

A New Look at the Deep Meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles!

There is far more meaning and deep spiritual significance to the Feast of Tabernacles than many have ever realized! In this article we explore the deeper, hidden meanings to this Festival of God -- the Feast of Sukkoth -- also called the "Feast of Ingathering" -- and the little understood rituals, laws and commandments that were commanded for this annual Holy Festival -- *Ha Hag Adonai* -- "The Feast of the Lord"-- also called *Zeman Simchateinu* -- "the Season of our Joy"! What is "sukkot" all about? What about all the sacrifices? And what is the "lulav" and why is it important? Here is vital new spiritual TRUTH!

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I have been observing the "Feast of Tabernacles" ever since I first proved that the annual holy days of God are still in operation and in force, in our "Christian" age -- since 1958 -- when I observed my first Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy, Texas, as a high school student. Since that time, I have observed well over 40 Feasts. I first learned of the Feast of Tabernacles from Herbert W. Armstrong, from reading his booklet entitled "God's Festivals or Pagan Holidays -- Which?"

In the many sermons I have heard since that time at and regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, the stress was always on the concept that this festival of God portrayed the millennial reign of Christ -- the "Kingdom of God" -- upon the earth. It was looked upon as the "fall harvest" also -- the great end-time harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom.11:26). The concept of why God's people were commanded to "dwell in booths" -- sukkoth -- temporary structures -- during the seven days of the Feast, was never explained, or what such "booths" had to do with the millennial reign of Christ! Nevertheless, we observed the Feast -- enjoyed a plethora of sermons, and feasting, eating in fancy restaurants, travel to exotic locations, and glorious fellowship with God's people. It was always a most enjoyable and enriching experience, something looked forward to every year.

However, in the past few years, as I have studied the festivals of God more closely, I have discovered that the old ideas, concepts, and explanations of the Worldwide Church of God, and its many off-shoots, today, have left much to be desired concerning the meaning, symbolism, and rituals connected with this important Festival of God. Let us go back to the original commandment concerning this festival, and see what has been missed, completely ignored and totally overlooked!

Leviticus 23 -- The Feast

We read in Leviticus 23 concerning the Feast of Tabernacles, the following statements: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the *feast of tabernacles* for seven days unto the LORD. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein" (Lev.23:33-36).

Additional instruction in observing God's festival is given in verses 39-43 of this chapter -- verses which have generally been ignored and overlooked, and never explained. Notice what these verses add to the festival commandment! "Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. *And ye shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall REJOICE before the LORD your God seven days.* And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a *STATUTE FOR EVER in your generations*: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. *Ye shall dwell in booths seven days*; all that are Israelite born shall dwell in booths: *That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD thy God*" (Lev.23:39-43).

In the 30 years I observed the Feast of Tabernacles in the Worldwide Church of God, from 1958 to 1987, we were never told about the command to take boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and willows of the brook, and to use them in rejoicing before the LORD; nor were we told how the Feast of Tabernacles relates to the journey of the Israelites as they came out of Egypt, and dwelt in the wilderness for forty years, living in "booths" or temporary structures, or tent-like portable dwellings. This aspect of the Feast was totally overlooked!

Solomon and the Feast

The next mention of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Scriptures occurs when Solomon dedicated the newly-constructed Temple of God during his reign. The Temple was dedicated in 1004 B.C., exactly 1000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the true living "Temple of God" (John 2:19-21; Eph.2:21-22; 4:15-16). "And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the *feast* in the month Ethanim, which is the *seventh month*" (I Kings 8:2). "And at that time Solomon held a *feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation*, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, *seven days and seven days, even fourteen days.* On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people" (I Kings 8:65-66).

Notice! They enjoyed the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of the seventh month, so much that they kept it for double the commanded time -- fourteen days, instead of just seven! The chronicler explains, "for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the FEAST seven days. And on the three and twentieth day (the day after the "eighth day") of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people" (II Chron.7:8-10).

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Feast

The Feast was also kept in the days of king Hezekiah (II Chron.31:3). Finally, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, we read, "They kept also the Feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (Ezra 3:4).

This observance occurred after the return of many Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Ezra, a righteous scribe of God, gathered the people and read to them from the law of God (Nehemiah 8:1-8) on the first day of Tishri, or the Feast of Trumpets (Ezra 8:2). On the next day, as the people were gathered to learn more of the laws of God, "they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: *for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.* And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the manner" (Neh.8:14-18).

Here again the Feast of Tabernacles is described -- and the statement is made that the festival had not been observed in this manner, with the construction of booths, since the days of Joshua himself! Truly, in the days of Ezra, there was a turning back to observe the laws of God among the people, and much more attention was given to proper and correct observance.

Nevertheless, many of these features of the Feast, as observed in modern times, have also been neglected by thousands of God's people. How many literally build "booths" to sit in, to discuss matters within, to fellowship in? How many use the branches of various kinds of trees to do so? How many take various branches, and wave them before the LORD, in rejoicing and worshipping Him? How important are these things? What do they add to our over-all understanding? How much have we missed, by not observing these things circumspectly, and thoroughly?

Let's begin to understand! Let's begin to get it right!

History and Tradition

Too many people try to look at God's Word, and His commandments, in "isolation" -- without considering at all the historical setting, and the observances and practices of God's people -- the Jews -- and how they have historically and traditionally observed the annual holy days. Many have dismissed anything and everything "Jewish" simply because the Jews rejected the Messiah and did not accept Christ as the Saviour.

Yet, Jesus Himself plainly said, "Salvation is of the JEWS" (John 4:22). The apostle Paul explained in simple terms, and clear language, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that *unto THEM were committed the ORACLES of God*. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid" (Rom.3:1-4).

The Jews as a people, even though most of them have never recognized Jesus Christ as the Messiah -- nevertheless, they have preserved not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also many important historical writings, commentaries, and religious works, relating to the Bible, and its observances and ordinances -- such as the *Midrash*, the *Mishnah*, and the *Talmud*. Therefore, when it comes to gaining insight and understanding of the Festivals of God, who better to turn to than the Jews, who have been observing them for centuries -- and millennia? Here is a vital storehouse of knowledge which the vast majority of Christians, including festival observers, have totally ignored!

The apostle Paul was himself a Jew. Did he disparage and denigrate the knowledge of the Jews, when it came to the laws of God? Not at all! In fact, Paul himself declared of the Jews, "Who are Israelites; to who pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom.9:4). Paul himself even "boasted" -- and claimed, under divine inspiration of God -- "I am a man verily which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of *Gamaliel*, and taught according to the perfect manner of the LAW of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3). Paul had high respect for the Jewish laws and knowledge of God. He did not reject all the teachings and ramifications of Judaism -- not at all.

In fact, Paul even boasted, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcized the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; *as touching the law, a Pharisee . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, BLAMELESS*" (Phil.3:4-6).

