Must be Taken Together

But, the message of unity during the Holiday of Sukkos goes even further. Not only should there be unity within each species and category, but even when there are four distinct kinds, they must nevertheless all be taken together in order to fulfill the mitzvah .

Our sages explain how these four species represent four levels of Jews, The Esrog with its pleasant fragrance and good taste symbolizes those who are both righteous and learned. The Lulav, which comes from a date tree,

symbolizes those who have taste or knowledge. The myrtle with its fragrance symbolizes those whose main preoccupation is with good deeds. The willow which lacks both the qualities of taste and fragrance, represents the lowliest class who is devoid of both qualities of knowledge and good deeds.

Yet, notwithstanding their differences, a Jew cannot fulfill **his** mitzvah unless he holds them all together. ,

This provides us with a deeper understanding of the concept of unity. It does not suffice for us to all dwell under the same roof (or Sukkah). Sure it is nice to have times when we can all shed our individual identities and unite, but it is even a greater measure of unity when despite the difference that exists, the four kinds can come together

Two Forms of Unity of the Future

In the Messianic Age both forms of unity will be experienced in their fullest.

On the one hand we will all enter in one figurative Sukkah in which we are all seen as one. Our experience of the Divine will be shared equally by everyone to the extent that we will not need any teachers to expose us to the G-dly revelations that will occur then.

On the other hand, each of us will realize the fullness of his or her individual qualities. A Torah scholar will reach the peak of his intellectual capabilities. Our emotional attachment to G-d will be enhanced immeasurably, our commitment to the practical observance will be flawless and even our simplicity will be seen as the great quality it is because, as the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, it derives from the "simple" Essence of G-d that transcends description and sophistication.

Yet, all of these qualities that reside in different classes will all unify to form the most perfect mosaic of G-dly energy that incorporates all of these elements.

In the days of Moshiach we will all sit in the ultimate Sukkah of Peace and experience the bonding of all classes of Jews: the Esrog, Lulav, Hadas and Arava.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE FOUR MEDITATIONS

The Midrash connects each of these four species to G-d.

The four species are four meditations about G-d.

G-d I reveled through nature (Esrog), His commandments (Lulav), the existence of the Jewish people (Myrtle) and His support of the widow, orphan and the downtrodden (Willow).

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE FOUR MEDITATIONS

G-d Compared to the Four Species

One of the central observances of Sukkos is the taking of the *Lulav* (palm branch), *Esrog* (citron), *Hadassim* (3 myrtle leaves) and *Aravot* (2 willow leaves). Of course, the primary reason for this ritual is that it is one of the commandments given to us by G-d. Nevertheless, our sages sought to find meaning in each of the commandments. This enables us to internalize certain spiritual lessons and inspiration, every mitzvah engenders.

The Midrash connects each of these four species to G-d. The *Esrog* – described in the Torah as a *Hadar* (splendid fruit) alludes to G-d Who is described as *Hadar*-splendid. The *Lulav* – which grows on a date-palm, is symbolic of G-d who is also compared to a date-palm. Likewise the other two species (myrtle and willow) are symbolic of G-d about Whom it is written: “Who dwells among the myrtles” and “Who dwells in the *Aravot* (that has the dual meaning of “heavens” and “willows”).

What did our Sages intend when they compared G-d to these four species? Furthermore, isn't it blasphemous to identify G-d with a plant?

Commentators explain that the intent of our sages was not to identify G-d with any particular plant, but to teach us that there are four meditations about G-d that help us get closer to Him. And these four meditations about G-d are represented by the four species we take on Sukkos.

Esrog: G-d Revealed Through His Handiwork

The first meditation is to reflect on the greatness of G-d expressed in the beauty and splendor of His handiwork. Before one can appreciate anything more sublime about G-d, one can appreciate His presence in the world through His Creation.

This aspect of G-d's greatness is expressed by the Esrog, described by the Torah as a most beautiful and splendid fruit that possesses both a beautiful fragrance and a wonderful taste. This is indicative of the beauty and splendor of its Creator.

Perhaps one can add that there are two effects of G-d Who reveals Himself through the Esrog: taste and fragrance. These are metaphors for the way we can derive both physical joy (taste) and spiritual bliss (fragrance) when we

reflect on G-d's handiwork; the beauty and grandeur of nature.

Lulav: G-d's Justice and Righteousness Revealed

The second meditation is to reflect on G-d's righteousness and other positive attributes. We can appreciate His attributes by reflecting on the commandments that G-d has given us. When we realize how righteous are His commandments, we cannot help but to be impressed with the righteousness of their author.

Indeed, the verse that "compares" G-d to a date-palm is the verse: "The tzadik (righteous) will flourish like a date-palm." G-d is the ultimate source of righteousness from Whom all righteous behavior in this world derives.

Hadas: G-d's Special Relationship with Us

The third meditation is to become aware of G-d's special relationship with good people in general and the Jewish people in particular. "Who dwells among the myrtles," is a reference to the unique way G-d relates to those who are likened to myrtles (the righteous).

When one reflects on the miraculous existence of the Jewish people and the way they survived against all odds,

one cannot help but to be impressed with G-d's greatness and love.

Arava: G-d's Relationship with the Lowly and Humble

The fourth meditation is to reflect on the way G-d relates to everybody, even the most humble and lowly beings, alluded to by the "lowly" willows.

Indeed, the verse that describes G-d as the "One Who dwells in the *Aravot* (heavens or willows) is followed by the words "Father of orphans and the judge of widows," referring to G-d's special attachment to those who are abandoned and in need.

By putting together these four species we declare our love and reverence for G-d Who can be found in the beauty of nature, the grandeur of His righteousness, in the souls of the righteous and in the lonely hearts and homes of the downtrodden.

The Four Species of the Future

But, our meditation is missing much of its intensity in the current period of *Galus*-exile:.

While G-d is expressed in nature, nature also conceals G-d's presence. The very word nature in Hebrew *teva* connotes

the idea of being submerged because the G-dly source of nature is often covered.

While G-d's righteousness is expressed through the Mitzvot, in times of exile our ability to perform most of the 613 Mitzvot is compromised. Moreover, very often it may seem that the Mitzvot do not bring about their intended effects.

While G-d has demonstrated His love for the righteous in general and the Jewish people in particular in times of exile, He also seems to have acted "unjustly" by allowing the righteous to suffer. G-d's special relationship with the righteous and the Jewish people is not always apparent and the downtrodden are often neglected.

For this reason, this Mitzvah of taking the *Lulav* and the other three species loses some of its impact in the present era of *Galus-exile*. Only with the coming of Moshiach and the subsequent Era of Redemption will we really begin to appreciate the deeper significance of this Mitzvah. Then we will see G-d's presence in nature unobstructed, we will see G-d's righteousness, His love for the righteous and how the most disadvantaged people will be lifted up from their lowly state.

May we all merit seeing the immediate realization of the ideals represented by the Four Species.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE PERFECT ESROG

The Esrog tree and its fruit have the same taste.

This suggests that the means (the tree) should not be different from the end (the fruit).

Much of our lives are spent on the means of things.

