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TITLE: TRAPPED IN THE BOOTHS OF OUR ANCESTORS: UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION OF THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOT AND CHARTING A COURSE FOR ITS FUTURE

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TRAPPED IN THE BOOTHS OF OUR ANCESTORS: UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION OF THE FESTIVAL OF SUKKOT AND CHARTING A COURSE FOR ITS FUTURE

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My anecdotal experience suggests that many contemporary liberal Jews share, with me, a weak relationship to the festival of Sukkot. It remains, in many communities, the forgotten step-daughter of the holiday season – one more demand on the time and attention of Jews. And yet, when one considers the other holidays that have found favor in the hearts and lives of today's Jews, one realizes that Sukkot has all the essential components and potential to restore it to a place of prominence in the lives of its celebrants. This formed the basis for the goal of this thesis: to understand the historical evolution in ritual and meaning of Sukkot in order to chart a trajectory for this festival into the twenty-first century.

The thesis begins with an historical survey of the evolution of ritual and meaning of the festival. Using primary and secondary sources, Chapters One and Two present Sukkot's origins from pre-biblical, pagan sources through its biblical era and into its rabbinic iterations. Chapter Three draws on the research of modern liturgists and sociologists to present an exploration of the role of ritual and meaning in the lives of the modern religious individual with an emphasis on the considerations necessary to ensure that a festival like Sukkot would remain relevant to its celebrants. And, Chapter Four presents examples of successful modern approaches to the festival and suggestions for the future.

The contribution of this thesis is a model through which congregational leaders might renew a meaningful connection to the holiday based on historical precedent. This process seeks to consider both the contemporary, socio-political milieu of the community members as well as the traditions passed down to us and to synthesize them into a twenty-first century observance of Sukkot that will find relevance in the lives of its celebrants.

Introduction

When Americans are discussing politics and one refers to The President, it is usually unnecessary to ask which president. It would be obvious to anyone who is a member of that culture that the speaker is referring to the President of the United States of America. Similarly, at one point in time, a group of Jews could have been discussing religious life and a reference made to הַחַג, The Festival, would have been equally clear and understood by all. The festival of Sukkot needed no other descriptors, being so central to the lives of its celebrants. The Jewish historian of the 1st century, Josephus, tells us that this celebration was "considered especially sacred and important among the Hebrews."[1] This familiarity and centrality has eroded over time so that, today, contemporary liberal Jews would be unlikely to understand the reference if all they heard was "הַחַג". How has this process taken place and what are the reasons behind such a significant change in relationship and status?

This thesis will explore: How this process has taken place; what caused such significant changes in Jewish understandings and what has been behind the Jews' changed relationship to the holiday.

Chapter One begins by tracing the development of the festival from its ancient pagan origins through the Toraitic and biblical periods of Jewish history. It will document the historical precedents that exist concerning early changes made to the festival and its rituals. This will be the foundation for the argument that the early Israelite religious framers borrowed liberally from surrounding cultures' traditions and modified them to meet their own contemporary needs.

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[1] William Whiston, trans. "The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus." Philadelphia, PA: The John Century Winston Company, 1937. *Antiquities of the Jews.* 14:285-6.

Chapter Two continues the historical survey of the Festival of Sukkot. It details Sukkot's significant evolution in the Second Temple and Rabbinic periods. During this time, the festival experienced its greatest challenges to continuity and most significant periods of change. Rabbinic Judaism saw the introduction and creation of new ways to look at pre-existing rituals, a process that influences how we experience them today. Additionally, it was during this period that many of the rituals that we recognize from contemporary traditions were introduced.

Chapter Three examines the theory of ritual and its development. The recent decades have enjoyed significant contributions, by well-known academics, to the understanding of the value of ritual to the lives of its celebrants. I have provided a brief overview of the relationship between Jews of the twentieth century and their liturgy. This provides a backdrop for understanding the psychological and sociological impact and significance of ritual in the lives of festival celebrants.

Finally, in Chapter Four, a brief survey of successful endeavors in the contemporary Jewish world is conducted. Of most interest are the suggestions and implementations for the festival of Sukkot from today's most innovative and creative leaders and their communities. Included in Chapter Four are my own observations and recommendations. In addition to concrete ideas and suggestions, I will provide areas for further study.

Chapter 1 – Early Origins

Sukkot is known as one of the שָׁלוֹשׁ רְגָלִים, or Three Pilgrimage Festivals: Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. It was during these three times of the year that average Jews were commanded to make the, long, expensive and sometimes dangerous journey to the Holy City of Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices to God at the Temple.

Sarah Shove argues that three major historical events mark the development of the Jewish People's history: the exit of the Israelites from the period of slavery in the land of Egypt, the reception of the Torah by Moses on Mount Sinai and the Entry into the Promised Land.[2]

Passover and Shavuot, have become associated with the first two events but the third lacks commemoration. Many authorities have asked the question: why, then, did Sukkot not become attached to a major historical event, as well? Is it, as Y. Leibovitz suggests, because the entry into our homeland was a bloody conquest and our tradition avoids the idealization of military bravery as a religious value?[3] After all, look at the tradition's ambivalent relationship to the militaristic aspects of the story of Chanukah.[4] Or is it as Shove suggests, that the festival of Sukkot veered away from the spiritually and theologically significant themes of Passover and Shavuot and, instead, focused on the concrete, worldly themes of real life? That it took on a didactic role in the lives of Jews rather than a spiritual role? Shove proposes that this may be because of the holiday's pagan origins.[5]

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[2] Sarah Shove. *The Festival of Sukkot as the Festival of the Harvest.* Mehkarei Chag, p. 24.
[3] Leibovitz, Y. as cited in Shove. p.23.
[4] Oliver Shaw Rankin. *The Origins of the Festival of Hanukkah: The Jewish New-Age Festival.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930. p.103*f.*
[5] Shove, p.26.

Others have suggested that Sukkot received a less prominent place in the annual cycle of holidays because of its inextricable connection to the Temple sacrificial cult and the agricultural importance for the celebrant. Since the Destruction of the Temple, the end of the sacrifices and the evolution of the lives of Jews (away from the field and agriculture) the holiday has lost its original foundation. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the observance and understanding of the holiday have been evolving since its earliest forms.

Earliest Origins

Religious tradition is very seldom completely new and created from scratch. Whether it is absorbed from surrounding religious traditions or modified from pre-existing rites, observance can usually find historical or environmental precedent and influence. The festival of Sukkot is no exception to this rule. Even in its earliest forms in the Bible, one may find evidence of the development of rituals and symbols even within the redacted text.

The two main sources for the Torah mandate of Sukkot are found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. There are other, more brief references to the festival sprinkled throughout the Bible.[6] The work of biblical scholars has dated these two books counter to the order that they appear in the canon. While the editor(s) of the Torah would have the reader believe that Deuteronomy is a retelling of the first four books in the voice of Moses as a final oration, the two are actually varying traditions of the same story. Redacted differences provide clues as to when each was written and where.[7] The two texts' focuses are:

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[6] See Ex. 20:14-17; Num. 29:12-38; Dev. 31:10-11; I Kings 8:2 (the dedication of the Temple corresponded to the date of the festival); II Chron. 7:8ff.; Ezra 3; Neh. 8; Zech. 14:16-19.

