

The Wedding Preparation A Personal Yom Kippur

The holiest day of the year is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is a fast day on which each person reviews in depth all of his past actions.

Since on the day of one's wedding God forgives the bride and groom of all of their previous transgressions, it is seen as a private Yom Kippur for the couple.

They fast until the ceremony; add Yom Kippur confessions to their afternoon prayers; recite the book of Psalms, asking for forgiveness for the wrongdoing of their youth, committed knowingly or unknowingly, before starting their new life together.

Previously each had been but a half person, now with the hour of marriage, they resume their original wholeness, a new and pure soul is again to be theirs.

Standing under the chuppah their life destiny is set, all past reckoning erased.

Start

In Jewish thought Israel was married to G-d under the chuppah of cloud on Mount Sinai and the Torah given was the teaching on how the marriage relationship was to be conducted.

Thinking now from a wedding perspective; there is a build up through the month of Elul to a high point plateau on Feast of Trumpets. The trumpet is sounded each morning throughout Elul (29 days) with a great sounding on the next day, the 1st of Tishrei (1 day) Greeting on this day L'Shana Tova Tika Tevu Ve Tehatemu. May your name be written in the Book of Life, and your balance sheet signed. (may your name be on the guest list)

From the Feast of Trumpets another build up of soul searching (9 days) until Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. (1 day) (Putting things right with the relatives and family)

From the Day of Atonement another period of expectation until Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. A very busy time of last minute preparations, getting the Sukkah (the booth) erected, and decorations for it, buying the lulav, nothing but the best.

Then there is the 7 days of the festival followed on the 8th day with the final high point of Simchat Torah. *Shemini Atzeret.*

Every morning during Elul the shofar is sounded. The purpose is to wake people up for what is ahead.

On the first day of the seventh month the last trumpet is sounded.

It is the feast of trumpets.

One of the names of the feast of trumpets is "The wedding of the Messiah".

The month of Elul is a month of preparation for the wedding feast of Messiah.

Elul is the month of preparation to meet the King and the Bridegroom.

One of the interpretations of the Hebrew name Elul is that it stands for

aglam A'ni L'dodi, V'dodi L'I "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" SS 6:3

The Sound of the Shofar

Is a wakeup call to repent and to draw near to God. It is a reminder of the substitute sacrifice, the lamb caught in a thicket that Abraham saw, which saved the life of Isaac *by taking his place*

By taking his place.

There are four different sounds.

Tekiah - the long straight shofar blast. It is the sound of a king's coronation, to proclaim

That God is King.

Shevarim - three medium wavering blasts - is the sobbing cry of a heart - yearning to connect. Crying out to God from the depths of the soul.

Teruah - ten short blasts in quick succession, reminds us of an alarm clock, arousing us.

Tekiah Gedolah - the great tekiah a single unbroken blast held as long as possible.

THE BLOWING OF THE SHOFAR

Though the recounting of God's judgment is an emotional moment, it is not at all the central point of the service. This exalted moment comes when the shofar is sounded, calling the people to repentance.

on Rosh Hashanah

So central is this moment to Rosh Hashanah that the rabbis even speculated that the very redemption of Israel would come through the ram's horn: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: 'Your children are destined to be caught by the nations and entangled in troubles . . . but they will ultimately be redeemed through the horns of the ram'" (Leviticus Rabbah 29:10).

As with many other significant Jewish customs, there were many interpretations of the blowing of the shofar; so many, in fact, that in the ninth century, Saadia Gaon, a leading Babylonian rabbi and scholar, codified the ten main reasons it is blown on the feast of Trumpets:

1. Trumpets are sounded at a coronation and God is hailed as King on this day.
2. The shofar heralds the beginning of a penitential season (from Rosh Hashanah to the Day of Atonement).
3. The Torah was given on Sinai accompanied by blasts of the shofar.
4. The prophets compare their message to the sound of the shofar.
5. The conquering armies that destroyed the Temple sounded trumpet blasts.
6. The ram was substituted for Isaac.
7. The prophet asks: "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people tremble?" (Amos 3:6).
8. The prophet Zephaniah speaks of the great "day of the Lord" (Judgment Day) as a "day of trumpet and battle cry" (Zephaniah 1:14, 16).
9. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the great shofar which will herald the messianic age (Isaiah 27:13).
10. The shofar will be sounded at the resurrection.