Clearly, there is much we can learn from our Jewish brethren -- even those who are at this moment still estranged from Christ!

What do Jewish sources tell us relating to the Feast of Tabernacles? Let's take a careful and probative look, and examine the subject. In ignoring Jewish sources, we have missed out on many profound truths about this Feast, and its Christian interpretation and significance!

A New Look at Sukkoth

The Feast of Tabernacles came to be so important in the ancient Jewish community, that it was known as "the feast of the Lord," and was even called "*the feast*." The Hebrew word *hag* translated "feast" literally means "to dance or to be joyous," and comes from a root meaning "to dance in a circle, i.e., to march in a sacred procession, to observe a festival, by implication, *to be giddy*: celebrate, dance . . . reel to and fro" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, #2287).

This final harvest celebration, coming on the heels of the fall harvest, was a special time of joy for the Israelites. The rabbis gave it the name, *Zeman Simhatenu*, which means "the season of

our joy." It was a high point in the year for all the people of Israel. That is why it was called "*the feast!*"

Say Mitch and Zhava Glaser in *The Fall Feasts of Israel*,

"If the theme of Rosh Hashana is repentance, and the theme of Yom Kippur is redemption, then most naturally the theme of Sukkot is rejoicing in God's forgiveness. The gathering of the year's final harvest was a confirmation of God's blessing upon the Jewish people for their obedience to His law. Salvation and obedience to God always leads to joy" (p.162).

In the book *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*, we read:

"*Khag HaAsif* (Festival of Ingathering) was to take place once the produce of the vineyards and product of the threshing rooms was collected (Exo.23:14-17; 34:22). Beginning on the fifteenth of the seventh month, this *Khag Adonai* (Festival of God) would last seven days, the first a sacred occasion when no work was to be done. The Israelites were to take the 'product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook' (later called the four species) and rejoice with them before God.

"Then another dimension was added as a 'law for all time.' For the duration of the festival the Israelites were to live in booths (*sukkot*) 'so that future generations will know that I made the Israelite people live in *sukkot* when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 23:39-43)" (*Celebrate!*, by Lesli Koppelman Ross, p.211).

This source continues, defining the Festival:

"The specifics of the Jewish harvest festival were designed to protect the Israelites from the pagan influences they would encounter once they entered Canaan. While heathens worshipped nature itself, the Jews were to worship the Creator and Renewer of nature. While the pagans celebrated with excess and debauchery, the Israelite pilgrims were to focus on the moral significance of the festivities.

"The purpose of rejoicing was not sensual abandon but to honor and thank God for His blessings, spread good fortune, and act with sensitivity" (p.212).

During the time of the second Temple, festival goers would gather in Jerusalem, which was festive in garlands of olive, palm, and willow branches, fragrant with fruits and flowers. The people would participate in public prayers, sing hymns, and watch or join in with religious processions at the Temple. At this time, the "four species" of foilage, specified in Leviticus 23, would be used to celebrate and rejoice before the Lord. We read:

"The four species (definitively identified through Oral Tradition as palm, willow, and myrtle bound together into a *lulav*, and an *etrog* [citron]) were now part of the ritual. Each day of *sukkot*, the priests, holding the *lulav* and *etrog* in hand, marched around the altar, which had been adorned with freshly cut willow branches. As they circled, they recited a psalm asking God to 'please save us' (*Hoshiah na*)" (p.213).

Why are these "four species" used to celebrate Sukkot? Says *The Jewish Book of Why* by Alfred J. Kolatch:

"The use of four species of plants is PRESCRIBED IN LEVITICUS 23:40: 'And you shall take on the first day [of the holiday] the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees [myrtle branches], and willows of the brook, *and you shall rejoice* before the LORD your God seven days.' The Bible does not specify precisely which trees and fruits are to be taken.

"Jewish authorities have interpreted the 'fruit of goodly trees' to mean the *etrog* [the citron], and the 'branches of [date] palms' to mean the *lulav*. The 'boughs of thick trees' refers to the myrtle (called *hadasim* in Hebrew), and 'willows of the brook' are the familiar willow trees (called *aravot* in Hebrew). These four species were to be held in the hand and blessed each day of the Sukkot holiday" (p.250).

In all the years I celebrated the Feast of Sukkot, or Tabernacles, with the Worldwide Church of God, we NEVER paid any attention to this *DIRECT COMMANDMENT OF GOD!* No one, it seemed, read the passage in Leviticus 23:40, or gave it any special thought! Although God's Word very plainly says we are to take these items, and "rejoice before the LORD," apparently this was felt to be too "physical," and too "ritualistic." Nevertheless, it is plainly a part of the commanded observances of the Festival of Sukkot!

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the Sadducees disputed with the Pharisees over this issue. As Alfred Edersheim writes in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*:

"As usual, we are met at the outset by a controversy between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The law had it: 'Ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook,' which the Sadducees understood (as do the modern Karaite Jews) to refer to the materials whence the booths were to be constructed, while the Pharisees applied it to what the worshippers were to carry in their hands. *The latter interpretation is, in all likelihood, the correct one; it seems borne out by the account of the festival at the time of Nehemiah, when the booths were constructed of BRANCHES OF OTHER TREES than those mentioned in Leviticus 23; and it was UNIVERSALLY ADOPTED IN PRACTICE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST*" (p.273).

Always roiling the pot, the Sadducees were the original gain-sayers -- the original "contrarians" who had their own ideas about everything! The New Testament points out that they were even disbelievers in a resurrection, did not admit to the existence of angels or demons, and were, all in all, "ignorant of the Scriptures" (see Acts 23:6-8; Matt.22:23, 29-31).

The Most Joyous Feast

Alfred Edersheim writes in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, that the Feast of Tabernacles was the joyous high point of the year in ancient Israel. He declares:

"The most joyous of all festive seasons in Israel was that of the 'Feast of Tabernacles.' It fell on a time of year when the hearts of the people would naturally be full of thankfulness, gladness, and expectancy. All the crops had been long stored; and now all fruits were also gathered, the vintage past, and the land only awaited the softening and refreshment of the 'latter rain,' to prepare it for a new crop. . . . If the beginning of the harvest had pointed back to the birth of Israel in their Exodus from Egypt, and forward to the true Passover-sacrifice in the future; if the corn harvest was connected to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai in the past, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; the harvest-thanksgiving of the Feast of Tabernacles

reminded Israel, on the one hand, of their dwelling in booths in the wilderness, while, on the other hand, it pointed to the FINAL HARVEST when Israel's mission should be completed, and ALL NATIONS GATHERED UNTO THE LORD" (p.268-269).

This great Feast, Edersheim points out, has a dual meaning: It both reflects back on the miraculous passage of Israel out of Egypt, and through the wilderness, as they lived in rickety "booths" open to the heavens, and it depicts in a very powerful manner the FINAL HARVEST OF ALL THE WORLD to the true paths of God -- the time when all nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship the Eternal, the Lord of hosts (Isa.2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4).