[7] Norman Gottwald. *The Hebrew Bible – A Socio-Literary Introduction.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. p. 102 ff. Gottwald provides an explanation about how difficult it is to

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Say to the Israelite people: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Booths to the LORD, *to last* seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations; seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations. Those are the set times of the LORD that you shall celebrate as sacred occasions, bringing offerings by fire to the LORD -- burnt offerings, meal offerings, sacrifices, and libations, on each day what is proper to it - apart from the sabbaths of the LORD, and apart from your gifts and from all your votive offerings and from all your freewill offerings that you give to the LORD. Mark, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of the LORD *to last* seven days: a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees,[8] branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall observe it as a festival of the LORD for seven days in the year; you shall observe it in the seventh month as a law for all time, throughout the ages. You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God. So Moses declared to the Israelites the set times of the LORD.[9]

And

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 a 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. Three times a year -- on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths -- all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed, but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you.[10]

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determine the sources of the books that were written around the time of the Babylonian Exile and the return to Palestine. He explains that it remained unclear which community had authority over the writing and codification of the early forms of the canon. While the dates of the two sources are post-Exile, they tell stories that well-precede the Exile and are narrated as though in the land.

[8] Rashi: "or an equivalent fruit." RamBan uses the Aramaic word for etrog to prove that the text is telling us that we should use an etrog specifically.

[9] Leviticus 23:33-44, JPS translations. All translations contained in text will be from JPS translation.

[10] Deuteronomy 16:13-17.

To begin with, we notice the differences in the focus on the actual booths. In the Deuteronomy text, the only mention of the sukkah itself is in the name of the festival and, even at that, only as part of a list of the three pilgrimage festival. The Feast of Booths is left unexplained and seems to hold no special significance apart from or over the other two festivals. Rather, the focus is both on the pilgrimage that the individual will make with his offerings to God and on the individuals who were included in the obligation – you, your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. On the surface, the meaning of the holiday, according to this source, appears to be the thanksgiving one owes to God for his bounty.

Compared with the Deuteronomy text, the Leviticus source offers far more information and significantly adds to the understanding of the holiday. To begin with, the text explains that the Feast of Booths (חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת) involves booths (סֻכּוֹת) in which the celebrant is commanded to live for the seven days of the festival.

Where does the idea of these booths come from? Jeffrey Rubenstein cites other scholars who suggest that it is a symbol for the bride-chamber borrowed from earlier fertility rites. They speculate that it represented the divine marriage between God and the People. The symbolic link is made between the hopes for fertility that will issue from the bride chamber and the hope of a fertile crop the following year. It is also possible, they offer, that the sukkah was a practical and functional tool fulfilling a concrete need;[11] namely, as a temporary dwelling in the rural fields and vineyards during harvest time. The biblical text offers its own explanation of what the booths were: " וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ

[11] Jeffrey Rubenstein. *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods.* Atlanta Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995. p.29.

עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת – But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth."[12] This seems to be an explanation, after-the-fact, for why the place was called Sukkot and what they were. This suggests that later readers might have required this information because they no longer understood the concept of these sukkot. Rubenstein and others posit that, as the sacrificial cult came to require a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the farmers found a new practical use for their temporary booths as dwelling places at the central sanctuary. Only after this new use, did the sukkah come to be written into the ritual requirements of the Festival of Sukkot.[13]

Further differences exist in the details of the sacrifices. Deuteronomy mentions only that the pilgrim shall appear with his own gifts but it offers no further explication. Leviticus adds sufficient detail – adding that this is the time for the individual to offer each of the appropriate sacrifices: אִשֶּׁה עֹלָה וּמִנְחָה זֶבַח וּנְסָכִים.

There is also a difference in the length of the festival. Deuteronomy instructs: "you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days."[14] Whereas Leviticus adds a full day onto the celebration and includes a complete day of rest: "seven days you shall bring offerings by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring an offering by fire to the LORD…you shall observe the festival of the LORD *to last* seven days: a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day."[15]

Weyde asks why it is that the Deuteronomic text lacked these details. He explains that it is due to the fact that the Levitical text was written while in Exile. In other words, D

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[12] Genesis 33:17.
[13] Rubenstein, p.29.
[14] Deut. 16:15
[15] Lev. 23:36 and 39.

(author of Deuteronomy) omitted the details of Leviticus either because he had never seen it or it had not yet been written. He cites the work of J. Milgrom explaining that the construction of booths happened during the Exile of the Israelites in Babylonia. They created the ritual (or perhaps revived it from the times of the Temple Cultic practices of pilgrimage) as a communal memory of life in their own land.[16] Here, too, the text provides historical information which contextualizes the festival which is absent in Deuteronomy.

Further proof that these developments in the festival took place in Exile is in the words "On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees (עֵץ הָדָר)." This reference to Hadar is the same word used for the trees that the exiles hung their harps on along the Rivers of Babylon.[17] This fact suggests that, while exiled in Babylonia, the Israelites may have used this particular species of willow because it was accessible to them in that location.

But Weyde does not argue that the entirety of this section of Leviticus 23 was written while in Exile. He proposes that the Holiness Code shows various strata of redaction. For example, in v.39 one may see evidence that the context is pre-Exilic – the author seems to be suggesting that the Israelites have a piece of land from which to "gather in the yield of your land." The omission of any reference to the produce of the land from v.40ff makes Weyde believe that the two texts (pre- and post-Exilic) were redacted at a later point.[18] Those in Exile would not be bringing produce they did not grow to a Temple that no longer existed. The reference was therefore written out of the Torah because the social reality and historical milieu in which they lived demanded the change.

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[16] Karl William Weyde. *The Appointed Festivals of YHWH: The Festival Calendar in Leviticus 23 and the sukkôt Festival in Other Biblical Texts*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004. p.132.

[17] cf. Ps. 137:1f. It was there, along the Rivers of Babylon that the Exile sat and wept and on the ערבים they hung their harps.

[18] Weyde, p.138.

The date set for the observance of the Festival of Sukkot also varies from one biblical text to another. Today, one knows that the date of the festival begins on the fifteenth day of Tishrei, the seventh month. This is according to the tradition that comes from the Leviticus text – again, a later version. A look at Deuteronomy reveals that the date of the festival is tied to the end of one's harvest. A year in which the meteorological conditions required an early or a late harvest would require that the festival, too, be celebrated earlier or later. This could be likened to a person today who tends his/her own garden; the flower bulbs may be planted according the spring thaw of that particular year. Presumably, this would have meant that each family would have celebrated the festival according to their own schedule. The next strata of celebration suggested that the festival was to correspond with the autumnal equinox,[19] referred to as the turn of the year, as seen in Exodus 34:22: "You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year." This would have standardized observance for the whole community but it still would have been a date that migrated in the lunar calendar. Only in the latest, levitical text, does one find a solid date of 15 Tishrei. Ulfgaard suggests that this is as a result of the Babylonian influence on the Israelite calendar.[20]

Like the sukkah, the four species is a symbol that, almost certainly, was assimilated into the tradition from existing rites. Concerning this ritual, too, there is a discrepancy between the two texts. Deuteronomy only directs the individual to collect first fruits as an offering in v.16f. In comparison, the text of Leviticus provides great detail concerning specific varieties of plants:

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[19]Theodore H Gaster. *Festivals of the Jewish Year*. New York: William Sloan Associates Publishers, 1953. p. 83.
[20] Håkan Ulfgard. *The Story of Sukkot: the Setting, Shaping, and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1998. p.95.