The blowing of the shofar is the rallying call of Rosh Hashanah. Because it is not an easy instrument to master, a Jewish congregation often goes to great lengths to locate an accomplished expert, known as a *Ba'al Tekiah*, to sound the trumpet on Rosh Hashanah.

The Wedding Preparation

A Personal Yom Kippur

The holiest day of the year is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is a fast day on which each person reviews in depth all of his past actions.

Since on the day of one's wedding God forgives the bride and groom of all of their previous transgressions, it is seen as a private Yom Kippur for the couple.

They fast until the ceremony; add Yom Kippur confessions to their afternoon prayers; recite the book of Psalms, asking for forgiveness for the wrongdoing of their youth, committed knowingly or unknowingly, before starting their new life together.

Previously each had been but a half person, now with the hour of marriage, they resume their original wholeness, a new and pure soul is again to be theirs.

Standing under the chuppah their life destiny is set, all past reckoning erased.

Notes on the Jewish Wedding
Rabbi Mordechai Becher

The next stage is known as the Chuppah or canopy. The chuppah is a decorated piece of cloth held aloft as a symbolic home for the new couple. It is usually held outside, under the stars, as a sign of the blessing given by G-d to the patriarch Abraham, that his children shall be "as the stars of the heavens." The groom is accompanied to the chuppah by his parents, and usually wears a white robe known as a kittel, to indicate the fact that for the bride and groom, life is starting again with a clean white slate, since they are uniting to become a new entity without past sins.

While the bride comes to the chuppah with her parents, a cantor sings a selection from the Song of Songs, and the groom prays that his unmarried friends find their true partners in life. When the bride arrives at the chuppah she circles the groom 7 times with her mother and future mother-in law, while the groom continues to pray. This symbolises the idea of the woman being a protective, surrounding light of the household, that illuminates it with understanding and love from within and protects it from harm from outside.

The number 7 parallels the seven days of creation, and symbolises the fact that the bride and groom are about to create their own new world together.

Jer 31:22
For the Lord
has created a
new thing in
the earth. A
woman shall encompass
a man (JPS Cont)

The chuppah and the sukkah are both temporary, outside, able to see the stars, and symbolic of a dwelling.

Number 7: 7th month, 7 days of sukkot, and 7 circling's of the groom.

Earth revolves 7 times in 1 week.

and, as the Mishna says, "with other instruments of music without number" (Sukkah 5:4). The Levitical musicians stood upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the women's court, which, according to the Mishna, corresponded with the fifteen songs of ascent in the psalms (Psalms 120-134). Not only did they play instruments with fervor, but the Levitical choir stood chanting and singing as the leaders of Israel danced. Jerusalem glistened like a diamond that night, and her light could be seen from afar.

The festivities continued long into the night. Two priests stood at the Upper Gate (Nicanor Gate), which led down from the Israelites' court to the court of the women, and held trumpets in their hands. They waited for the signal—a cock's crow at dawn. Then they sounded a prolonged blast, a quavering note, and another prolonged blast of the shofar. They then held their trumpets without sound and proceeded to the tenth step, where they sounded another prolonged blast, a quavering note, and a prolonged blast. Finally, when they reached the court of the women they blew another prolonged blast, quavering note, and prolonged blast. The momentum intensified, and the two priests began blowing prolonged blasts until they reached the gate that led to the east (the Beautiful Gate). Once through the gate with a multitude of worshipers, they turned their faces towards the west, facing the sanctuary in the Temple. With the sun rising and the light of the candelabra paling, they chanted an ancient prayer: "Our ancestors, when they were in this place, turned with their backs unto the Temple and their faces towards the east and they prostrated themselves eastward toward the sun, but as for us our eyes are turned to the eternal." It was a magnificent ceremony filled with beauty and symbolism. The light represented the Shekinah glory that once filled the Temple.⁵

5. Edersheim, p. 285.

The light.