Isaiah the prophet speaks of this great "fall harvest" in this manner:

"And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for ALL PEOPLE a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the VEIL that is spread over *all nations*. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:6-8, NKJV).

During that coming age, Isaiah says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the *earth shall be FULL of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Isaiah 11:9).

Edersheim adds that this Feast, in particular, was designed by God to illustrate the great harvest of all nations to the Kingdom of God in the latter days. This is evident, he says, "not only from the language of the prophets and the peculiar services of the feast, but also from its position in the Calendar, and even from the names by which it is designated in Scripture." He continues:

"Thus in its reference to the harvest it is called 'the feast of ingathering' [Exo.23:16; 34:22]; in that to the history of Israel in the past, 'the Feast of Tabernacles' [Lev. 23:34, and specifically verse 43; Deut.16:13, 16; 31:10; II Chron.8:13; Ezra 3:4]; while its symbolic bearing on the future is brought out in its designation as emphatically 'the feast' [I Kings 8:2; II Chron.5:3; 7:8,9]; and 'the Feast of Jehovah' [so literally in Lev.23:39]. In this sense also Josephus, Philo, and the Rabbis (in many passages of the *Mishnah*) single it out from all the other feasts" (p.269-270).

The Feast of Sukkot in Ancient Times

The Feast of Tabernacles was considered the most joyous season of the entire year. With all the electric anticipation along the caravan trails, the stirring religious ceremonies, the inspiring singing of hymns, and the Levitical choir and orchestra playing at the Temple, with lively singing, dancing, and feasting, the joy literally ran over the brim. Each day of the Feast, a vital celebration took place called *Simkhat Beit Hashoavah*, that is, "The Rejoicing at the Place of the Water-Drawing."

"Each morning of Sukkot, the priests went to the pool of Siloah (Silwan) near Jerusalem to fill a golden flask. *Shofar* blasts greeted their arrival at the Temple's Water Gate. They then ascended and poured the water so that it flowed over the altar simultaneously with wine from another bowl. When the priest was about to pour the water, the people shouted 'Raise your hand!' because of an incident that occurred in a previous year: The high priest Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.) showed contempt for the rite by spilling the water at his feet, a transgression for

which worshippers threw their citrons at him.

"The pelted priest had demonstrated his alliance with the Sadducees, who literally followed Torah and only what was specifically in Torah. (Explained as an oral instruction given to Moses at Sinai, this water rite was not mentioned in The Five Books.) The deliriously happy celebration connected with the water drawing developed when the Pharisees (who believed in the Oral Tradition and interpretation of Torah and gave us the rabbinic Judaism we know today) triumphed over them in the first century.

"Based on Isaiah's promise 'With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation' (12:3), rejoicing began at the end of the first day and took place every night except Shabbat. Talmud recorded that 'one who had never witnessed the Rejoicing of the Place of the Water Drawing has never seen true joy in his life.' (Although the celebration was for the *libation* that would be made the next morning, it was named for the preparation for the ritual -- the water drawing -- which the rabbis said showed that getting ready was sometimes of greater merit than the *mitzvah* itself because of its positive effect on the person doing it.)" (p.213-214).

For this fascinating ceremony, four immense candelabrum were set in the Temple courtyard for the Feast of Sukkot, 75 feet in height. Each candelabra had four golden bowls, and was reached by four ladders. Each bowl was capable of holding many gallons of oil. Four youths of priestly descent each held a pitcher of oil, which they used to fill the bowls. Wicks were made from the old, cast-off priestly garments and rags from worn-out vestments. When the candelabrum were lit, they generated such intense and brilliant light, that not a courtyard in the whole city of Jerusalem failed to be illuminated by the blazing light. As the mighty torches blazed in the night, we read:

"A Levite orchestra of flutes, trumpets, harps, and cymbals accompanied torchlight processions, and men who had earned the capacity for real spiritual joy through their purity, character and scholarship danced ecstatically to the hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and hymn-singing crowds.

"We do not imagine our distinguished sages as acrobats and tumblers, but they were often agile physically as well as mentally. Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel juggled eight lighted torches and raised himself into a handstand on two fingers, a gymnastic feat no one else could master. Others juggled eight knives, eight glasses of wine, or eight eggs before leaders and dignitaries" (p.214).

Why was this ceremony called "The Water-Drawing Ceremony"? Alfred Edersheim gives us the emphatic reason, as understood by the Rabbis. He writes:

"For though that ceremony was considered by the Rabbis as being a subordinate reference to the dispensation of the rain, the annual fall of which they they imagined was determined by God at that feast, its main and real application was to the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as predicted -- probably in allusion to this very rite -- by Isaiah the prophet. Thus the Talmud says distinctly: '*Why is the name of it called, The drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit*, according to what is said: 'With joy shall ye draw waters out of the well of salvation.'" Hence, also, the feast and the peculiar joyousness of it, are alike designated as those of 'the drawing out of water'; for according to the same Rabbinical authorities, the Holy Spirit dwells in man only through *joy*" (*The Temple*, p.279-280).

The celebration of the Water-drawing was a highlight of the Feast. It was a happy, even

ecstatic occasion, with a torchlight parade, including musicians, jugglers, and dancers, marching to the Temple, at night, as the whole city of Jerusalem was lit up by giant torches and the light of giant menorahs. As the lyres, drums, cymbals, trumpets, drums and horns played, the Rabbis entertained and clowned, adding to the joy. Not one day of Sukkot passed without joyous festivities that celebrated the happiness of the harvest, and the joy of community.

As the dawn of each day approached, the priests descended the steps to the Women's Court, with trumpets blaring, and marched in procession to the Eastern Gate of the Temple, and then turned their faces toward the Temple, to the west, and proclaimed, "Our fathers who were in this place stood with their backs to the Temple and their faces eastward and worshipped the sun, but our eyes are unto the Lord" (based on Ezekiel 8:16).

The Seventy Sacrifices

Each day of the Feast of Sukkot, the priestly procession would march around the altar one time, waving the lulav branches and shouting praises to God. But on the seventh day of the Feast, this circling procession was done *seven times* -- instead of just once! At the conclusion of the seventh circle, they struck the willows on the ground around the altar.

During the Feast, a total of seventy sacrifices of animals were performed -- understood to represent the seventy nations of the entire world that came from the family of Noah.

The Feast of *Sukkot* has a distinctive feature of universalism, and reaches out to all the nations of the world. This concept is expressed in the order of sacrifices enjoined during this festival period. On the first day of the Feast, 13 bulls were offered, and each successive day the number offered was decreased by one. Therefore, during the 7 days of the Feast, the bulls were offered as follows: $13 + 12 + 11 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 = 70$ (see Numbers 29:12-34). The seventy bulls correspond to the seventy original nations that were descended from Noah and his sons and who were the ancestors of all the nations of the world.