Torah, however, does not separate between the means and the end. The means are also endowed with G-dly purpose.

The means must be suffused with the vitality of the end.

As we travel on the road towards the final Redemption we must suffuse every moment and every inch of the way with the energy of Redemption, by living our lives now as if we were already at our destination.

We attempt to bring the joy and sanctity of life in the Messianic Age to these last moments of exile.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE PERFECT ESROG

An Intriguing Fruit

The upcoming Holiday of Sukkos features several joyous Mitzvah observances. First and foremost, we dwell in a Sukkah for seven days (in the Diaspora we add on another day of Sukkah dwelling). The second Mitzvah is to take the Four Kinds (Esrog-from the citrus family, Lulav-a palm branch, Hadassim-myrtles and Aravos-willows) and shake them every day (except Shabbos). Third, there is a Mitzvah to rejoice; a command that goes even beyond the requirement of rejoicing during the other Festivals. This Holiday is therefore referred to as *Z'man Simchaseinu*-the Season of Our Rejoicing.

The Beautiful Fruit

In this message we will focus on the Esrog, which is one of the four components of the Mitzvah of the Four Kinds.

The Esrog is a most intriguing fruit. Some of its many unique features are highlighted by the Torah and Talmud.

First, it is the only fruit that is referred to in the Torah as *Hadar*-beautiful. There is something about its appearance that elicits a reaction of admiration. The Midrash identifies the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as an Esrog! It is based partially on Onkelus, the Aramaic translation of the words, “it was desirable...-*u’merageg*,” which shares the same root as the word Esrog. Indeed, Onkelos translates the entire phrase as “It was desirable to gaze upon.” The Esrog represents the ultimate in beauty.

The Unifying Fruit

Second, the Talmud identifies a unique trait about the Esrog in that it “lives on the tree from year to year,” meaning that it thrives in all seasons. Each of the four seasons contributes to the growth of the Esrog. This trait underscores its unifying element. It expresses unity because it unites all the disparate seasons to serve the common objective of producing an extraordinary fruit. When you look at the Esrog you see the collective influence of four seasons.

In truth, the other three species used for the Mitzvah also express unity: The Lulav’s leaves must be “bound.” However, these leaves can actually be separated and then the unity unravels. The unity of the myrtle derives from the way three leaves grow out of one stem. Here too, there

are three distinct leaves. One can rip off a leaf or it can fall off of its own accord. The unity is not absolute. The willows are considered to be unified because they grow in “brotherly” clusters. However, they are still separate leaves living together in harmony.

Only the Esrog’s unity is intrinsic, organic and cannot be unraveled. It is a single fruit and one cannot separate the influence of winter, or any of the other seasons, from the Esrog itself.

Fruit before the Leaves

The Tosphos commentary (composed by the Sages of France in the 12th-14th centuries) uses one of the Esrog’s unique botanical features to explain an enigmatic statement in the Talmud. When the Jewish nation was offered the Torah, the peoples’ response was: “*Na’aseh v’nishmah*-we will do and we will hear.” The Talmud likens their willingness to accept the Torah before hearing its contents to the apple, which produces its fruit before its leaves.

Tosphos raises the obvious question. Apple trees do, in fact, produce their leaves before their fruit as do all other fruit trees. How then could the Talmud state otherwise?

Tosphos answers that the Hebrew word for apple, which is *ta’puach*, actually refers to the Esrog in this instance. The

Esrog tree indeed produces its fruit before its leaves. The Esrog tree will therefore always have fruit on its branches. The fruit of one season will still be on the tree when the leaves of the next season emerge.

Thus, in addition to the theme of unity, the Esrog also represents the unconditional nature of our acceptance of the Torah, in return for which, as our Sages state, G-d gave each Jew two crowns.

Barking up the Right Tree

Third, the Talmud identifies another unique trait of the Esrog: The bark and the fruit have the same taste. When G-d created vegetation, our Sages state, His original intent was for all trees to share the taste of their fruit. This desire, however, did not happen. How can that be that G-d's original intention did not materialize?

The answer is that G-d's original intention was the way He chose to state the ideal and objective of His creation. It is up to us to work towards the realization of G-d's plan. The purpose of His plan is for human beings to bring ultimate consistency to fruition in this world. We must strive for external as well as inner perfection. It is the mark of consistency and integrity that every part of the person is in total sync with every other part. However, G-d did not intend for this ideal to be manifested immediately. G-d

wants a world which we make perfect. However, G-d allowed this physical model of perfection to exist in some areas, such as the Esrog, to remind us of our goal.

Taste and Fragrance

Fourth, the Midrash extols the virtue of the Esrog inasmuch as it has both an exquisite taste (in Talmudic times it was a delicacy served at royal tables) and a wonderful fragrance. It is a metaphor for the well-rounded and balanced Jew, who is both learned (taste and reason share the same Hebrew word *ta'am*) and whose performance of the Mitzvos is admirable (good deeds give a person a good reputation, much like the wafting of a good fragrance).

The Preferred Path

Fifth, The Midrash likens the shape of the Esrog to the shape of the heart. The Esrog signifies the person who has a warm and sincere heart. Ethics of the Fathers cites Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai's extolling the virtue of his disciple, Rabbi Elazar, who said that the best path for a man to follow is "a good heart" (chapter 2:10-13).

Humility

Sixth, commentators point out that the initials of the words from Psalms “Don’t lead me to the path of arrogance” spells Esrog. The Esrog, with all of its qualities is also the symbol of humility.

Esrog in Code

Seventh, there is one more interesting feature about the very word Esrog. The Talmud discusses various “codes” from which one can discover additional insights in the Biblical text. One such code is called *at bash*, which simply substitutes the last letter of the alphabet (*tav*) for the first (*aleph*), second last letter (*shin*) for the second letter (*beis*), and so on.

It is intriguing to see that if we apply this code to the word Esrog, the result remains Esrog, albeit in a rearranged form. אטרג=תאגר.

(Another word where the code yields a similar result is the word tzedakah-charity. When applying the *at bash* code צדקה becomes הקדצ. In this case the result is actually the word tzedakah in reverse. Perhaps the message is that whenever we give tzedakah we receive whatever we gave in return.)

What is the message with regard to the Esrog?

Perhaps the fact that when we apply the code we get the same letters in return signifies that the secret and the revealed are one and the same. This echoes the message, mentioned above, that the taste of the tree is the same as the taste of the Esrog itself.

Means is the End and the End is in the Means

However, one can detect a nuance of difference in these two lessons.

That the Esrog tree and its fruit are the same could suggest that the means (the tree) is not different from the end (the fruit).

Much of our lives are spent on the means of things. If we had to tally how much of our time, energy and resources are spent on the means, we would quickly discover that it consumes the overwhelming majority of them. We sleep as a means to acquire the energy to function the next day. So too is our eating of food. Sometimes it seems that all of life is one endless cycle. Frequently our employment is unrewarding, but we need the paycheck to buy the things we need to help us through the day, so that we have the strength to go to work the next day... Even people who have clear goals and objectives in life spend most of their time, energy and resources on the road that gets them there.