Not about a wedding

THE ILLUMINATION OF THE TEMPLE

Another ceremony of the feast of ^{Sukkot} Tabernacles, the illumination of the Temple, also had its source in Jewish tradition.

According to the Mishna, at the end of the first day of Tabernacles, the priests and Levites went down to the court of the women. Four enormous golden candlesticks were set up in the court (fifty cubits high) with four golden bowls placed upon them and four ladders resting against each. Four youths of priestly descent stood at the top of the ladders holding ten-gallon pitchers filled with pure oil, which they poured into each bowl (Sukkah 5:2).

The priests and Levites used their own worn-out liturgical clothing for wicks. The light emanating from the four candelabra was so bright that the Mishna says, "There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light at the libation water-well ceremony" (Sukkah 5:3).

The mood was festive. Pious men, members of the Sanhedrin, and heads of the different religious schools would dance well into the night holding burning torches and singing songs of praise to God. The Levitical musicians played spirited music with harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets,

Once the sukkah itself is erected, it is time for the smaller children to join the project. They are excited to do their part in fulfilling the tradition of beautifying the sukkah. For if there is one thing the Jewish people agree on regarding the festival of Sukkot, it is that the mere building of the sukkah booth is never considered enough. The sukkah must be made as beautiful as it can be. The rabbis say that the verse "This is my God, and I will praise Him" (Exodus 15:2) is really speaking about the booths of Sukkot, and therefore it is a duty to "make a beautiful sukkah in His honor" (Shabbat 133b).

This glad duty is not left without rabbinic advice—the Talmud contains many discussions on how to beautify the festival booths, and Jewish communities around the world

THE WAVING OF THE LULAV

Technically, the lulav itself is the single palm branch that occupies the central position in the arrangement. It has a holderlike bottom (made from its own leaves), with the two willow branches to its left and the three myrtle branches to its right. This cluster is held in the right hand, and the etrog, or citron, is held in the left. These are taken and waved in the synagogue on the morning of each of the seven days of Sukkot (except on the Sabbath). This waving takes place at specific points in the liturgy, while a blessing is said: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us with Thy commandments and has commanded us concerning the waving of the lulav."

To wave the lulav properly, one must stand facing east, shake the cluster slowly and deliberately three times, and repeat the motion to the south, to the west, to the north, above one's head, and down towards the floor. Tradition gives the following meaning of this elaborate ritual: "The four directions of the compass remind us of God, to whom the four directions belong, and the lulav is waved up and down in acknowledgment of Him to whom are heaven and earth" (Sukkah 37b).

These wavings serve to arouse joy, thanksgiving, and praise of God at the time of the final fruit harvest.

Every man must have his own lulav. One cannot borrow a lulav to use but may receive it as a gift, even if that gift was given on the condition that it be returned.

So with lulav and etrog firmly in hand, the family goes to the synagogue. After the service, cake, fruit, wine, and other refreshments are provided in the congregational sukkah. But nobody eats much on this night, for each participant can almost taste the feast that lies ahead in his own sukkah booth. After the refreshments, the family rushes home for their own celebration.

Jewish Observance of Sukkot 189

have developed their own embellishments as well. For instance, it is customary in many nations to suspend from the roof the seven species of the land of Israel mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8—wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey—in gratitude for the Lord's bounty.

As time has passed, the festival ornaments have expanded to include tapestries and bright tablecloths to cover the walls and expensive rugs for the floors. Different cultures use items as diverse as eggs, stuffed birds, paper flowers and chains, and ornamental lanterns to further beautify the booths. In fact, an entire folk art of sukkah decoration has developed over the centuries.