Mitch and Zhara Glaser go even further concerning the numbers of sacrifices. They point out:

"The order of sacrifices on Sukkot is spelled out in minute detail in the book of Numbers. Never before had so many sacrifices been required of Israel on any one day. The vast number of sacrifices were commensurate with Israel's depth of thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.

"A fascinating and mysterious pattern emerges from the seemingly endless list of sacrifices. No matter how the offerings are grouped or counted, their number always remains divisible by the number seven. During the week are offered 70 bullocks, 14 rams and 98 lambs -- altogether 182 sacrifices (26×7), to which must be added 336 (48×7) tenths of ephahs of flour for the meal offering. . . .

"It was no coincidence that this seven-day holiday, which took place in the height of the seventh month, had the perfect number, seven, imprinted on its sacrifices. It was by divine design that the final holiday . . . bore on its sacrifices the seal of God's perfect approval" (p.163).

Therefore, the Feast of Tabernacles was a time of celebration and rejoicing in the Lord for

ALL NATIONS, to whom salvation will be extended. Says the book *Celebrate!* --

"The sacrifices made throughout the week -- a total of seventy -- were understood to represent the seventy nations that then existed in the world. Their well-being, like Israel's, depended on whether or not they would receive the rain needed for food supplies. Blessings like rain were understood as rewards for proper behavior (Deut. 11:13-15) (In his vision of messianic times, Zechariah presents lack of rain as punishment for the nations that fail to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Sukkot to worship God, which would show that they accept His sovereignty [14:16]. This prophecy, and those of Isaiah and Micah calling on all nations to show their acceptance of God's sovereignty by going to His Temple -- combined with the connection between Sukkot and fulfillment, the ultimate being messianic redemption -- encouraged many proselytes to join the pilgrims in Jerusalem)" (p.214).

The connection of all nations with the Feast of Tabernacles is clearly pointed out in the prophecy of Zechariah. We read that during the millennial reign of the Messiah, after He has established the Kingdom of God in the earth, that all nations will come up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles! Notice this amazing prophecy!

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech.14:16-19, NKJV).

The Last Great Day of the Feast -- Hoshana Rabbah

The seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles is not an annual Sabbath day -- yet it has special meaning and significance of its own. In ancient times it was known as the "great day of the feast." Being the seventh and last day of the Feast -- and the culmination of the Feast -- it represented in a unique way the FINAL DAY OF HARVEST! Therefore, it also pictured the FINAL DAY of JUDGMENT! It pictured the celebration of the gathering in of the final great harvest of souls in God's plan. We read in the book *Celebrate!* --

"Therefore, the *final day of the festival*, when the last sacrifices were offered on behalf of the other nations, was identified as the occasion *when the earth is JUDGED* regarding replenishment of water, and consequently, *when mankind's FATE, collectively and individually, IS SEALED*. (Rabbinic literature identifies this *Yom Darvata*, Day of the Willow, as *Yom Hakhitum*, Day of Sealing, an *extension of Yom Kippur*.) Striking the willows then had the added connotation of casting away of sin or symbolizing the thrashings one would receive in punishment for sin" (p.214).

The seventh day of the Feast is called "Hoshanah Rabbah," meaning "the many *hoshanahs*." This is a contraction of *hoshiah na* -- or "The Great Salvation." During the Middle Ages, customs associated with Yom Kippur -- such as dressing the Torah in white vestments, and the cantor's wearing of a *kittel* -- were adopted for Hoshanah Rabbah, looked upon as "the *final day of judgment*."

Says Avraham Finkel in *Essence of the Holy Days*,

"*Hoshana Rabbah*, the seventh day of Sukkot, has a solemn undertone, it is closely linked to Yom Kippur, for it is on this day that the FINAL SEAL is placed on the verdict that was pronounced on Yom Kippur. . .

"On *Hoshana Rabbah* we are mindful of the fact that during Sukkot, judgment is rendered concerning the rainfall for the entire world (*Rosh Hashana* 16a). The economic fortunes of the world depend on abundant rainfall, so our prayers for rain are of crucial importance for the global economy as a whole and for *Eretz Yisrael* in particular.

"This is evident in the special prayers of *Hoshana Rabbah*. During the *Shacharit* (morning) service of the first six days of Sukkot, the entire congregation makes one circuit around the *bimah* with *lulav* and *etrog* in hand while the *chazzan* leads the recitation of the *hoshana* prayer that is punctuated by the congregation's saying aloud, *Hoshana*, 'Please save!' On the seventh day of Sukkot -- *Hoshana Rabbah* -- seven circuits are made, hence the name *Hoshana Rabbah*, which means 'many *hoshanas*.'

"In the *hoshana* prayers we ask for rain, 'to give life to the forsaken wastes, to sustain with trees, to enhance with sweet fruits, to rain on the sproutings, to elevate the thirsty earth.' After the seven processions around the *bimah*, additional prayers are said, after which the *lulav* and *etrog* are laid aside and the *hoshana* bundle, consisting of five willow branches, is picked up. The *hoshana* bundle is beaten on the ground five times in accordance with an ancient custom that was instituted by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (c. 350 B.C.E.)" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.94).

This final day of celebrating the Harvest, and Ingathering, therefore, pictures the final stage of God's plan of salvation -- the "Last Great Day," or the "Great White Throne Judgment"! It literally pictures the final day of "judgment" and sealing those who will receive eternal life (compare Rev.20:11-15), as opposed to those who will suffer the second and final death penalty (v.14-15).

This final day of "harvest celebration" pictures the vast second resurrection -- the resurrection of all people who ever lived, who did not qualify to be in the first resurrection, at the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Rev.20:1-4). All these others will rise up, to human life, after the 1,000 year period (Rev.20:5-6). They will be judged at that time -- the time of the "Great Salvation," or "Many *Hoshanas*."

Mitch and Zhava Glaser tell us concerning this day of *Hoshana Rabbah*:

"The seventh and last day of Sukkot, known as *Hoshana Rabbah*, 'The Great *Hoshana*,' is somewhat a festival in itself. On other days of the feast, when the family goes to synagogue, one procession is made around the sanctuary with *lulav* and *etrog* while the congregation sings, '*Hoshianah*, save us.' This particular tradition is believed to date back to the time of the Maccabees, around 165 B.C.

"On the final day, the entire congregation marches around *seven times*, carrying even more willow leaves with them. These seven times, a memorial of the circuits made by the ancient priests around the Temple altar during worship, remind us of God's goodness in destroying Jericho once Israel had circled it seven times.

"After the seventh time around the synagogue, the willow branches are beaten

until their leaves fall off -- a symbol of beating off our sins and a prayer for plenteous water for next year's willows. . .