Torah, however, does not separate between the means and the end. It is impossible to get to the end without the means; therefore, the means are also endowed with G-dly purpose. Moreover, the person must live the means with the same energy level and joy as if he or she was experiencing the end result. The means must be suffused with the vitality of the end.

There is a special lesson for us here as we travel on the road towards the final Redemption. We suffuse every moment we are in motion and every inch of the way we must travel with the energy of Redemption, by living our lives now as if we were already at our destination. We attempt to bring the joy and sanctity of life in the Messianic Age to these last moments of exile.

We may draw a different lesson from the fact that the coded form of the word Esrog is the same as the revealed form. This additional lesson suggests that an Esrog personality is one whose secret existence is as beautiful and real as his or her outer appearance.

We can see now that the Esrog represents the ideals of : beauty, unity, dedication, perfection, balance, a good heart, humility and integrity.

Esrog: Four Perfections

However if we were to sum up all of these traits, we would realize that their common denominator is a profound expression of wholeness and perfection. This is further exemplified by virtue of the law that an Esrog used in performing the Mitzvah of the Four Kinds must be whole and unblemished. If it is even slightly defective, the Esrog is not kosher for use on Sukkos.

Commentators point out that there are four items about which the term shleimah-perfection is employed in our prayers and in classical Jewish literature: אמונה Emunah-Belief ("I believe with complete faith..."); תשובה Teshuvah-repentance or return ("...help me return with a complete repentance"), רפואה Refuah-healing ("...provide with a cure and complete recovery") and Geulah-Redemption ("...redeem us with a complete Redemption"). The initials of these four words spells אתרג Esrog.

The Esrog thus epitomizes the ultimate perfection of the Jew and of the entire world, a phenomenon that will be realized imminently with the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TOTAL HOLIDAY

Dwelling in the Sukkah is the only Mitzvah that involves the entire person. Even one's clothing and boots are invited into the Sukkah.

Although the water of the Mikveh envelops the entire person, we do not immerse ourselves while clothed and the immersion is of short duration. We certainly don't "dwell" in a Mikveh.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TOTAL HOLIDAY

All Encompassing

One of the lessons of this Holiday is that it encompasses the totality of our existence. Dwelling in the Sukkah is the only Mitzvah that involves the entire person. Even one's clothing and boots are invited into the Sukkah. But what about immersion in a Mikveh? Although the water of the Mikveh envelops the entire person, we do not immerse ourselves while clothed and the immersion is of short duration. We certainly don't "dwell" in a Mikveh.

There is another all-embracing feature to the Sukkah. The Talmud tells us that "all of Israel are fit to sit in one Sukkah." Indeed, the first "Sukkah" was formed by the "clouds of Glory" that surrounded and protected the Jewish People as they wandered through the desert for 40 years. This means that if we had one Sukkah large enough to contain all of the Jewish people, at least theoretically, there would be no impediment to their fulfilment of the Mitzvah to dwell in a Sukkah. This idea is unparalleled. There is no

other Mitzvah like it. The Sukkah is the ultimate all-encompassing Mitzvah!

Likewise, the Four Species that we take and wave are symbolic of the all-encompassing emphasis of this Holiday. First, these four species are said to represent all the different classes of Jews. Midrash also symbolically relates them to four integral parts of our body: heart, spine, eyes and mouth.

The Esrog is unique among fruits in that it grows and thrives in all four seasons. This allows the Mitzvah to unify all of the disparate seasons even though Sukkos occurs in the Fall.

We shake these Four Species in six directions (south, north, east, up, down and west) to underscore G-d's unity within the six directions of space. Here again the Mitzvah unifies all six directions.

Gematria

Another area in which we see the notion of totality in this Holiday is the word for the covering of the Sukkah—*schach*. Indeed a Sukkah is so-called because of its *schach*, the temporary and flimsy covering of the Sukkah. And while it is a reminder of the fragility of life in this world, it is also a symbol of G-d's protective cover.

The word *schach* numerically adds up to the number 100, which, of course, connotes perfection. It also conveys a powerful lesson: notwithstanding the temporal nature and trivial value of these loose branches, that is where G-d invests His greatest strength. It also conveys the lesson that G-d's power can be expressed through any medium and that He identifies with simplicity. Simplicity is actually a powerful expression of perfection because it is receptive to everything, just like a clean slate upon which anything can be written.

The Five Senses

There is another area where we can observe the all-encompassing nature of the Festival of Sukkos.

Our Creator endowed us with five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. Judaism, which is primarily concerned with our effects on the physical world, seeks to refine and elevate these senses.

There are many Mitzvos and Jewish customs which involve seeing. The Torah describes coming to the Bais Hamikdash three times a year for the so called "pilgrimage" Festivals as "seeing the face of G-d." One came to the Temple to see and be seen.

When the Torah commands us to wear *tzitzis*, the fringes on the four corners of our garments, it exhorts us to “see them” so that we will remember all of the commandments.

The monthly ritual of blessing the new moon requires us to see the moon.

Many more Mitzvos are associated with hearing. We must hear the Shofar, hear the reading of the Torah and hear the reading of the Megillah, just to name a few examples. Perhaps even more significantly, Judaism’s most important prayer begins with the word *Shema*, which means “hear.”

References to the sense of taste are ubiquitous in Jewish life. In addition to all of the things we are commanded not to taste we are also commanded to eat certain foods. For example, we are commanded to eat Matzah on Passover. We are enjoined to eat three meals on Shabbos and eat festive meals on every Jewish Holiday. Jewish customs abound with food requirements such as Hamantashen on Purim, apples dipped in honey on Rosh Hashanah, etc. More pointedly, we must eat in a Sukkah.

The sense of touch is evident in all the Mitzvos which require doing things with and to our bodies, such as wearing *tzitzis*, donning Tefilin on our heads and arms, taking a Lulav in our hands during Sukkos, and of course, circumcision.

The olfactory sense is seldom used in rituals save for Havdalah when we smell the besamim, but it was an important part of the Sacrificial offering, which was characterized as “a pleasant fragrance for G-d.”

The Five Senses of Sukkos

The Festival of Sukkos is unique in that it involves all of our five senses.

We are required to see the *schach* (covering of branches) of the Sukkah so that we know that G-d provided our ancestors with shelter when they sojourned in the desert. Indeed, one of the roots of the word sukkah is related to vision. The Matriarch Sarah, our Sages tell us, was also named Yiskah, because she was endowed with prophetic **vision** and that everyone **gazed** at her beauty.

Sukkos also directs us to hear the recitation of the special blessing we make when we eat in the Sukkah. And, interestingly, the word Sukkah is itself etymologically related to a Biblical word *haskeis*, which means “listen.” One must hear the recitation of Kiddush, the blessings on the Sukkah, etc., when dwelling in the Sukkah.

Tasting is an integral part of dwelling in the Sukkah, which in practice means that we are to eat our meals in the Sukkah, particularly on the first two nights of the Holiday.

The tactile aspect of Sukkos involves building the Sukkah, holding the Four Species and shaking them each day of the Festival (except for Shabbos). These acts all require touching the materials and objects of the Mitzvah. It is also interesting to note that the word Sukkah can also be related to the word *sach*, which means “anoint” or “coat,” both of which are tactile actions.