SIMCHAT TORAH

Simchat Torah is a separate holiday that falls on the day after Sukkot, the same day as Shemini Atzeret, although outside of Israel it is celebrated for two days. This holiday is mentioned neither in the Scriptures nor in the Talmud. It is likely that it dates back to the post-Talmudic period, but we do not find it being observed until the eleventh century in Western Europe.⁸

The joyfulness of Sukkot is dim compared to the exuberance displayed during the Simchat Torah celebrations, for Simchat Torah means "rejoicing in the law." This festival is one of the most energetic of the Jewish year.

The festival of Simchat Torah commemorates the closing of the annual Torah-reading cycle and the beginning of a new one. Each week in the synagogue, a portion of the five books of Moses is read in a specified order, so that the entire five books are covered during a one-year cycle. Actually, an older tradition that is still practiced by some Jewish cultures is to complete the cycle of Torah-reading in three years instead of one, but among Western Jews the yearly cycle has prevailed. The rabbis say that Israel's adherence to a Torah-reading cycle is a symbol of their

8. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

9. Gaster, p. 99.

loyalty to the Torah and their unconquerable spirit as a people. It is their answer to the command God gave to Joshua: "The Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein."¹⁰

Joy in the festival is a religious duty, but not a difficult one to perform. The principle of joy in relation to fulfilling the law has been little understood and is not often mentioned in theological writings. But in Talmudic and devotional Jewish literature of the Middle Ages, a recurring theme is: "Tremble with joy when thou art about to fulfill a commandment."¹¹

THE EVENING CELEBRATION

On the evening of Simchat Torah, all the Scrolls of the Law except one are paraded around the synagogue seven times, as the children lead the procession singing, waving flags or carrying apples and candles on tall sticks. The congregation sings and dances, both with the Torah and with each other. In fact, some believe it is meritorious to get a little drunk this evening, since drinking improves one's ability to dance and celebrate, but that is not an approved rabbinic practice.

After they have circled the synagogue seven times, they read the last passage in the book of Deuteronomy, and the books are put back in their place for the night. This is the only time the Torah is read in the synagogue at night.

THE NEXT MORNING

The next morning, the family returns to the synagogue where once more the happy parade begins. Seven times,

10. Goodman, p. 118.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

they circle the sanctuary. Then the last portion of Deuteronomy is read again, closing the yearly cycle, but this time it is followed by the first portion of the book of Genesis. Those chosen to recite these two sections are called "bridegrooms"—the Bridegroom of the Law and the Bridegroom of the First Portion. It is considered an honor to be chosen as one of the bridegrooms on Simchat Torah. These are often the most esteemed men in the community, who pledge contributions to charity and have the privilege of inviting their friends to a great feast after the service (Kitzur Shulhan Arukh 138).

Actually, some believe that the entire celebration prescribed for Simchat Torah closely parallels the Jewish wedding service and in fact symbolizes the marriage of Israel to the law. The bridegrooms, for instance, are attended by "bridesmen." The procession around the synagogue resembles the wedding custom of walking seven times around the bride and groom. In some traditions, fruits and nuts are tossed at the bridegrooms while they read, much as they would be at a wedding. It certainly is a fascinating comparison.

Besides the march around the synagogue with flags and apples, besides the fun and merriment of Simchat Torah, there is still one more coveted privilege given to the children on this day. In the synagogue, all the children under thirteen are called up to say the blessings over the reading of the Torah. It is the only time when such youngsters are allowed to do this, and a rare privilege it is. The little ones are covered with large prayer shawls as they recite the prayers together, and then are blessed by the rabbi with Jacob's words to Ephraim and Manasseh, "The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Genesis 48:16).

DISMANTLING THE BOOTH

At the conclusion of Simchat Torah, the family once more sets to work on their booth—this time to dismantle it and perhaps save some portions to use in the following year. But the sad occasion does have its bright point: now the tempting fruits and vegetables can finally be enjoyed, and the family can return to the comfort and warmth of their home. They return, that is, until next year, when this happy holiday beckons them once again to recall God's provision for them in the wilderness so long ago.