"In contrast to the festive days of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah is observed solemnly, as an extension of the Day of Atonement. On this day, the rabbis tell us, the GATES OF JUDGMENT FINALLY CLOSE and the decrees pronounced by God *on the Day of Atonement take effect*" (*The Fall Feasts of Israel*, p.198-199).

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Journey through the Jewish Year*, tells us more about Hoshana Rabbah:

"The seventh day of Sukkot is known as Hoshana Rabbah. On this day, the ritual of *Hoshanot* [marching around the synagogue or room] involves seven circlings of the synagogue with the four species. At the end of this ritual, willow branches are beaten against the ground. Hoshana Rabbah is viewed as the *END of the cycle which began on the first day of Elul*" (p.235).

In other words, Hoshana Rabbah is the culmination of the holy day season that begins with the month of Elul, which is the preparation month for the great feasts of the month of Tishri. Thus the process begins with self-examination and repentance, enjoined on us during Elul, heightened with Rosh Hoshana, and the trumpet warnings sounded on that day to "repent" and draw close to God. This "Feast of Trumpets" is followed by the Days of Awe, leading up to "Yom Kippur" or the "Day of Atonement," picturing judgment and cleansing -- forgiveness to the deserving and judgment upon the wicked. This is followed by the joyousness of the Feast of Sukkot, but this time is terminated by the FINAL "judgment" of Hoshana Rabbah!

In reality, then, we have the following scenario:

- 1) Month of Elul -- 30 days -- warning to examine ourselves and come to deeper repentance
- 2) Rosh Hashanah -- Day of Blowing -- pictures final warnings of God symbolized by trumpets of Revelation, call to repentance
- 3) Days of Awe -- final warnings to prepare to meet the Messiah
- 4) Yom Kippur -- Messiah returns, and judges the world, and marries His bride
- 5) Feast of Sukkot -- seven days of joyous exuberance and feasting -- symbolizing Millennial Kingdom of Messiah, and "wedding feast" of Marriage and Lamb
- 6) Hoshana Rabbah -- last great day of Sukkot -- symbolizes "Great White Throne Judgment, when all who ever lived receive opportunity for salvation

We read in the gospel of John that Jesus Christ went up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:1-9). Then, about the middle of the Feast, He went up to the Temple, and taught the people (v.14-30). We then read this amazing truth:

"On the LAST DAY, THAT GREAT DAY OF THE FEAST, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me,

as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

The "last day," the "great day of the Feast," was Hoshana Rabbah! It was the seventh or last day of the Feast of Tabernacles! Jesus therefore made this statement, about the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, on the last day of the Feast of Sukkot -- picturing the Day of Final Salvation, the Day of Great Salvation, and the Great White Throne Judgment!

For more information on this, be sure to read the article "The Annual Holy Days Reveal the Awesome Plan of God," and the article entitled, "How Many Resurrections? The Mystery of the Resurrection of the Dead!"

Spiritual Lessons from the Feast -- the Lesson of FAITH

God's Word specifically links the Feast of Tabernacles, or "Booths," with the harvest ("Ingathering"), and with the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt, when they traveled in "temporary shelters" or "booths." These "booths" themselves are also linked with the harvest. In *Celebrate the Feasts*, Martha Zimmerman points out that "Sukkot" was the name of a city or town -- and was the first "stopping off" place for the Israelites as they left the land of Egypt (Exo.12:37).

We also read of a place named "Sukkoth" in Canaan. This was the city where, we read, "And Jacob journeyed to Succoth; and built for himself a house, and made booths [*sukkot*] for his livestock, therefore the place is named Sukkoth" (Gen.33:17).

Why does God command that we build make-shift, fragile, temporary "booths" or "huts" during the Feast? What is the lesson in this? There is a very special, deep, and profoundly meaningful lesson in the *sukkah*. Notice!

"While the Israelites were wandering the desert with nothing -- not even the ability to provide for their own basic needs -- they had to recognize and rely on God as the means of their survival. He provided manna for food (Exo.16:4-16), clouds for shelter (Exodus 33:4-17; Numbers 9:15-23), water to drink (Exodus 15:22-25; 17:5-7; Num.20:7-12), and conditions to prevent their clothing from deteriorating (Deut.29:5). His *sukkot* -- protection -- inspired in them the faith that they would reach the designated Land, as promised.

"Once they arrived, they planted and harvested foodstuffs, built houses, dug wells, and wove and sewed garments. But they were not to then feel that they were self-sufficient. All they created and enjoyed, while developed through their own efforts, was no less provided by God than the desert sustenance had been. Though much more obvious in times of want, the booths they lived in for a week each year were reminders of how they began, and that regardless of their state, whatever they had came from the Supreme Provider and Protector. As Torah warned when this was readily recognized, 'When you later have prosperity, be careful that you do not say to yourself, "It was my own strength and personal power that brought me all this." You must remember that it is God your Lord Who gives you the power to become prosperous' (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)" (*Celebrate the Feasts*, p.216).

The lesson of the "sukkah" is that God is our true eternal shelter. His protection and providence is a daily need for each one of us. He is the canopy over our heads, and our true

protection from the vicissitudes of life. True protection does not come from four walls, whether they are concrete or wood, or steel-reinforced. The solid walls of the homes of the Jews in Germany or the Warsaw ghetto did not protect them from the ravages of Nazi persecution and Hitler's death camps. In one moment, fire, flood, hurricane, or tornado can rip apart a solidly built construction, and deal death to its inhabitants. True security comes only from God in heaven.

Therefore, the sukkah built during the Feast of Tabernacles is to remind us of the true "sukkah" of God's protection, and our dependence and reliance upon Him for safety and survival. God delivered His people from Egypt in fragile, flimsy, sukkahs, built of branches of trees and leafy boughs -- teaching us and reminding us of the transitory fragility of human life, and how utterly dependent we truly are upon the living God.

Mitch and Zhava Glaser in *The Fall Feasts of Israel* declare:

"The impermanent, vulnerable, leafy shelters were to remind the Israelites of God's faithfulness during their forty years of wandering in the desert. The booths symbolized man's need to depend on God for His provision of food, water and shelter. . .

"In ancient Israel, booths were in common use throughout the land. The Hebrew word *sukkah* originally meant 'woven.' Temporary shelters were woven together from branches and leaves to protect livestock (Gen.33:17), to provide resting places for warriors during battle (II Samuel 11:11), to shelter watchers in the vineyard (Isaiah 1:8), and to protect the people from the incessant heat of the merciless Middle-Eastern sun. During harvest time, Israelite fields were dotted with such booths, woven hastily together as temporary homes for the harvesters" (p.157).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg declares in his fascinating book *The Jewish Way*:

"The *sukkah*, the booth, is the central symbol of the ancient Israelites' trust and hope for forty years in the desert. The Hebrews left the protection of man-made thick walls to place themselves under the protection of God. Exposed to dangerous natural conditions and hostile roving bands, they placed their confidence in the divine concern, which is the only true source of security. . . .