And while there is no obligation to smell anything during the Holiday, we are surrounded by aromatic flora. In addition, during this Holiday we are outdoors and are constantly exposed to many fragrant scents in our midst. Moreover, Midrash teaches us that at least two of the Four Species, the Esrog and the Myrtle, are known for their beautiful fragrances, which symbolize the Jews who are known far and wide for their good deeds. Good deeds endow us with a good reputation which spreads far and wide like a pleasant fragrance that wafts through the air, reaching distant places.

The Sukkah of Peace

In our prayers, we describe the state of peace in the future using the metaphor of the Sukkah: “And spread upon us the Sukkah of Your peace.” One of the distinctive qualities of the Messianic Age is the way it will bring completion and perfection to everything positive. In the absence of the

disruptive power of evil, the forces of goodness and holiness will assert themselves. We will be able to immerse ourselves totally in the Mikveh of Divine knowledge and moreover remain there indefinitely. Indeed, the future deluge of G-dly knowledge will envelop us and everything connected to us.

All of our senses will be fully activated to see, hear, savor, feel and smell the incredible Divine energies which will be revealed in the Messianic Age.

And, finally, we will experience an unprecedented sense of unity with all Jews that will enable us to dwell together in one Sukkah.

When we sit in our Sukkahs and perform the added Mitzvah of taking the Lulav we should imagine life in the future and how it will be the most balanced amalgamation of all of our faculties. Better still, let us resolve to do one more Mitzvah so that this will be the year we will celebrate Sukkos in the Bais Hamikdash with Moshiach. Then we will not need to use our imagination.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RAIN OR SUKKAH

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RAIN OR SUKKAH

Protection from the Rain

This week's parsha features the special song of Ha'azinu, which opens with a description of Torah as rain and dew that G-d showers on us.

In Hebrew there are two words for rain. One is geshem and the other is matar. Why does the Torah use the word matar when discussing the Torah's teachings that flow down to us?

This week's parsha coincides with the Festival of Sukkos. There is always a connection between a holiday and the Torah portion read in close proximity to the holiday. What connection can we find between the idea of rain and the holiday of Sukkos?

When the Talmud discusses the commandment to dwell in a Sukkah, it cites the Biblical prophecy that G-d will act as a protective Sukkah. This Sukkah, the prophet Isaiah declares, will be "for shade in the day-time from the heat, and a refuge and for a covert from storm (*zerem*) and

from rain (*matar*).” Here, too, the word *matar* is used for rain.

However, the references to rain in these two sources are diametrically opposite. In the parsha, rain is a positive metaphor for the Torah, which nurtures like rain, whereas in the citation from Isaiah, the Sukkah protects us from the rain.

248, not 247 or 249

To reconcile these two sources and to better understand the role of the Sukkah in relation to rain, there is an interesting commentary by the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s father) that the word for storm and rain in the abovementioned verse, *zerem* and *matar*, have the numerical value of 247 and 249, respectively. There are 248 positive commandments (i.e., the commandments of the Torah that tell us what to do as opposed to the negative commandments that detail the prohibitions of the Torah). The Torah commands us not to add on to the commandments or subtract any of them. Thus, the deeper significance of the Sukkah discussed in Isaiah is that it protects us from 247—subtracting a Mitzvah—and from 249—adding on a new Mitzvah.

It is also interesting to note that the very word Sukkah, when spelled phonetically (*samach, vav, chaf, hei*), numerically adds up to 248!

The Sukkah thus represents and underscores the integrity of the Divine commandments; there are no less than 248 and no more than 248.

What is it about the Sukkah that is so protective?

To understand the protective quality of the Sukkah, we ought to first understand what could be wrong with adding on a new Mitzvah? If 248 are desirable, one would think that a 249th mitzvah would be even more desirable.

The truth is that the difference between 248 and 249 is the difference between doing a Mitzvah for G-d's sake or for our own sake.

Who are we Serving?

A simple analogy to illustrate this point is the person who gives a gift to show affection to a loved one, but brings him or her something that the giver enjoys but the recipient does not. If one starts to think about that gift, one will come to the honest realization that the purpose of the gift is to assuage the giver's own feelings and make him or her feel comfortable. Rather than giving a gift, one is merely patting one's own ego. If the gift is ostensibly

motivated by love, one has to question whether the gift is an expression of love for the recipient or is actually evidence of self-love.

[To be sure, there are times when giving of a gift is not really to benefit anyone, but rather as a gesture on the part of the giver to show that he or she is thinking of the recipient. This is the “theory” behind the offering of sacrifices to G-d who, obviously, does not need our sacrifices.]

In the context of serving G-d it assumes an even more ominous tone. When we give G-d a gift He did not ask for, we have to ask ourselves: Are we serving Him or are we serving ourselves? Who is it that is truly the object of our love—G-d or ourselves?

And once we degenerate into a mindset of spiritual independence by adding on to G-d’s commandments, we could just as easily go from 249 to 247; we will invariably find ways of decreasing the number of commandments that do not sit well with our spiritual comfort zone.

When our religion is based exclusively or primarily on our own understanding and how it resonates with us, we are likely to focus on “what is in it for me.” With that mindset, we begin to search for independence from authority [as we] self-righteously looking for ways to add on commandment number 249. We let our spiritual passion

“rain” down on us and seek other unauthorized and inauthentic avenues to express our spirituality.

The Sukkah conveys an overarching (pun intended) message of faith and trust in G-d exclusively. The Sukkah reorients our egocentric way of thinking into a G-d centric manner of thinking. The Sukkah reinforces our faith in G-d as the only one upon whom we can [be] depend even when all the signs point in the opposite direction. The Sukkah reminds us of the way our own understanding and our own initiatives are inherently limited. It therefore helps to free us from our delusional insistence that we can devise our own rituals to take the place of the ones ordained by G-d. The Sukkah is the antidote to self-serving rituals that often masquerade as religious devotion.

Whose Home are You In?

There is another way of explaining how the Sukkah assists us in ridding ourselves of the pitfall represented by the numbers 249 and 247.

It's like a person who is invited as a guest to someone's home. While they may feel free to do things in their own home, they are more respectful, reticent and cautious before doing things in their host's home.

While we dwell in the Sukkah we feel that we are dwelling in G-d's home and we act accordingly. Our focus becomes G-d oriented rather than oriented on the self.

The Sukkah is thus the protective home that is permeated with G-dly awareness that helps us escape the obsession with self.

Why does Sukkos Follow Yom Kippur?

Perhaps this provides a reason why the Holiday of Sukkos follows Yom Kippur. During Yom Kippur—and the forty days preceding Yom Kippur—we are required to engage in soul-searching. We are preoccupied with our selfhood. Introspection and soul searching are not only appropriate but indispensable for this time of the year. This is the path to purification and catharsis.

However, there is a drawback to this type of approach. We can get so obsessed with self-examination that everything we do begins to revolve around ourselves. We could then cease serving and loving G-d. Instead, we begin to serve and love ourselves in the guise of serving Him.