> On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees (פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר), branches of palm trees (כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים), boughs of leafy trees (עֲנַף עֵץ־עָבֹת), and willows of the brook (עַרְבֵי־נָחַל), and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.[21]

Rubenstein explains that the accepted opinion among scholars is that these four species were adopted from other, pre-existing ancient fertility rites. There is mention of the Palm as the "tree of life" throughout the Ancient Near East and the boughs of leafy greens symbolize growth and fertility.[22] As in the previous note about the willow, these species seem to have been chosen because of the ease of acquisition and their relative affordability. This gave all Israelites, regardless of class or location, access to the tradition of the Four Species.

Perhaps one of the most obvious differences between the two texts has to do with their explanation of *why* the celebrants are observing the festival. In Deuteronomy, the text says that you will mark the festival so "the LORD your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings."[23] This is the entirety of meaning assigned by the text to the experience. Compared with this, Leviticus again provides significantly more detail about the instructions and, more importantly for the scope of this work, the meaning of the event. The Israelites shall live in their booths for the seven days of the festival "in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt."[24]

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[21] Lev. 23:40
[22] Rubenstein, p.29 and Ch. 5, II, n.33, p. 191.
[23] Deut. 16:15.
[24] Lev. 23:43.

It is here that one may begin to see the dual bases for the holiday. The agricultural basis is much older and derived from other traditions.[25] Agriculturally, the Israelites could relate to the experience of giving thanks for their produce. This served two purposes: it was an expression of gratitude for the success of the past year and an unspoken request for continued success in the coming year. But the insertion of the remembrance of the time of the wandering in the desert is an addition and introduces an historical aspect of the celebrant's experience. This is a new didactic aspect intended to facilitate a connection with the past. Shove suggests that this became especially important following their expulsion from the land, during a time when the Israelites had a more difficult time relating to the agricultural aspects of the festival.[26]

Amongst the yearly cycle of holidays, there is a group of three that are connected by the requirement upon the pre-Exilic Israelites to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[27] Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot came to be known as the שָׁלוֹשׁ רְגָלִים, literally the "Three Feet" because the individuals would make the trip to the central Temple in Jerusalem on foot.[28]

Many scholars find a thematic connection between Sukkot and the other two Pilgrimage Festivals.[29] That is, in telling the story of the formation of the Israelites, it is logical to connect the three holidays with the three major historical events of their establishment: the Exodus from Egypt and slavery (as told on Passover) the Revelation and

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[25] שלמה ויסבליט. מהותה של חג הסוכות במשנתו העיונית של הרמב"ם. מחקרי חג - כתב עת לתרבות יהודית, p.43 and Shove, p. 26.

[26] Shove, p.29-30.

[27] See Ex. 23:14, 34:24, Deut. 16:16.

[28] See Bava Kama 2b. The text refers to תורת הרגל demonstrating the connection of the word for "foot" to the individual who travels by foot.

[29] Arthur Waskow. *Seasons of our Joy*. New York: Summit Books, 1986. p. 47f.; Shove, p.23; and Weisblatt, p. 42.

receipt of the Torah on Mount Sinai (which is associated with Shavuot) and the entry into the Land promised to their ancestors. Shove and Weisblatt suggest that this historical event should have been associated with Sukkot. Instead of being known as "the Festival of the Conquering of the Land" the historical-didactic meaning of Sukkot was attached to the period of wandering in the desert.[30]

In addition to the two major textual references in the Torah, there is a third mention of the festival in Deuteronomy 31:

> And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel. Gather the people -- men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities -- that they may hear and so learn to revere the LORD your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere the LORD your God as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.[31]

The tradition of gathering (הקהל) every seven years was ordained so that the community would hear the reading of the scripture. This is an innovation in the observance of the Festival in that there is no other mention of any connection to a public recitation of any sort.

One final, ongoing theme of the festival finds its first expression in the texts of the Bible. The connection between Sukkot and the yearly rainfall is first seen in Zechariah:

> All who survive of all those nations that came up against Jerusalem shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow low to the King LORD of Hosts and to observe the Feast of Booths. Any of the earth's communities that does not make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to bow low to the King LORD of Hosts shall receive no rain. However, if the community of Egypt does not make this pilgrimage, it shall not be visited by the same affliction with which the LORD will strike the other nations that do not come

[30] Shove, p.29.
[31] Deut. 31:10-13.

up to observe the Feast of Booths. Such shall be the punishment of Egypt and of all other nations that do not come up to observe the Feast of Booths.[32]

There is an explicit connection between the correct observance of the requirements of pilgrimage and God's granting sufficient rainfall, an essential need to an agrarian society. This concept will maintain a place of prominence in the writing and meaning of Sukkot well through the Temple period and the Amoraic and Tannaitic periods.

Sukkot during the Second Temple Period

The biblical period of fastest, and most significant, change in the observance and meaning of the Festival of Sukkot occurred in the years following the Destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian Exile. There was a gap of fifty years between the Destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the return of some of the Israelites from Babylon in 536. During this time, the cultic worship was discontinued and personal memories of observing the festival were forgotten by all but the most elderly of the community. This offered a valuable opportunity for the leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, to reshape, and even to create from scratch, new understandings of old ritual.[33] They needed to contend with a vacuum of information and they re-contextualized, re-explained and in some cases, re-wrote the meaning of older rituals.[34] They were not, however, simply creating new ritual out of nothing. As in the Toraitic material, much of the ritual decreed by these later texts draws on traditions of, and was influenced by, the surrounding pagan rites. Regardless of whether the observance was adopted from without or was a resurrection of an earlier tradition from

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[32] Zech. 14:16-20.
[33] Rubenstein, p.32.
[34] *ibid.*, p.34.

within, the added historical input and supplemental perspective added by writers of the Second Temple period expand our knowledge of what rituals were being performed and what the experience of the celebrants might have been.

The return to the sacrificial cult offerings was of absolute prime importance to the latter prophets as seen by the portion of Ezra-Nehemiah devoted to discussion of the sacrifices. Even in the references to Sukkot, the text is focused on the sacrificial aspect of the festival:

> They set up the altar on its site because they were in fear of the peoples of the land, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings each morning and evening. Then they celebrated the festival of Tabernacles as is written, with its daily burnt offerings in the proper quantities, on each day as is prescribed for it, followed by the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the new moons and for all the sacred fixed times of the LORD, and whatever freewill offerings were made to the LORD.[35]

Even after the sacrifices were resumed, there was a gap of twenty years before other aspects of the pre-Exilic festival were reinstated. When they were, it was under the influence of the culture in which they had spent time in Exile and with an eye toward re-asserting a specific Israelite ideology.[36] Ezra is concerned with couching his instructions in the earlier tradition of the Pentateuchal guidelines of the sacrifices. Hence, the language uses expressions such as: as it is written, proper quantities, as is prescribed, fixed times, etc. These sought to establish Ezra's authority as based on an earlier tradition.[37]

Chapter eight of the Book of Nehemiah offers greater clarity on new traditions:

> On the second day, the heads of the clans of all the people and the priests and Levites gathered to Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Teaching. They found written in the Teaching that the LORD had commanded Moses that the Israelites must dwell in booths during the festival of the seventh month, and that they must announce and proclaim throughout all their towns and Jerusalem as follows, "Go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles, palms and

[35] Ezra 3:3-5
[36] Ulfgard, p.109.
[37] *ibid.* p.123.