"The halachic requirements for the construction of a sukkah attempt to capture the fragility and openness of the booths. . . By deliberately giving up solid construction, Jews admit their vulnerability and testify that the ultimate trust is in the DIVINE shelter [that is, in God Himself]" (p.99).

Avraham Vaakov Finkel in *The Essence of the Holy Days: Insights from the Jewish Sages*, tells us more about the *sukkah* experience. He relates --

"The *sukkah* is a reminder of the huts in which God made the children of Israel live during their forty-year journey through the wilderness and of the Clouds of Glory that protected them on their wanderings. As a Jew sits in the *sukkah*, under the shelter of the *s'chach* [roof], surrounded by family and friends, he cannot help but feel God's sheltering Hand enveloping him. His spirit soars as he realizes that true happiness is found only in the eternal values of Torah and *mitzvot*, that material possessions offer no security, and that THE SHIELD OF FAITH is the only protection he can rely on. He is aware that, like his stay in the *sukkah*, life on earth is unstable and transitory. Gazing at the stars shimmering through the greenery of the *s'chach*, he experiences a closeness to God that is almost palpable. This nearness to God is the source of his *simchah*, the exhilarating gladness that is the hallmark of Sukkot" (p.80).

The *sukkah* is referred to as the "SHELTER OF FAITH" in the *Ohel Torah*. Finkel quotes the Kotzker rabbi:

"The *sukkah* is called *tzila dimehemenu*, the shelter of faith. It teaches you to leave behind all your worldly concerns and to dedicate yourself to God with total self-effacing faith in His mercy and compassion. If you have attained this level of self-negating faith, you feel no pain or discomfort. That is why a person who feels discomfort is exempt from the *mitzvah* of eating in the *sukkah*. Feeling discomfort proves that he has not reached the point of total self-nullification.

"Because he has not grasped the meaning of the *sukkah*, any further stay there is of no benefit to him. Therefore, he is exempt from the obligation" (p.83).

Rabbi Chanoch of Alexander, in the *Zohar*, points out that the *sukkah* is also looked upon as the "*shade of faith*." This is because the walls and roof of the *sukkah* are so fragile and impermanent and unstable and precarious, that it expresses our complete and total dependence on God, and our boundless trust in His protection.

Joel Ziff in *Mirrors in Time*, describes the "sukkah" in terms of "change" in our lives. He shows how the experience of the "sukkah" leads to our changing, and transformation, as human beings. He asserts:

"For the Israelites in the desert, the *sukkah* provided a new home after they left slavery in Egypt. The *sukkah* links us to that arche-typal experience of CHANGE. In this spirit, we begin to build the *sukkah* immediately after the end of Yom Kippur. We move out of the permanent shelter which we habitually regard as home. We move into a new home and establish it as a center for the activities of daily life . . . We set aside a full week for prayer, celebration, and community.

"In some respects, the image of the *sukkah* evokes the wandering in the desert associated with the counting of the *omer*. However, there are significant differences. After Pesach, we are thrust into an alien environment; we are confused and dependent. . . On Sukkot, we experience our competence, autonomy, and power as we build our own shelter. Our joy is built on a solid foundation as we celebrate our achievements. The image of the *sukkah* as a symbol of CHANGE helps us become aware of how we have been TRANSFORMED as a result of the process of self-reflection which has just been completed" (p.236).

Says Joel Ziff, "We not only change, but we also *enjoy the change*. The rituals [of Sukkot] emphasize sensual pleasure and enjoyment. They are performed with a focus on joy and celebration. We are encouraged to select a *lulav* and *etrog* which are especially beautiful so as to enhance our pleasure" (*ibid.*).

Ziff goes on, showing how the Feast of Sukkot relates to "change":

"The experience of joy and celebration on Sukkot helps us discover and express our own positive feelings. In the process of self-development, it is important not only that we change; we must also experience those changes as positive, pleasurable, and satisfying. As we change our coping responses, we also experience a change in the results. We are better able to resolve the problem that previously overwhelmed or frustrated us. Our self-confidence and self-esteem is enhanced because we feel more power and competence as well as the satisfaction of being able to make changes and take more

control of our lives. The pleasure and satisfaction we feel reinforces our commitment to the process and enhances our motivation and our energy. This joy is more mature and dependable than the joy we experience at the time of liberation from slavery or the giving of the Torah because it is grounded in the reality of human failure and the capacity to learn from our mistakes" (p.237)..

Thus, the Feast of Sukkot pictures our moving from faithlessness to believing, from joyless to being joy-filled, from spiritual shakiness to spiritual strength, solid confidence and security. The Feast of Sukkot is a time to solidify and strengthen the spiritual CHANGES that God is working in our nature -- putting on the New Man in Christ, and putting off the Old Man with the lusts and sins of the flesh!

The Lesson of Sheer JOY

Concerning the Feast of *Sukkot*, the Bible states, *vehayita ach same'ach* -- that is, "and you shall remain ONLY JOYFUL" (Deut.16:14, 15). In the King James Version, we read in verse 14, "thou shalt rejoice," and in verse 15, "thou shalt surely rejoice." The Jewish Tanakh has this passage, however, as follows:

"After the INGATHERING from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall REJOICE in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold festival for the LORD your God seven days, in the place that the LORD will choose: for the LORD your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and *you shall have NOTHING BUT JOY*" (Tanakh).

The command "you shall rejoice" is literally "you shall *remain* joyful." This turns the attitude of rejoicing into the permanent trait of joyfulness in your personality. The words "nothing but joy" means that this joyfulness in your character and personality must persist, even under the most dire of circumstances or duress of trials and disappointments in life.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch expounds this passage in this way:

"The command 'you shall remain joyful' turns your rejoicing into a permanent trait of your personality, and the words 'only joyful' mean that this joyfulness in your character will persist even under circumstances that would otherwise tend to cast a cloud over it. You will remain joyful in spite of everything, 'only' joyful. *Simchah*, rejoicing, is the most sublime flower and fruit to open on the tree of life planted by the Law of God. In the same spirit, the joyfulness to which the present verse refers is not restricted to festivals and festive gatherings but extends beyond the festive seasons and accompanies us back into everyday life, from the exuberance of the festive assemblies into the quiet privacy of our homes, and remains with us through all the vicissitudes of life . . . to be joyful in spite of everything, whatever life may bring: *vehayita ach same'ach*" (*The Essence of the Holy Days*, p.88).