We therefore have the Holiday of Sukkos to allow us to undergo a paradigm shift from living in our own cocoon of self-absorption to dwelling in G-d's Sukkah and becoming G-d-centric.

Good Rain and Bad Rain

There is, however, a major caveat to all of this.

While we have a commandment not to add on, we know that the rabbis have instituted many additional rituals and observances. In addition, Jewish customs have blossomed and given us important holidays. Chanukah and Simchas Torah are examples of Holidays that are rooted in rabbinical law and Jewish custom, respectively. Moreover, the Chassidic movement added so much more to Jewish life than just compliance with the 248.

How do we reconcile this with the prohibition of adding on any commandments?

This question has been addressed by many, including Maimonides. Maimonides' simple answer is that the rabbis did not claim to be adding another Biblical command. They made it clear that their commandments were of a rabbinical nature. And, it is the Torah itself that instructed the rabbis to add on these rabbinical ordinances and to respect Jewish custom.

Chassidic thought goes a step further. All of the rabbinical commandments are merely offshoots and extensions of the original Biblical ones. All innovative customs are designed, not to add on to any of the Mitzvos, but to enhance them and express their inner soul.

The criteria to adding on to the commandments are:

- (a) Recognition that the 248 are G-d's sacrosanct domain, and we may not tamper with them. And whether or not we like them, we dedicate ourselves to their observance. When we enter the Sukkah of G-d's commandments, we are entering into His turf and we do them on His terms;
- (b) Recognition that the additional measures are intended to preserve, enhance and embellish the 248. The 248 must be nurtured by the 249; and,
- (c) Recognition that these additional measures are ultimately also G-d's will, and although they may express a certain subjective spiritual dynamic, they are first and foremost expressions of G-d's will.

We can now resolve the question that was asked at the beginning of this essay: How do we reconcile the reference to *matar* in the parsha which refers approvingly to the Torah as rain with the citation from Isaiah in which the Sukkah is depicted as the structure that shields us from the *matar*?

In truth, *matar*, with its symbolism of 249, is a positive phenomenon when it is in the context of the entire verse that reads: “**My** teachings shall drop as the rain... as the small rain on the tender grass... For I will proclaim the name of the L-rd, ascribe you greatness unto our G-d.”

Upon close examination, all three criteria are indicated here.

When we emphasize that the matar is: (a) “**My** teaching”, (b) nurturing like “rain on the tender grass...”, and (c) when we bless G-d for this rain and that the rain (matar-249) for which we express our gratitude **is also from G-d**, those additions, symbolized by rain-matar-249, are positive and holy.

No Raining on our Party

The Messianic Age is, in the abovementioned verse from Isaiah, likened to a Sukkah. In the Messianic Age we will have no worry about the harmful additions or subtractions, but we will simultaneously reap the benefits of novel levels of observance and understanding. Hence the prophet declares: “A new Torah shall emerge.” This does not mean, G-d forbid, that the Torah will change, but that we will enjoy heretofore concealed dimensions of knowledge and observances that will be fully revealed at that time.

And since we will be dwelling and fully ensconced in the ultimate G-dly Sukkah, which symbolizes the 248 Mitzvos, we will have no fear of the additions (read: Matar) raining on our feast.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GLOBAL WARMING OF THE FUTURE

Conceptually, each and every Mitzvah enables us to enter into G-d's Sukkah, i.e., G-d's abode, one Mitzvah at a time.

However, a single Mitzvah gets us only part way into the Divine Sukkah.

The Mitzvah of dwelling in a Sukkah allows us to enter G-d's Sukkah completely.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

GLOBAL WARMING OF THE FUTURE

Don't Kick Your Sukkah

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 3a) discusses an intriguing dialogue that will take place in the future Messianic Age between G-d and the Nations of the world:

After discussing how they will testify that the Jewish people observed the commandments, they too will come and demand a reward. They will say:

“Master of the Universe! Give [the Torah] to us anew and we will observe it.”

The Holy One Blessed is He, says to them, “fools of the world! Whoever toiled on the eve of the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath, but whoever did not toil on the eve of the Sabbath from where will he eat on the Sabbath? Nevertheless, [I will accede to your request]. I have an easy Mitzvah and its name is Sukkah. Go and perform [it].”

Immediately, each [member of the Nations] goes to construct a Sukkah on the roof of his house. The

Holy One Blessed is He pierces them with the sun in the Tammuz season. And each and every one kicks his Sukkah and leaves.

The Talmud questions G-d's tactic in proving the disloyalty of the Nations to the performance of a Mitzvah. Even a Jew would be exempt from dwelling in a Sukkah under these circumstances of extreme heat since the rule is that when one is in distress he is exempted from the Sukkah. The Talmud answers that although a Jew would be compelled to leave the Sukkah he would not kick it on the way out.

The Four Questions

Many questions have been asked about this enigmatic story in the Talmud.

First, why did G-d choose the Mitzvah of Sukkah specifically as a test of the Nations' desire to fulfill the commandments?

The Talmud seems to address this question by referring to the Sukkah as an "easy Mitzvah" because it doesn't involve a significant monetary cost. But there are many other Mitzvos which do not involve major expense. Why this Mitzvah specifically?

Second, why did G-d then make it difficult for them to observe the Mitzvah of Sukkah? Certainly it was G-d's way

of demonstrating that they were not serious about serving Him. But, the fact that G-d made the performance of this “easy” Mitzvah difficult seems to undermine the initial emphasis that this was an easy Mitzvah. It turned out not to be so easy.

Third, why did G-d cause them to leave the Sukkah as a result of the extreme heat? G-d could have poured rain down on their Sukkos, which would have yielded the same result.

Fourth, why did they build the Sukkos on their rooftops?

Rashi explains that in those days roofs were flat and people used roofs for many of their needs.

However while this explains how it was possible to build a Sukkah on a rooftop, it does not explain why they chose the rooftops instead of their yards. And, more importantly, why were the Talmudic authors interested in reporting such an inconsequential aspect of the story?

Totality!

One way of approaching this matter is to reflect that the Mitzvah of Sukkah was chosen specifically because, despite its simplicity, it is one Mitzvah that comprises all the other Mitzvos, both subjectively and objectively.

From the perspective of the person who fulfills this Mitzvah, the Sukkah is unique. When we perform this Mitzvah it encompasses the totality of the person. One enters the Sukkah wearing his clothing and his boots. Even the Mikveh, which requires full immersion, does not involve one's clothing. The Sukkah is the sole Mitzvah that involves the totality of the person and encompasses all of one's routine activities such as eating and sleeping.

Sukkah = 248

The word Sukkah, when spelled phonetically [i.e., when we take each letter and spell it as it is sounded] adds up to 248, which is the number of positive commandments in the Torah. [There are a total of 613 commandments in the Torah of which 248 are prescriptive, the do's, whereas the other 365 are proscriptive commandments, the don'ts.]