> *other* leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." So the people went out and brought them, and made themselves booths on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God, in the square of the Water Gate and in the square of the Ephraim Gate. The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths -- the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day -- and there was very great rejoicing. He read from the scroll of the Teaching of God each day, from the first to the last day. They celebrated the festival seven days, and there was a solemn gathering on the eighth, as prescribed.[38]

In comparison to Ezra, the book of Nehemiah is not as focused on the cult worship. In fact, Weyde suggests that Nehemiah's description of the festival is an intentional re-interpretation of the earlier dictates of Leviticus.[39] Nehemiah instructs the Israelites to return to the practice of collecting the natural materials but adds that they are to be used for constructing their booths.[40] He also includes varieties of materials that are not mentioned in earlier texts. This is a modification of the tradition; instead of the visitors to Jerusalem building the booths out of personal necessity, now all celebrants will build them out of religious obligation.[41] Blenkinsopp claims that this is a natural process of exegetical development and is not simply more detail about earlier text.[42] Furthermore, the text explicitly instructs them to build these booths "on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God, in the square of the Water Gate and in the square of the Ephraim Gate".[43] This is another piece of evidence that the focus of the ritual life of the Israelites was shifting away from the sacrificial altar and toward the individual ritual

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[38] Neh. 8:13-18.
[39] Weyde, p.139.
[40] Rubenstein, p.36. cf. Lev. 23:40.
[41] *ibid.*, p.77.
[42] J. Blenkinsopp. *Ezra – Nehemiah, A Commentary*. London: OTL, 1989, p.291*f.*
[43] Neh. 8:16.

experience.[44] And perhaps most interesting is the re-introduction of a public gathering to hear the reading and explanation of the Torah.

Nehemiah 8 is also credited with being the inspiration to the rabbis for the much later institution of synagogal readings of the Torah. "On the second day, the heads of the clans of all the people and the priests and Levites gathered to Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Teaching"[45] drew on the tradition of the *Hakhel* ceremony from Deuteronomy. (See below, pg. 31) This is another example of the later prophet's efforts to shift the focus of the festival away from the sacrificial cult and onto the individual's experience.

It can be difficult to ascertain much information about the emotional or psychological experience of the individual during these ancient rituals. As Fischer reminds the reader, all a historian can work with are the "ascertainable facts" provided by the texts.[46] He acknowledges that many who study history are likely to employ their own creativity in interpreting them and thereby do them injustice and damage. It is not because historians intend to mislead their readers but rather because their own historical relativism is a dangerous trap and can lead to misinterpretation.[47] This pitfall can be avoided, to some extent, through a careful methodological approach to the ancient Israelite texts.

During the Pentateuchal period of development, the text offers several examples of commanded happiness on the Festival of Sukkot. It would be tempting for modern scholars to believe that they understand the meaning of the words "joyful" or "sad" when they appear in the Bible. But, by looking at the context of these terms we can gain a sense of what they

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[44] Blenkinsopp, p.286 as in Ulfgard, 125.
[45] Neh. 8:13.
[46] David Hackett Fischer. *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers. 1970, p.xvi.
[47] Fischer, p.307.

referred to for the celebrants of these rituals. This can be seen in a concordance comparison of the command in verse 40 of Leviticus 23 and verse 14 of Deuteronomy 16. The command, וְשָׂמַחְתָּ, appears in singular and plural forms eight times in all of the Tanach.[48] Each case is connected with the bringing of tithes to the altar of God and to offering sacrifices. Each occurrence suggests that there is some sort of rejoicing or pleasure in which the individual will partake as part of, or as a result of, the fulfillment of the offering. In the context of Sukkot, then, it suggests that the central motif of the festival in the Torah is that of fulfilling the obligations of tithing. However, once the tradition of commanded happiness progresses to the times of Nehemiah, there is a new, additional aspect.

Nehemiah 8:10 employs a word for rejoicing that is different from the one mentioned above. Instead of שִׂמְחָה, the words, חֲדָוַת יְ-ה, are associated with "eating good foods and drinking sweet drinks" and with hosting those who do not have the materials for celebration. In v.11, Nehemiah contrasts what the celebrants should be feeling with the emotion of sadness (אַל־תֵּעָצֵבוּ); instead, it says that the Israelites shall make שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה. It seems that, this late biblical text is the first example in which the word "שִׂמְחָה" clearly relates to an emotional experience of happiness as we might know it today.

Later biblical books, make a connection, sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly, between Sukkot and the idea of dedication/consecration. This arises from the references to the dedication of Solomon's Temple which took place during Sukkot. The story is first told in the First book of Kings 8:2:

> "Then Solomon convoked the elders of Israel -- all the heads of the tribes and the ancestral chieftains of the Israelites -- before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from the City of David, that is, Zion. All the men of Israel gathered before King Solomon at the Feast, in the month of Ethanim --

[48] cf. Lev. 23:40, Deut. 12:7, 12, 18, 14:26, 16:11, 26:11, 27:7.

> that is, the seventh month...So Solomon and all Israel with him -- a great assemblage, *coming* from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt -- observed the Feast at that time before the LORD our God, seven days and again seven days, fourteen days in all. On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their homes, joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness that the LORD had shown to His servant David and His people Israel."[49]

The idea that spaces are to be consecrated or re-dedicated after disuse is seen again when Ezra brings a portion of the community back from Exile in Babylonia. We read the description of the festival above but the verses that preceded them tell the reader that this particular observance of the Festival of Booths is, in fact, the first return of sacrifices to the Land of Israel.[50]

> "When the seventh month arrived -- the Israelites being settled in their towns -- the entire people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brother priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers set to and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings upon it as is written in the Teaching of Moses, the man of God. They set up the altar on its site because they were in fear of the peoples of the land, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings each morning and evening."[51]

Weyde suggests that the building of the altar began at the beginning of the month and, upon its completion two weeks later, the offerings took place on the festival of Sukkot.

When King Jeroboam wanted to erect his own altars in imitation of the one in Judea, he modeled his ceremony after that in Solomon's Temple and he fixed the date of the inauguration on the 15th day of the eighth month, one month after that of Solomon's ceremony (albeit in a different year).[52] And exactly one month after we now celebrate Sukkot.

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[49] I Kings 8:1-2 and 65-66.
[50] Rubenstein, p.33.
[51] Ezra 3:1-3.
[52] Josephus 8:225-231, cf. I Kings 12:26-33.

What was it about this festival, of all the festivals of the year, which prompted a thematic connection to consecration and dedication? Josephus tells us that it was specifically the fact that this festival "was considered especially sacred and important by the Hebrews"[53] which merited its attachment to such a significant event as the rededication of a Temple.[54] This concept of inauguration will be further developed by later authorities in the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods.