This sublime and supreme joyousness was expressed at the Feast in a special way during the "Water-Drawing Ceremony," every evening and night of the Feast. Isaiah wrote, "JOYFULLY shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa.12:3). This was the theme behind the daily water-drawing ceremony at the Temple. As happy throngs filled the Temple, and the Levitical orchestra played on, with giant lamps lighting up Jerusalem, the priests drew water from the pool of Siloam, and carried it in a procession to the Temple, where it was poured upon the altar, with

huge blazing candelabra casting their magnificent light over the proceedings.

Says the *Mishnah*, expressing the euphoria and rapture of the event, "If you have not seen the rejoicing of *Bet Hasho'evah* you have not witnessed joy in all your life" (*Sukkah* 53a).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg tells us of the joy of Sukkot, pointing out that it reflects a "mature joy." He writes:

"One fundamental criterion of a life well lived is love of life. It is terribly important, therefore, to enjoy life as it goes along. *Joy cannot be postponed*. Life *as is* is of infinite value.

"There is another dimension to the focus on joy on this holiday. Those who serve out of obligation, such as those who are in servitude, do not find joy in their work. *The joy of sukkot reflects maturity*. It is the happiness of the free person who chooses to live this way, who prefers this mission to all other alternatives. There is an *inner joy* even in the struggle against obstacles, the joy of choice and of anticipation of the goal" (*The Jewish Way*, p.114).

Greenberg adds:

"Constant renewal of joy makes life on the Exodus road worthwhile in itself. Thence comes the strength to persist. The suffering self is, at some level, at war with itself and its biological -- if not spiritual -- need for satisfaction. The joyous self, properly fulfilled, can be UNIFIED in body and soul, and love God and humanity with the whole heart" (p.115).

The Talmud tells us, "The Shekinah (Divine Presence of God) comes upon us neither out of sadness nor out of raucous laughter . . . but out of the joy of mitzvah."

This lesson of joyfulness teaches us that as Christians we ought to be joyful and filled with overflowing joy all the year around, because of the steadfast hope we have in Christ. As James wrote, "My brethren, count it all JOY when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Peter pointed out that we are "begotten to a living hope" (I Pet.1:3) through Christ "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away . . . In this you *greatly rejoice*, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (v.4-6). Peter says that these trials test the genuineness of our faith, "though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you *rejoice with JOY INEXPRESSIBLE and full of glory*" (I Pet.1:7-8).

The apostle Paul tells us that one of the chief fruits of God's Holy Spirit is real joy: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, faith, meekness, self control" (Gal.5:22-23). Ezra told the people assembled to observe God's Festivals, in his day, "For the *JOY* of the LORD is your strength" (Neh.8ss:10).

The Feast of Tabernacles teaches us to express and shower forth this exuberant joy!

The Third Lesson -- Love and The Four Species

The four species of plants waved before the Lord, in celebrating the Festival of Sukkot, are

called *Arba Minim* in Hebrew. Jewish rabbis have several explanations for the meaning of these fruits and boughs. Symbolically, the four species represent the four kinds of people that make up a congregation or community. The *etrog* or citron, a tasty fruit which also has a pleasant aroma, represents the righteous people who have both Torah (Bible) knowledge *and* good deeds (or works). The *lulav*, or branch of a date palm, produces a sweet fruit, but has no aroma or fragrance. This represents the person who has Torah knowledge (such as a scholar), but is lacking in good deeds. He is deficient in good works. Then the *hassidim*, or sweet-smelling myrtle, is the person who has good deeds, but may not have much technical knowledge -- this person does good works, but is deficient in knowledge or scholarship. The majority of people may fall into this category. Finally, there is the willow, or *aravot*. This species grows near the water, and needs water, but is odorless and tasteless -- representing the person lacking in both knowledge and good deeds.

All four types of people can be found in a typical community or congregation. Says Finkel:

"Thus the *lulav* bundle symbolizes the totality of the Jewish people, all extending a helping hand to one another, all striving toward the same goals: Fulfillment of Torah to the best of their abilities and thereby proclamation to all humankind that God is the Creator and Maker of the universe" (p.80).

In the book *Celebrate!* we read of the profound significance of the waving of the *lulav* to the six directions:

"The qualities of the four species are likened to those of four categories of Jews. The *etrog*, possessing both taste and aroma, stands for Jews who have knowledge of Torah and do good deeds. The palm's fruit (date) with taste but no aroma, represents people with Torah knowledge. The myrtle, with no taste but aroma, represents the opposite, and willow, with neither aroma or taste, stands for those self-concerned and ignorant of Torah.

"We serve God with all four elements held together, the spiritually lofty with the mundane, the scholar, aristocrat, merchant, and laborer. *In society, all elements must likewise hold together, so that the wise and righteous can influence those less so, and because each contributes its part to society's functioning and progress when they UNITE for COMMON WELFARE.* As our sages put it, 'As one does not fulfill his duty on Sukkot unless all four species are bound together, so some will not be redeemed unless all Jews hold together.' A strong message about the need for UNITY among our diverse segments" (p.222).

Another analogy of the "lulav" is to compare the palm branch to the backbone in the human body -- which gives strength and uprightness -- righteousness. The myrtle then is compared to the eyes, with which we see. The *etrog* is comparable to the heart, with which we understand, have compassion, and empathize with others. And the willow is comparable to the mouth, which speaks words and communicates (or fails to do so). In this picture, then, we must use ALL FOUR SPECIES -- backbone, heart, eyes, and mouth -- to serve God and our fellow man, to do the Work of God, and to fulfill the purpose for which God placed us on this earth -- to be His Partners in Creation!

A Spanish Rabbi, Aaron Halevi, at the end of the thirteenth century, in a book called *Sefer HaHinukh* ("The Book of Education") illustrated this basic, underlying principle in these words:

". . . Since the rejoicing [of the holiday of Sukkot] might cause us to forget the fear

of God, He, praised be He, has commanded us to hold in our hands at that time certain objects which should remind us that all the joy of our hearts is for Him and His glory. It was His will that the reminder be the four species. . . for they are all a delight to behold. In addition, the four species can be compared to four valuable parts of the body. The *etrog* [citron] is like the heart, which is the temple of the intellect, thus alluding that man should serve his Creator with his intellect. The *lulav* is like the spinal cord [or backbone], which is essential for the body, alluding that one should direct one's entire body to His service, praised be He. The myrtle is like the eyes, alluding that one should not be led astray after his eyes on a day when his heart rejoices. The willow branch is like the lips. We complete our actions through speech, and thus the willow branch alludes to the fact that we should control our mouth and the words that issue from it, fearing God, praised be He, even at a time of rejoicing."

Learning to use all our resources and senses to serve God is no easy task. Worshiping God with all our being requires diligent effort and focus. Solomon wrote, "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward *mouth*, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine *eyes* look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (Prov.4:23-27).

As the apostle Paul writes: "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor.6:20). Also, Paul wrote: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor.10:31). Paul adds, "And *whatsoever ye do*, in word or deed, *do all* in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). This is a full-time commission -- a full-time job!!!