Another fascinating connection between the Sukkah and the number 248 has been stated by the famous Chassidic Masters, Rabbi Chaim of Tzanz and Rabbi Avraham of Sochotchov:

The minimum dimension of a Sukkah (in terms of Biblical law) is that it must have at least two walls, each consisting of 7 by 10 *tefachim* (handbreadths-about 3 to 4 inches). A third wall must be at least one handbreadth by 10. If we add the *schach* (the covering of branches), which is 7x7 it

amounts to an additional 49 handbreadths. If we add on the floor space it gives us another 49 handbreadths. When we add up all these dimensions, $70+70+10+49+49$, they equal 248!

Another connection of the Sukkah to the number 248 is in the Talmud's association of the 248 Mitzvos to the 248 organs of the human body. When we enter the Sukkah we enter with all of our limbs and organs, which symbolize all of the positive Mitzvos. Here we see how the subjective nature of the Sukkah (entering with all of our 248 organs) matches the Sukkah which represents the 248 commandments.

Entering G-d's Domain

Conceptually, each and every Mitzvah enables us to enter into G-d's Sukkah, i.e., G-d's abode, one Mitzvah at a time. However, a single Mitzvah gets us only part way into the Divine Sukkah. The Mitzvah of dwelling in a Sukkah allows us to enter G-d's Sukkah completely.

We can now understand why G-d will test the Nations with the Mitzvah of Sukkah. When G-d tests these clamoring protesters he chooses to give them a Mitzvah that comprises all the other Mitzvos. If they were to pass this test they would be ready for all of the commandments. Otherwise, even fulfilling one Mitzvah would still not

entitle them to the same reward the Jewish people are destined to receive for observance of all the Mitzvos.

On a deeper level, one may suggest that by giving them the one Mitzvah that contains all of the Mitzvos, G-d would expose them to incredible spiritual energy.

This then is the deeper significance of building the Sukkah on their rooftops. The roof is the closest part of one's home to the rays of the sun. These test Sukkos will not be ordinary. The object of having the Nations perform this Mitzvah is to expose them to the powerful spiritual G-dly energy that is compared to the sun.

Contrary to the surface understanding of the story, the test here is not if they will respect the Mitzvah or be willing to do it, rather, the test is whether they have the spiritual stamina to absorb the lofty warmth and heat of the cumulative power of 248 Mitzvos. G-d would not test them merely to see how faithful they would be. It will be G-d's way of showing them they did not have the capacity to absorb the spiritual reward for all the Mitzvos.

The Reward of a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah

This is based on a deeper understanding of the reward for our observance of Mitzvos. Understood conventionally, a reward is something received in return for doing something

meritorious. The true meaning of reward for a Mitzvah, however, is that the reward is the Mitzvah itself. Each Mitzvah generates a measure of G-dly light, which, when experienced fully, is the greatest form of bliss and pleasure.

In the pre-Messianic Age most of us cannot experience this bliss. The coarseness of the body and Animal Soul is an impediment to this feeling.. Moreover, if every Mitzvah produced an immediate blissful state beyond any delight we can imagine, it would be virtually impossible to resist doing every Mitzvah possible.

Every Mitzvah we perform has a gradual impact on our bodies and souls that prepares us for the Final Redemption by conditioning us to absorb the powerful blissful energy that we generated by our own Mitzvos.

This thought is based on the statement of the Talmud (*Nedarim* 8b): “G-d will take the sun out of its sheath; the righteous will be healed by it, whereas the wicked will be punished by it.” In the Messianic Age, the world will experience a spiritual form of “Global Warming.”

The sun’s effect on the wicked is not simply punishment, but a direct consequence of their sins. One who commits a transgression becomes resistant to the G-dly energy generated by a Mitzvah. As a result they will be ill prepared to tolerate and enjoy the incredible delight and magnitude of G-dly light that will be generated when G-d removes the

sheath that has obscured the effects of the Mitzvos in the present day and age.

This then also explains the meaning of the phrase that G-d “pierces them with the sun.” This image is meant to suggest that they will be unable to tolerate the Divine radiance generated by the all-encompassing Mitzvah of Sukkah.

One cannot just show up for the Messianic Age, unprepared by the performance of Mitzvos, and expect to bask in the G-dly light. Even if they are able to generate light in the Messianic Age, they will not be able to reap the full benefits because they will be unable to safely and comfortably absorb such intense light.

As the Talmud (in the context of their demand for reward in the future), explains the verse: “You shall keep the commandments... which I command you today to do them”: “Today [in the pre-Messianic Age] was made to do them, and not tomorrow [the Messianic Age]. Today was to do them, and today was not for receiving reward.”

The Mitzvos (and particularly the Mitzvah of Sukkah) we do today serve a dual function: They generate G-dly light and they refine and shield us so that we are capable of being exposed to the G-dly radiance and fully equipped to enter into G-d's overarching Sukkah.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

WE'LL BUILD THIS FOURTH WALL AND WE'VE ALL PAID FOR IT!

The Midrash explains that the Torah begins with the letter *beis* to convey the message that the creation of the world is similar to the *beis*: it is contained on three sides, leaving the fourth side open.

Knowing from the very outset that the world is incomplete because of the open side helps us understand the existence of evil. G-d allowed it to exist to challenge us, as G-d's partners in creation, to complete the fourth wall and eliminate evil.

This fourth wall is being constructed by every Mitzvah we do bringing us one step closer to the ultimate Redemption; to the four-walled world.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

**WE'LL BUILD THIS FOURTH WALL AND WE'VE ALL
PAID FOR IT!**

Three Models of the Sukkah

The Festival of Sukkos is so called because of its central Mitzvah: to dwell in a Sukkah for seven days.

The proper construction of a Sukkah requires that it be covered with branches and have, by Biblical standards, minimally two complete walls and a third partial wall (even one only a handbreadth wide will do). Rabbinical law, however, required three complete walls, and recent Jewish custom has many adding on a totally optional fourth wall.

Moreover, one of the hymns that some congregations recite on the Holiday of Sukkos mentions a four walled Sukkah.

The question has been asked if Biblical and rabbinic law require only three walls, why has the custom changed to seek the addition of a fourth wall, and why does the hymn talk about the fourth optional wall as if it were common practice?

Puzzling Midrash Linking Job with a Sukkah!

A related question concerning the walls of the Sukkah involves a puzzling Midrash taken from the genre of Midrashic literature known as Midrash Peliah, material that was deliberately written in the most cryptic style. Presumably it was written this way to stimulate the minds of students to search for hidden messages.

“When Job was afflicted with suffering and he said, ‘Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him.’

Said G-d to him, ‘Why did you sit in a Sukkah of three walls?’”

How was the fact of Job building a Sukkah with three walls an explanation for his suffering?

The North Side: Cold and Hostile

The following explanation of this anomaly is based partly on the Talmudic commentary *Ein Eliyahu*, which refers us to a passage in the Talmud (Bava Basra) and related Midrash that describes the world, allegorically, as consisting of four sides with walls erected on only three sides. The north side was left open so that G-d could challenge us to block it off as well.

We are taught that the fourth wall was left open to the negative forces in our world. This is consistent with the Biblical prophecy that “evil will come forth from the north.” One of the names for a serpent, the symbol of evil, is *tzifoni*-the north one. The North is dark, frigid and foreboding. It symbolizes the icy indifference some may have towards anything G-dly and holy.