The thematic connection with rain, which first appeared in Zechariah, is picked up again during the Second Temple period. Rubenstein points us to the writing of the first century philosopher and de facto historian Pseudo-Philo on the topic of the use of the lulav during the Second Temple period. It is a paraphrase of the text from Leviticus and its connection to rain: "And you will take for me the beautiful fruit of the tree and the palm branch, and the willow and the cedar and the branches of myrtle. And I will remember the whole earth with rain..."[55]

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[53] Josephus, 8:100-123.
[54] Rubenstein, p.78.
[55] Pseudo-Philo, 13:7. Trans. By Harrington, p.321 as cited in Rubenstein, p.73.

Chapter Two – Tannaitic Period

As with so many other parts of the Jewish world today, themes and concepts which govern our religious lives were created and developed during the Rabbinic period. As mentioned above, the gap of time between the destruction of the First Temple and the return from the Babylonian Exile left a virtual *tabula rasa* on which to create this festival (as well as other aspects of the cultic practice) anew. Ezra and Nehemiah took full advantage of this opportunity and the rabbis of the first century CE following the destruction of the Second Temple were no less ambitious.

Rubenstein claimed that "the Temple was viewed as God's terrestrial abode and without it, the foundation upon which biblical Judaism stood was removed."[56] This was significant in all aspects of religious life in the 1st century CE. This was especially problematic for a festival like Sukkot that was primarily focused on a pilgrimage to a Temple. The destruction of the Second Temple left the rabbis with a choice: Allow all ritual aspects of cultic Judaism to cease and disappear or pick up on relevant themes from Temple practice and re-explain them for the new post-Temple paradigm.[57]

Remember that that there was already a precedent for the celebration of the festival which did not center on the altar itself (see Neh. 8:16 and above, page #16) and even to observe some aspects of the holiday without coming to Jerusalem at all (see Lev. 23 and above, page #7). Instead of the sacrificial/pilgrimage focused observance, the rabbis decided to draw on themes that were independent of the Temple cult. It is possible that these themes were chosen because the rabbis believed they would carry Judaism forward into an indefinite

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[56] Rubenstein, p.1.
[57] *ibid.*, p.236.

future for an undetermined amount of time until the Temple could be rebuilt, and the sacrifices reinstated.

One of these themes, which was present in the biblical texts but found its champion among the rabbis was the connection of Sukkot to water. The thematic relationship was first observed in the Bible as a form of Sympathetic Magic.[58]

Many of the sympathetic magical acts of the Hebrew Bible had to do with fertility. This reflected the contemporary pagan rites of the surrounding culture. For example, the practice of child sacrifice was meant to appease the gods and they believed that the sacrificial gift of one child would ensure increased progeny in the future. Another example, and one that becomes important in this study, is that of the pouring of water - which was reminiscent of the twice yearly pagan water libations at the Temple in Hierapolis, Syria as well as Ispahan, Iran.[59]

The Israelite tradition transmits several examples of biblical characters pouring water on the ground. In First Samuel, Samuel said to all the Israelites:

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[58] This refers to the notion of the ancient peoples that one thing or event can affect another at a distance as a consequence of a sympathetic connection between them.[58] In Gaster's words: Things done by men may induce similar actions on the part of nature or "the gods".(pg.82) This type of interacting with the supernatural world can be seen throughout the ancient Near East.
Christopher Faraone. *Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies*. The Journal of Hellenic Studies, 1993. Faraone writes about two examples from the ancient Near East. The Egyptian priests would create, manipulate and destroy wax effigies of the gods of their enemies believing that the Voodoo-like actions would have an effect on the other gods. The notion is best captured in the liturgy of the *Maqlû* ceremony of the Hittites: "Just as these figurines melt, run and flow away, so may sorcerer and sorceress melt, run and flow away." (*Maqlû* 2.146-57 as translated by Hillers.) p.62.
Similarly, the Greeks would mutilate the carcasses of animals in the hope that their own mortal enemies would suffer a similar fate (cf. Jeremiah 34:18-20).
[59] Gaster, p.82.

> If you mean to return to the LORD with all your heart...Then He will deliver you from the hands of the Philistines...They assembled at Mizpah, and they drew water and poured it out before the LORD; they fasted that day, and there they confessed that they had sinned against the LORD.[60]

Similarly, in Jeremiah, 44:18, the pouring of liquid on the ground served as a performative petition; a way of turning their request for success in their battle into a physical gesture: "But ever since we stopped making offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pouring libations to her, we have lacked everything, and we have been consumed by the sword and by famine." They believed that the source of their misery was the discontinuation of their libations (in this case, oil). In another demonstration of the power of these libations, David asks for a drink of water from the cistern of Bethlehem and his men risk their lives to bring it to him. Out of an act of humility and of petition, he refuses to drink it and instead, "he poured it out as a libation to the Lord".[61] Bar Kapara adds that this episode took place on Sukkot "and the water libation (needed to be done)!"[62]

Interestingly, Brand points out that the ritual of pouring out libations of water on Sukkot is found nowhere in the Bible.[63] Using the premise of sympathetic magic, it is possible that this is connected to the mention of the relationship between the festival and rain in Zechariah.[64] While Rubinstein does not identify a clear link,[65] he does suggest that a seemingly pagan ritual of pouring magical libations on the ground has been transformed by the rabbis into *Nisuch HaMayim*, the Water Libation, as part of the Sukkot sacrificial ritual.[66]

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[60] 1 Sam. vv. 7:3,6.
[61] 2 Sam. 23:16.
[62] y. Sanhedrin, 4:5.
[63] ישראל ברנד. *על השמחה בחג הסוכות - מניסוך המים לשמחת בית השואבה*. מחקרי חג. תשרי, תשנ"ד. vol. 5, p.16.
[64] see Zech. 14:16-20 and above, page #13.
[65] Rubenstein, p. 77.
[66] *ibid.*, p. 117.

Rubenstein offers the reader a way to understand the action of pouring out a water libation. He tells us that the ancients understood there to be a large store of subterranean waters lying directly beneath the Temple. Their libations of water, especially on the Temple altar were meant to stimulate these waters and to bring them to the surface in the form of appropriate rains during the coming year.[67] Rain was, after all, the key ingredient for ensuring the fertility of the land in the coming year. The Talmud states this idea explicitly:

> Why did the Torah say: "they poured water on the Holiday"? God said they shall pour water on the festival so that they will be blessed with rains of blessing".[68]

This is in response to the idea that: On Sukkot, judgment is passed in respect to rain.[69] With the destruction of the Second Temple and the ensuing blank slate, one may deduce the importance of a topic to the rabbis based on how much discussion is devoted to it in the texts. Relative to the amount written on the topic of sukkot, the matter of the water libations received a surprising amount of discussion. It seems fair, then, to claim that the rabbis wished the theme of rain to remain central, but recognized that the ritual needed modification.

The earlier magical acts of pouring water libations were modified into the new form of divine worship – prayer. The additional prayer in the Amidah for rain is added to the daily recitation of the liturgy on Shemini Atzeret – the eighth day of the Festival. It is interesting to see how the rabbis explained the delay of the rain – after all, it would have been thematically appropriate for the rain to begin to fall on the first day of the festival. We read in Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana:[70]

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[67] Rubenstein, p.163.
[68] b. Rosh Hashanah, 16a.
[69] m. Rosh Hashanah, 1:2.
[70] Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana 28:8.