Out-going and Extended Love

During the Feast of Sukkot, the people of the congregation take the Four Species -- the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hassidim*, and *aravot* -- and hold the *etrog* or citron in their left hand, with the *pitam* facing down, and the bundle of the palm branch, myrtle, and willow in the right hand. After reciting the blessing, the *etrog* is turned over, with the *pitam* pointed upward, and the bundle of the *lulav* in the right hand is waved in front of the person, then in back, to the right side, then to the left, upward and then downward -- the six directions -- as they parade or march around the room, as our forefathers marched around the altar at the Temple, singing praises and shouting hoshanahs to God, "Save us," "Help us," "Deliver us," "Blessed by Thy Name," "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," and so forth.

What does this picture for us? Marching around the room, or altar in Temple times, pictures our faith in God, calling to Him to save us. On the final day of *Hoshana Rabbah*, as we march around the room seven times, this reminds us of the Israelites, who marched around the city of Jericho *seven times* -- and then they shouted, *Hoshana Rabbah*, "Save us!" and God smote the walls of Jericho and caused them to fall flat in a mighty earthquake! Performing this together, as one body, pictures *SPIRITUAL UNITY!*

The fact that we do this *together*, as a congregation, even as Israel marched around Jericho as a congregation, reminds us that *we are in this spiritual struggle and fight together -- we need each other -- and we must help one another!* When ancient Israel marched into the Promised Land, so long as they were united, as one, and obedient, God gave them miraculous victories over powerful nations. But when *disunity* occurred, and some disobeyed, then even the smallest city,

like tiny Ai, could overwhelm and defeat the Israelite armies!

When we are united in truth, then we are powerful by the Spirit of God flowing through us and out from us. Therefore, Paul wrote, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that you all speak the same thing*, and that there be no DIVISIONS among you, but that you be PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER *IN THE SAME MIND and in the same judgment*" (I Cor.1:10).

As David wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to *dwell together in UNITY!* It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion: For there the LORD commanded the *blessing -- Life forevermore*" (Psalm 133:1-3).

Joel Ziff, in *Mirrors in Time*, tells us how the experience of the Feast of Sukkot teaches us the lesson of community, sharing, and loving one another. He writes:

"We do not limit ourselves to the symbols of support and nurturance; the *sukkah* ritual encourages us to the actual experience as we feed one another. We invite guests into our *sukkah* and accept invitations [or we dine out together, and enjoy the fellowship of one another] from our neighbors. Difficulty in coping successfully with our stresses is often exacerbated by isolation and alienation. When we regard our problems as too overwhelming or difficult, we tend to expect others to be disinterested or unable to help. As a result of the changes we have made during the Days of Awe, we are more open, honest, and responsive. Others who have similarly worked to change themselves are also more open, honest, and responsive. *On this Holy-Day, we strengthen the BONDS WITH OTHERS, feeling the ability to GIVE TO OTHERS and to receive from them*" (p.239).

Ziff continues this theme, showing how the Feast of Sukkot focuses our attention away from selves and outward to others, teaching us the lessons of giving and sharing. He writes:

"In contrast to the inward turning quality of the Days of Awe, on Sukkot, our energies **EXTEND OUT**. In the ritual of the four species, we make the blessing and then point the *lulav* to each of the SIX DIRECTIONS -- south, west, north, east, upward, and downward. In the *Hoshanot* and in the *Hakafot*, we circumnabulate the synagogue in a PARADE. We emphasize prayers for peace and prosperity, for water for our crops, not only for ourselves as a people but for ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD. *We extend OUTWARD towards others as well. We SHARE our meals* in the *sukkah*, and *we join hands and voices as we celebrate* with singing, dancing, and merry-making. The ritual thereby helps us turn our energies outward as well. As we experience changes in ourselves, we begin to translate those changes into our activity in the world. *We are energized by our experience and move naturally outward*" (p.239).

Joel Ziff concludes this theme, saying, "Sukkot serves as a BRIDGE by helping us translate our experience of Essence on Yom Kippur so that we can apply and integrate what we have learned into everyday life activity" (*ibid.*).

In other words, Sukkot teaches us to express love, which is out-going, and which is the very nature and fundamental character of God Himself.

As the apostle John wrote: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and

everyone who loves is born [begotten] of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, *we also ought to love one another . . .*

"*God is love*, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (I John 4:7-16).

As Jesus said so plainly, we must learn to really "love one another" (John 13:34). He added, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have LOVE for one another" (v.35). He added, "This is My commandment, that you *love one another* as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:12-13).

Jesus prayed to the Father that His Church would truly be unified, even as He and the Father are in total unified agreement (John 17:11). He prayed that true Christians "all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be *one in Us*, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be ONE just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; *that they may be made perfect in one . . .*" (John 17:21-23).

Peter put it plainly: "And above all things, have FERVENT CHARITY [LOVE] among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). And as Paul wrote: "And above all these things put on CHARITY [LOVE], which is the bond of perfectness" (Col.3:14).

True brotherly love creates perfect unity. The strong help to uphold the weak, the rich help to support the poor, and everybody adds his particular strength and gift and talent to the pool, so that all may be nourished and strengthened in faith, hope, and love.

The apostle Paul sums it up nicely. He wrote: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own; is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . . .

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love" (I Cor.13:4-13).

The "booths" of the Feast remind us of our need for FAITH. The command to "rejoice" reminds us of our eternal HOPE, our calling and destiny in life, by the grace of God and His goodness. The "lulav" reminds us of our need to develop LOVE for others in our heart and soul -- true godly compassion and *chesed* -- which is translated "loving-kindness."

The Feast of Sukkot -- an Awesome New Vitality

There is far more meaning and significance to the Feast of Sukkot than most of us, if not all of us, have begun to imagine in our wildest dreams. Even the "lulav" ceremony itself -- something which most Christians are totally ignorant of -- contains tremendous depth of meaning and spiritual significance -- more than any of us have even begun to remotely imagine!

In summation, the Feast of Tabernacles comprises three powerful spiritual lessons: It is "The Feast of Faith," and "The Feast of Joy," and "The Feast of Love." It contains vital elements expressing all of these major themes.

We are commanded to build a temporary Sukkot -- this teaches us the lesson of FAITH.

We are commanded to "rejoice" -- teaching us the lesson of JOY, related to our HOPE.

We are commanded to rejoice with "lulav" branches, waving them in the six directions, out and away from ourselves -- teaching us the lesson of out-going concern for others -- true LOVE.

What an *awesome* Feast! Isn't it time we begin to really celebrate this Festival of God -- this Hag HaAdonai -- with the depth and emotion and joy and understanding that God intends for us to have?

Blessed be the Name of the LORD!

Baruch Attah Adonai, Yavenu, Elohenu, Avenu, Melchenu, Melek ha Olam!