The word *tzafon* can also be translated as “concealed.” It refers to the insidious and deceptive forms that evil may take to seduce its unsuspecting victim.

It is through the unprotected north side that evil has entered into the world and spread its undesirable influence to all four corners of the earth.

So, why did G-d leave this direction unprotected?

The answer is that this was to give **us** a challenge; we should be the ones to close off the north side, to shut out evil, revealed or hidden. This would make the world a “four-walled” existence; the elusive utopia that we have been praying for from the beginning of time.

Torah Begins with the Letter Beis

This idea is also seen in the Midrash as the reason the Torah begins with the letter *beis*. The Midrash asks:

shouldn't the Torah have begun with the letter, *alef*, the first letter of the alphabet?

The Midrash answers that the shape of the letter *beis* conveys the message that the creation of the world is similar to the *beis*: it is contained on three sides, leaving the fourth side open.

Knowing from the very outset that the world is incomplete because of the open side helps us understand the existence of evil. G-d allowed it to exist to challenge us, as G-d's partners in creation, to complete the fourth wall and eliminate evil.

This fourth wall is being constructed by all those who struggle with evil and overcome it. Every Mitzvah we do adds another brick to this wall and whenever we avoid transgression it fortifies the wall, bringing us one step closer to the ultimate Redemption; to the four-walled world.

The Sukkah: A Micro World

This then is the rationale for the four walls of the Sukkah.

The Sukkah is a model for the entire world.

Like the world we inhabit, the Sukkah is G-d's model for the world; a world surrounded by walls that protect it and provide it with a spiritual cover.

At Sinai, when G-d gave us the Torah and commanded us to dwell in the Sukkah the Divine influence had just begun to envelop the world.

It could be said that at that time the world was shaped like the letter *hei*, which is open on two sides. It is open on the bottom, which the Talmud states is indicative of the pitfalls one can sink into because of the existence of so many negative influences in the world. In addition, another one of its walls was incomplete. G-d was waiting for our input to complete the construction of that wall.

With the passage of time and generations of holiness, which grows by every Mitzvah performed, the third wall was also made whole. The rabbis, who were attuned to the changed spiritual atmosphere, reflected that sensitivity by requiring us to construct our Sukkos with three walls to reflect the new spiritual reality.

The fourth wall has been the most difficult one to build. We have had to go through a 2,000 year odyssey of exile and suffering to accumulate the Mitzvos-bricks necessary to produce a formidable stockpile of construction material. Adding to the sheer quantity of Mitzvos that we've collected is the pain and suffering we have endured and the *Mesiras Nefesh*, the unparalleled and unprecedented self-sacrifice we exhibited. All this had the effect of making the fourth wall longer, stronger and higher.

Three Letters: *Hei*, *Beis* and *Mem*

Upon reflection, these three models of the Sukkah and the three stages of history they represent are summed up by three letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

First is the letter *hei*, which our Sages tell us G-d used to create this physical world. As explained, this reflects the world's genesis when humans had yet to contribute to a third wall.

With the introduction of the Torah, the **potential** for the third complete wall emerged. The Torah's description of creation begins with the letter *beis*, which, as we have noted above, is closed on three sides.

The Talmud, which is the embodiment of the Oral Torah, **concludes** with the word Shalom, the last letter of which is a final *mem*, closed on all four sides and the ultimate expression of the future four-walled world.

G-d's Response to Job

With the association between a four-walled Sukkah and a four-walled world we can now understand why G-d, as recorded in Midrash, responded to Job's suffering by saying, "Why did you build a Sukkah of three walls?"

G-d was saying don't you realize that this world is not a finished piece of work? I have deliberately left one

direction open to allow evil to enter and cause pain and suffering. In Job's case it was the Satan, G-d's angel, who turned G-d against Job. The Satan is just one name for the forces of evil that are both internal and external to us. G-d allowed this angel to enter through the "north side," which He deliberately left open.

The Future of the Four Walls is Now!

However, in the Messianic Age, that will change. The fourth wall, which we have been building for the last 2,000 years, will finally be complete and as the prophet predicts, "the spirit of impurity I will remove from the earth."

This explains why the recent custom has been to construct four-walled Sukkos. Since we are so close to the Messianic Age we build the Sukkah the way it will be in the near future.

Moreover, as the Rebbe told us repeatedly, the Redemption is actually right in front of us and is ours for the taking; we can now begin to enjoy a taste and sample of, and, indeed, the beginning of that glorious four-walled Sukkah experience of the future.

Conclusion of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah

By Divine providence, during this Festival of Sukkos, Jews the world over will be completing another annual study cycle of Maimonides' magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah. It is no coincidence that the very last letter of this work is also the Mem. Maimonides ends the Mishneh Torah with his description of the Messianic age as the time when we will be deluged in the sea of G-d's knowledge. It is therefore so appropriate that the last letter, which sums up all that was said earlier, is the final letter *mem* symbolizing a perfect world, surround by four walls.

It is also interesting that the Kabbalists teach us that the shape of a Mikveh, the pool of water used for spiritual purification, should be rectangular like the final letter *mem*. The Mikveh, like the four walled Sukkah, is suggestive of the future world of purity and holiness, when, as the prophet Isaiah states (quoted by Maimonides in his concluding words): "The entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the water covers the seabed."

Nothing happens by coincidence, certainly not when it involves Torah knowledge. The Hebrew words for conclusion-*siyum*, and seal-*chosem* both end with a final *mem*. This indicates that the four-walled state will be the end and the seal of the world. The four-walled state will make the world permanently the way G-d envisioned it at

the outset and it will exhibit G-d's seal-imprimatur for all to see.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE FOUR EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL LIGHTS

The Sukkah is the symbol of the future Messianic Age.
Its four walls are expressive of four agents that brings us to
the period of Redemption.

They are Teshuvah, Tefilah, Tzedakah and Torah.
Hence the ideal four wall configuration construction of the
Sukkah alludes to these four agents of Redemption.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE FOUR EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL LIGHTS

Three Configurations

The Holiday of Sukkos is so called because of its central Mitzvah of dwelling in a Sukkah for seven days.

A Sukkah has three configurations.

The Biblical obligation requires that the Sukkah consist of, at least, two complete walls and one incomplete one.

Rabbinical legislation requires that we have three complete walls.

Jewish custom, however, is to build a Sukkah with four walls.

The Shaloh (the classic work by Rabbi Yeshayahu Hurwitz, a 17th century Sage) writes that these three configurations are hinted in the word Sukkah, which consists of 3 letters *Samach*, *chof* and *hei*.

The *Samach*, is totally enclosed like the four walled Sukkah.

The *chof* is enclosed on three sides and open on one side.

The *hei*, has two whole lines and a fragment of a third line. Shaloh explains that a Jew ideally has four powerful “walls.” They are: Teshuvah (repentance, or more accurately: return, Tefilah-prayer, tzedakah-charity, and Torah.

But not everybody has the mental capacity to study Torah. For these individuals they have a three walled Sukkah, Teshuvah, Tefilah and Tzedakah.