> During the seven days of Sukkot, the Torah hints to Israel and says to them: Ask God for rain...Since they did not notice, the Torah set aside for them an additional day. Therefore, the Scripture had to say, 'On the eighth day...[71]'

This relatively early midrash, from about the fifth century, shows us that the rabbis understood that the original connection to rain would have been expressed on the Festival of Sukkot and was only later moved to its current place in the liturgy of Shemini Atzeret. The authors of Midrash Hagadol provide a different explanation, though, regarding why this happened. "It is fitting that rain begins to fall on the first day of Sukkot, but because this would inconvenience pilgrims at the Temple, the rain is deferred until Shemini Atzeret."[72]

In Mishnah Sukkot, we receive a detailed description of how the water libation took place in the days of the Temple sacrifices:

> נִסּוּךְ הַמַּיִם כֵּיצַד, צְלוֹחִית שֶׁל זָהָב מְחֻזֶּקֶת שְׁלֹשֶׁת לֻגִּין הָיָה מְמַלֵּא מִן הַשִּׁלֹחַ. הִגִּיעוּ לְשַׁעַר הַמַּיִם, תָּקְעוּ וְתַרִיעוּ וְתָקְעוּ. עָלָה בַכֶּבֶשׁ וּפָנָה לִשְׂמֹאלוֹ, שְׁנֵי סְפָלִים שֶׁל כֶּסֶף הָיוּ שָׁם. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, שֶׁל סִיד הָיוּ, אֶלָּא שֶׁהָיוּ מַשְׁתִּירִין פְּנֵיהֶם מִפְּנֵי הַיַּיִן. וּמְנַקְּבִין כְּמִין שְׁנֵי חֲטָמִין דַּקִּין, אֶחָד מְעֻבֶּה וְאֶחָד דַּק, כְּדֵי שֶׁיְּהוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּלִין בְּבַת אַחַת. מַעֲרָבִי שֶׁל מַיִם, מִזְרָחִי שֶׁל יַיִן. עֵרָה שֶׁל מַיִם לְתוֹךְ שֶׁל יַיִן, וְשֶׁל יַיִן לְתוֹךְ שֶׁל מַיִם, יָצָא. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, בְּלֹג הָיָה מְנַסְּכוֹ כָּל שְׁמוֹנָה. וְלַמְנַסְּכוֹ אוֹמְרִים לוֹ, הַגְבַּהּ יָדְךָ, שֶׁפַּעַם אַחַת נִסְּכוֹ אֶחָד עַל גַּבֵּי רַגְלָיו, וּרְגָמוּהוּ כָּל הָעָם בְּאֶתְרוֹגֵיהֶן:

> How is the pouring of water done? A golden flask, with a volume of three *lugim*, was filled from the Shiloah. It was brought to the water gate; then sounded and announced. They went up the ramp and turned to its left. Two silver bowls were there. Rabbi Yehuda says, they were made of lime, but had turned dark from the wine. They had holes like a narrow nose, one wise and one narrow, so both of them could be poured together, the one for wine poured slowly and the one for water poured quickly. The one on the west was for water, the one on the east for wine. If he emptied the bowls of water in to the bowl of wine, or the bowl of wine into the bowl of water he has fulfilled it. Rabbi Yehuda says one pours a *lug* the whole eight days. And to the one who pours, they announce to him "lift up your hand, because one time a person poured it on his feet and all the people stoned him with their etrogim.[73]

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[71] Num 29:35.
[72] Midrash HaGadol, 3:657.
[73] m. Sukkah 4:9.

Recall, the mishnayot, like the one above, cover a great span of time. Some of the rabbis, to whom the traditions are attributed, were living during the time of the Temple and were therefore first-hand observers of the practices. Others were living during the third century, 150 years after the destruction. These rabbis were drawing on one of a few sources for their information about the goings-on of the Temple cult: during the generation following the destruction they could gather the testimony of the oldest members of the community who still could recall the tradition, after that, there were oral descriptions of the events in the Temple and they had written records of what took place. It is generally acknowledged that each of these sources was biased and must be taken with a degree of skepticism as to their accuracy, authenticity and with the agenda of the source in mind.[74]

Looking to the end of the Mishnah, the story requires some explanation. The text relates the story of "One time, one poured the water on his feet and all the people stoned him with their etrogs." Brand quotes Josephus' first century work, Antiquities of the Jews, which clarifies that the individual was none other than King Yannai. He also includes the twentieth century commentary of the historian Yosef Klozner who added that Yannai was a Sadducee who wanted to demonstrate that this custom of a Water Libation on Sukkot was purely rabbinic, מדרבנן. Because it was not מדאוריתא, not from the Torah, Yannai mocked it and attempted to regain the control over the sacrifices of the Temple.[75] When he poured the libation on the ground, the Mishnah tells us that the will of the people was made clear: they

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[74] A word might be said about the reliability of these texts of the rabbinic period. Any conclusions we reach based on these works are compromised because one must admit that the rabbis had a clear agenda (the capture of authority) and, therefore, their texts are obviously suspect. But Rubenstein argues that the level of agreement with extra-rabbinic sources (i.e. the Qumran scrolls, an Alexandrian papyrus and Philo) suggests that the rabbis' texts may be more reliable that critics would claim. (p.149)

[75] Tosefta m. sukkah 3:15.

felt the libation important and they threw their etrogs at him in protest. What begins to emerge is the role that this ritual played in the power struggle that was underway between the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Hellenists and the Qumran Sect for control and authority over the future direction of Judaism.

In addition to this example, another field on which this battle was played out was that of the observance of Simchat Beit HaShoevah. This is described as a fantastic celebration that took place each night of the festival in the Temple. The descriptions of the rituals and choreography were lavish and sometimes almost too fantastic to believe.

As with the rite of the Water Libation, the rabbis acknowledge that this tradition arose from a much earlier pagan rite. The Mishnah states:

> And two priests stood in the upper gate, which descended from the Court of the Israelites to the Women's Court, and had two trumpets in their hands...They arrived to the gate that exited to the East: they turned their faces to the West and said: Our ancestors were in this place turned with their backs to the Temple of God and faced the East and there they bowed to the sun. "But as for us, our eyes are towards God." Rabbi Yehuda says: they said it two times, We belong to God, our eyes are toward God.[76]

It seems that they understood that there was an earlier rite in which the worshippers bowed down to the sun instead of to God. Gaster describes the rite as an effort to "rekindle the decadent sun at the time of the autumnal equinox and to hail it when it rose at dawn."[77] It is possible that this is based on the excerpt from the book of Ezekiel in which the prophet describes the Israelite men practicing the idolatry of other cultures by taking part in a Sun Worship ritual:

> He said to me, "Have you seen, O mortal? You shall see even more terrible abominations than these." [16] Then He brought me into the inner court of the House of

[76] m. Sukkah 5:4.
[77] Gaster, p. 83.

> the LORD, and there, at the entrance to the Temple of the LORD, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men, their backs to the Temple of the LORD and their faces to the east; they were bowing low to the sun in the east. [17] And He said to me, "Do you see, O mortal? Is it not enough for the House of Judah to practice the abominations that they have committed here, that they must fill the country with lawlessness and provoke Me still further and thrust the branch to their nostrils?[78]

Initially, it seems that the ritual took place during the day time. As part of the struggle for authority, the rabbis received criticism from the Sadducees who accused them of continuing the pagan worship of the sun in their Simchat Beit HaShoevah celebration. To remove all doubt, the observance of this ritual was moved to the middle of the night – eliminating the grounds for the accusation that the sun was their object of worship.[79] The Mishnah also describes how the party would continue through the night until it was time to offer the morning sacrifices

Some of the most interesting aspects of the celebration of Simchat Beit HaShoevah have to do with exactly how it was performed. The location of the festivities may, at first glance, seem insignificant but it is of major importance in the religio-political sectarian struggles. During the period of the operation of the Temple cult, all significant rituals and rites would take place around the central, inner court which contained the altar and the Holy of Holies. This celebration was different. The Mishnah describes the construction of special galleries and arenas in the Women's Court – outside the Israelite Court. This is important because it both included the marginalized members of the Israelite community (women, lepers and Nazerites) but also because it moved the festivities effectively outside the control of the Sadducean Priests.[80]

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[78] Ezek. 8:15-17.
[79] Brand, p.19.
[80] *ibid.*, p.17.

We read that the arrangement of the Simchat Beit HaShoevah was quite a production. It required the construction of two-tiered stadium seating and the raising of eight massive *menorot* of gold.

> בְּמוֹצָאֵי יוֹם טוֹב הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁל חַג, יָרְדוּ לְעֶזְרַת נָשִׁים, וּמְתַקְּנִין שָׁם תִּקּוּן גָּדוֹל. וּמְנוֹרוֹת שֶׁל זָהָב הָיוּ שָׁם, וְאַרְבָּעָה סְפָלִים שֶׁל זָהָב בְּרָאשֵׁיהֶן וְאַרְבָּעָה סֻלָּמוֹת לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, וְאַרְבָּעָה יְלָדִים מִפְּרֹחֵי כְהֻנָּה וּבִידֵיהֶם כַּדִּים שֶׁל שֶׁמֶן שֶׁל מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים לֹג, שֶׁהֵן מַטִּילִין לְכָל סֵפֶל וָסֵפֶל:
>
> On the evening ending the first day of the festival, they went down to the women's court and arranged there some order. And there were golden menorahs with four gold bowls on the top and four ladders for each menorah. And four young one priests had jars of oil in their hands containing 120 *lugim* to pour in each bowl.[81]

The rabbis were interested in elevating this event to a place of prominence among all the holy times of the year. This may be why Josephus referred to it as *HeChag – The* Festival. This is clear through at least two clues. First, is the description of the original gallery constructed for the festival. We learn that the happiness grew to such a fervor that the original design, which included simple areas designated for men and others for women proved insufficient. As soon as joy amongst the crowd spiked, we learn that the men spilled into the women's section and the two intermingled. From that point on, the rabbis designed a raised balcony from which the women could observe the celebration without the fear of the two mixing.[82]

The other indicator we have about the rabbis' perception of their celebration is about the "joy" of the festival. It is obviously important to them that the commanded happiness of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are properly observed. To this end, the text presents us with an image of nearly uncontrollable excitement and joy. The final words sum up the extent of the joy: "כָּל מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה שִׂמְחַת בֵּית הַשּׁוֹאֲבָה, לֹא רָאָה שִׂמְחָה מִיָּמָיו", anyone who has never seen

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[81] m. Sukkah 5:2.
[82] Brand, p.18.

the Simchat Beit HaShoevah has never seen happiness in his life."[83] The thread of exuberant joy is picked back up in the Talmudic discussion of Simchat Beit HaShoevah in which we read that the rabbis presented great feats of acrobatic and energetic accomplishments:

> It was taught in a Baraita: They said of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel that when he rejoiced at Simchat Beit HaShoevah, he would take eight flaming torches and throw one up and catch another without their touching each other. And when he would prostrate himself, he would plant his two thumbs in the ground and bow and kiss the floor and arise and no one else could do this...Levi would sport in front of Rabbi with eight knives, Shmuel in front of King Shapur with eight glasses of wine. Abaye before Rabbah with eight eggs; some say with four eggs.[84]

Mishnah Sukkah 5:1 describes the flute playing and the happiness that was present during the ritual. To add to the sense of positive energy, the Tosefta adds that: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananyah says, that when we were happy from the Joy of the House of Drawing, you could not see hate in our eyes.[85] While a nice image – everyone happy with everyone else – it is hard to imagine that it is descriptive, rather perhaps proscriptive.

It is significant to note that the players in the grand choreography of the festivities are not the priests. Again, as pointed out by Brand, it was Rabban Gamliel, the grandson of Hillel HaZaken, the president of the Sanhedrin and his followers and the rest of the devotees and "People of Deeds", in other words, the society's notable personalities, who led this event. It is reported that Hillel used to say: If I am here – All is here, and if I am not here – who is here...[86] In other words, he was proclaiming that his presence, as head of the Sanhedrin, was essential for the observance of the celebration. The Talmud also proclaimed the authority of this event by claiming: If you will come to my house (the place of the Sanhedrin), I (God)

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[83] m. Sukkah 5:1.
[84] b. Sukkah 53a, trans. Schottenstein Edition.
[85] Tosefta m. sukkah 4:5.
[86] *ibid.*, 4:4.

will come to your house.[87] This was their way of establishing their authority in the post-Temple milieu. If, even during the times of the Temple cult, the rabbis had the power to invite God's presence outside the Inner Court, then how much more-so during the period of the Mishnah and Talmud could they move it to wherever they claimed it to be.

Continuing with the theme of the rabbis agenda, we see a renewed emphasis on the tradition known as the Hakhel ceremony. Originally instituted in Neh. 8:13 (see above, page #17), the rabbis reminded the Israelites, through the Mishnah, that this precept was still in effect. The Tanaitic details of the ceremony are rather vague. This is addressed by the Mishnah. Mishnah Sotah details exactly how this was to be carried out as well as the choreography of the gathering as well as which community leaders were involved.[88]

> Parshat HaMelech, how was it done? On the evening ending the first festival day of the Festival (of Sukkot), on the eighth evening of the seventh (year), they made him (the King) a dais of wood in the (Women's) Courtyard (of the Temple) and he sat upon it, as it is said: Every seven years during the year set for remission, etc.[89] The servant of the Knesset raised the Torah scroll and gave it to the head of the Knesset and the head of the Knesset gave it to the deputy (vice High Priest) and the deputy gave it to the High Priest and the High Priest gave it to the King and the King stood to receive it and read from it while seated. King Agrippas stood and received it and stood while reading and the sages praised him (for it). And when he (Agrippas) arrived at the part: "you must not set a foreigner over you (as king),"[90] his (Agrippas') eyes welled up with tears (because this invalidated his own kingship). They said to him, do not be afraid, Agrippas, you are our brother, you are our brother, you are our brother, and he read from the beginning of Deuteronomy until the Shema...until he finished the reading. And the blessings that the High Priest used, the King blessed (after the Torah reading) but instead of "Mehilat HaAvon", the king said "who has given us the Festivals."[91]

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[87] b. Sukkah, 53a.
[88] m. Sotah 7:8.
[89] Deuteronomy 31:10.
[90] *ibid.* 17:15.
[91] The insertions in parentheses are made based on the clarifications of Pinchas Kehati.