But what about simple and poor Jews who lack the knowledge of Torah and cannot really make any significant contributions to Tzedakah? They have to be content with a two walled Sukkah consisting of Teshuvah and Tefilah, and a nominal third wall, i.e., a small amount of Tzedakah because even the poor have to give something.

The Sukkah of the Future

The Sukkah is seen in Midrashic literature based on Biblical references, as the symbol of the future Messianic Age. It follows then that these four walls are expressive of four agents that brings us to the period of Redemption.

Our Sages tell us that when the Jewish people will do Teshuvah they will be redeemed.

One of the ways we hasten the Redemption is by prayer. Indeed our prayers are replete with requests and heartfelt pleas for Moshiach.

Our Sages also declare that Tzedakah hastens the Redemption. Just as we care for others, G-d will show His love for us and perform the ultimate charitable act by redeeming us from Galus-captivity.

Torah study, particularly the laws of Torah and its mystical teachings, are also seen by our Sages as agents of Redemption.

Hence the construction of the Sukkah, the ideal four wall configuration, alludes to the four agents of Redemption.

Repairing the Breaches

When we survey the criteria for Moshiach, enumerated by Maimonides, he includes “reinforcing the breaches [of Torah observance].” The term “breaches” implies there is a wall that is showing some cracks. Moshiach’s role is to repair those breaches and ensure that all four walls are intact. Moshiach, as any Jewish leader in the past, leads by example, and we too follow in his way of reinforcing the breaches in the walls of Judaism.

Moshiach works to strengthen Judaism specifically in these four areas of Teshuvah, Tefilah-prayer, Tzedakah-charity, and Torah. Moshiach focuses on getting all of the Jewish people to return to the path of Torah and to the core of their souls. Moshiach arouses us to be fed up with Galus

and to desire and therefore pray incessantly for the Redemption. Moshiach stresses the importance of connecting every event in our lives with Tzedakah. And Moshiach reveals new dimensions and vistas in Torah knowledge and demands of us to do the same.

The Four Walls and the Four Species

During the Holiday of Sukkos we are commanded to take four species of plants, hold them and wave them in all six directions.

The fact that there are ideally four walls to a Sukkah and we are to take the Four Species is not a coincidence. It is logical to assume that they parallel each other.

The Midrash explains that the Lulav, which comes from a date palm, is suggestive of Torah study, because dates have a sweet taste symbolizing the sweet taste of Torah.

The Esrog, which the Midrash states resembles the heart, is suggestive of prayer, which the Talmud refers to as “service of the **heart**.”

The myrtles which are blessed with a good fragrance, the Midrash says, are symbolic of one’s good deeds, most specifically Tzedakah.

The poor willow, which has neither taste nor fragrance, is said to represent the Jew who has no knowledge and no

good deeds to speak of. He or she is the person who has hit rock bottom. The “willow Jew” wants to do Teshuvah and be attached to the Lulav, the symbol of the Torah scholar and spiritual leader.

Why Two Sets of Four?

One might ask, why the need for two sets of four; the four walls of the Sukkah and the four species?

We observe the Mitzvah of Sukkah by entering in it and allowing it to surround and encompass us. The Four Species, by contrast, we take into our hands, wave it in all directions and then literally bring it close to our hearts.

The physical ways of observing these two Mitzvos reflect their diverse spiritual effects, which relate to two necessary sources of influence in our lives.

The Sukkah which surrounds us represents enveloping ourselves in aspects of holiness that are above and beyond us. When something surrounds us it means that we are taken over by a force greater than ourselves.

Translated into simple terms this means that we should always seek out inspiration from levels, people and experiences that are higher than ourselves and bask in their light. The Sukkah generates an encompassing Divine aura into those who enter into it.

Moreover, the Kabbalists reveal that the Cloud of Incense that fills the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur “converts” into the *schach*-covering of our Sukkos. On Sukkos we inter into an ethereal existence, even “with our boots” as a famous Chassidic saying puts it. Just being in this atmosphere inspires and elevates us.

There is however a second aspect of the Holiday of Sukkos where we take the encompassing, other-worldly experience and inspiration and bring it close to our heart. When we take the Four Species, wave them and then bring them physically to our heart we thereby mimic a spiritual dynamic where the peripheral experience of holiness of the Sukkah penetrates into our hearts.

So while the four walled Sukkah and the Four Species may have something in common, as discussed earlier, they serve two interdependent functions. The Sukkah elevates us to a higher state of consciousness, while the Four Species allow us to internalize it.

Don't Place the *Schach* Too High

However, when we deal with the higher consciousness generated by the Sukkah, there can be an impediment if we come into the Sukkah with the wrong attitude. Sometimes we don't feel that we can relate to other-worldly or more spiritual influences.

To allay this concern the Mishnah states that “*schach* of a Sukkah placed higher than 20 cubits is invalid.” One of the reasons for this is that the Torah wants us to “know that we are sitting in a Sukkah.” Something placed that high will not be noticed.

The message this law conveys is that if one places the *schach* too high he or she is insinuating that the message the Sukkah is beyond our reach.

There is a tendency for people to dismiss certain challenges and goals in two opposite ways.

Some will say “it is beneath my station in life to deal with petty matters. I am better and higher than that.” Our egos cause us to take ourselves too seriously. We then fail to recognize that we can sometimes go low and need to deal with issues that we think are the provenance of others.

However, there is an opposite response to some of our challenges which appears to come from humility. In this mode the person says, “How can I be expected to reach that lofty perch, when I know how limited and insignificant I am. That challenge is for greater people than me.”

Without judging that individual’s humility, the message of the Sukkah serves as a powerful rejoinder to that mindset. The Sukkah with its lofty *schach* perched atop its four walls is both above us but within eyesight and within reach.

Once we place the *schach* beyond 20 cubits, which symbolizes that it is in another elusive sphere, we miss the whole idea of the Sukkah. The Sukkah allows us to bask in and enjoy G-d's sublime, encompassing and protective power. Our entering into the Sukkah has been compared to G-d taking us into His embrace after we dedicated ourselves to Him in the preceding days of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.

The Parallel to Moshiach

The Sukkah and Four Species complement each other. While we enjoy being in G-d's embrace we take some of that love and inspiration and bring it into our hearts; internalize it by taking the Four Species and bringing them close to our heart.

The same attitude can be found with regard to Moshiach. Some feel that it is a concept difficult to relate to. It is metaphorically speaking higher than "20 cubits;" it is elusive. Some will say, "let it happen when it happens, but it is not something to which we can relate."

The message of the Sukkah, the symbol of the Messianic future, is that it is indeed accessible to us not only in terms of time. In addition, we can all bask now in its light by studying the Torah's teachings about the Messianic Age, praying for it, giving tzedakah and doing Teshuvah.

But, as with the Festival of Sukkos, we cannot be content our exposure to Messianic ideals, we must also bring them closer to our hearts.

This Festival of Sukkos let us enjoy both the encompassing and internalizing light of G-d in the Third Bais Hamikdash with the imminent true and complete Redemption through Moshiach.