It seems that, rather than reading the entire Torah as Deuteronomy instructed, the king would read certain excerpts from the book.[92] Additionally, it is interesting to note that the rabbis emphasized this tradition which focused authority away from the Sadducean priesthood. For instance, it is not the High Priest who is performing the reading and the king chose to read a different excerpt than what one might have expected from the High Priest.

Just as the rabbis clarified and removed inconsistencies in the original sources for Hakhel, so too they clarified the Willow ritual. As was mentioned above (see above, page #8-9), the text of Lev. 23, the text left a certain amount of ambiguity as to the identity of the proper species of willow to use in the ritual. Experts believe that this "willow of the brook" is actually the Babylonian version and not the Palestinian. The rabbis seek to eradicate the issue by explaining that the names of these two trees switched names and so the correct species is the Palestinian variety after all.[93] The rabbis also seek to resolve the debate concerning the exact identities of the various species. Association of the Etrog with (עֵץ הָדָר) and the Myrtle with (עֲנַף עֵץ־עָבֹת) is obvious speculation but they felt the need to standardize practice – again ensuring that their words were authoritative on the matter.[94]

In addition to the aspects of earlier rites that the rabbis preserved, it is important to consider what aspects they allowed to slide into historical oblivion. An important early theme of the cultic expression of the festival was the offering of the first fruits and the wave

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[92] In modern days, the president of the State of Israel has taken the role of king and fulfilled the tradition during massive gatherings at the Western Wall on the Second Day of Sukkot in 1987 and 2001.
[93] b. Sukkah 34a.
[94] Rubenstein, p.192*f.*

offering. With all the prominence given to sacrifices in some *masechtot* of the Mishnah, the sacrifices of Sukkot receive very little attention.[95]

Similarly, old meaning of ritual was, in some cases, emphasized in a new way. For example, upon the rebuilding of the Second Temple, Ezra used the festival as a way to emphasize a nationalistic pride. Shove points out that Sukkot was the perfect holiday for that sentiment to find expression. While the theme of the festival is that of temporariness and the instability of shaky dwellings, the yearning for the opposite cannot help but creep into the minds of its celebrants. Therefore, Ezra has plenty of emotional material on which to draw for his framing of Sukkot as the Israelite's grand return (or so he would have us believe) to the Land. This, Shove suggests is the reason that Sukkot was chosen as the time of year Ezra rededicates the altar.[96]

This nationalism is further strengthened in the excerpt from Nehemiah. He wishes to demonstrate not only that Israelites should be proud to return to their land but that the land is absolutely essential in the proper observance of the festival. For this reason, Nehemiah listed the materials required for the construction of the booths – materials that the Israelites could have procured only in their own land. He also explains that "the whole people from captivity built booths" and suggests that they are the first Israelites to celebrate the festival since the time of Joshua. Both of these are likely exaggerated comments but lend support to the claim that Ezra and Nehemiah both wanted to communicate the grandeur of the festivities and the centrality of the Temple and the Land in the observance of the festival.

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[95] Rubenstein, p.4.
[96] Shove, p.30.

Bloch suggests that this is the reason that Zechariah prophesies the pilgrimage of all the nations of the earth to Jerusalem.[97] The Jew could not fulfill the duty where they lived; political, religious and political autonomy were essential to the festival's success.

> Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities shall yet come -- the inhabitants of one shall go to the other and say, "Let us go and entreat the favor of the LORD, let us seek the LORD of Hosts; I will go, too." The many peoples and the multitude of nations shall come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.[98]

Similar to the nationalistic undercurrents of Ezra-Nehemiah, Zechariah is predicting that some day, everyone will recognize the centrality of Jerusalem to the proper worship and homage of the Lord of Hosts. "To go to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Sukkot was Zechariah's way of prophesying the recognition of the independence of Israel by the nations of the World."[99] According to the Talmud,[100] this is, incidentally, the haftarah for the prayer service of Sukkot – again emphasizing the rabbis' commitment to its themes in the observance of the festival.

In addition to the nationalistic prophesies of Zechariah, the rabbis also carried forward and further developed the eschatological aspects of Zechariah's vision of Sukkot. Chapter fourteen describes God's entrance into the war between Israel and the other nations of the earth. God will destroy Israel's enemies and all knees will bow to the one true God. It is from this chapter that the prayer, Aleinu, draws the statement: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד – And on that day, God will be one and His name will be one.[101] Weyde explains

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[97] Abraham P. Bloch. *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days.* New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc, 1978. p.43.
[98] Zech. 8:20-22.
[99] *ibid.*
[100] b. Megillah 31a.
[101] Zech. 14:9.

that the words of verse 16 connect Sukkot to the End of Days: Any survivors of those nations that came up against Jerusalem shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow low to the King LORD of Hosts and to observe the Feast of Booths.[102]

It is understandable that the rabbis would be interested in emphasizing the eschatological meaning of a festival like Sukkot. They lived in the, relatively, early days of an expulsion from their holy city. Without their Temple, they dreamt of a return to autonomy and peace. In the words of the early homiletic midrash of Pirke D'Rav Kahana, Rabbi Levi is quoted as saying: whoever fulfills the commandment of sukkah in this world, God says, 'since he observed the commandment of sukkah in this world I will protect him from fire of the Day to Come.'"[103] One can almost feel the yearning for the "Day to Come" and the protection the rabbis felt the proper observance of the festival would afford them in God's judgment.

To highlight the rabbis' understanding of the eschatological function of the sukkah itself, the Talmud transmits this midrash:

> Rabba bar bar Hanna[104] in the name of Rabbi Yohanan[105] further stated: The Holy One in the World to Come will make a sukkah for the righteous from the skin of Leviathan, for it is said, "can you fill "sukkot with his skin." (Job 40:31)[106] If a man is worthy, a sukkah is made for him; if he is not worthy a mere covering (צלצל) is made for him, for it is said, "and his head with a fish covering." (Job 40:31) The rest of Leviathan will be spread by the Holy One upon the walls of Jerusalem and its splendor will shine from one end of the world to the other.

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[102] Weyde, p.236.
[103] Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 452, Yalkut 653.
[104] A third generation Babylonia amora.
[105] A second generation Palestinian amora.
[106] According to Rubenstein's note #17 on page 281, the text is making a word play on the word שׂכות. It exchanges the *shin* for a *samach* and שׂכות becomes סכות.

This text synthesizes two images from within the tradition. First, the image of leviathan as a beast who revolted against God and who, in the end of days will be destroyed in the ultimate show of God's power. And second, the sukkah which surrounds us like a shelter; a symbol of God's protection. By melding the two, otherwise unconnected symbols, the rabbis have created a connection between the this-worldly festival of Sukkot and the other-worldly notion of the mythic beast of Leviathan.

Rubenstein explains that the connection between Sukkot and the End of Days was so important for the rabbis because they were so Temple focused. He points out that two-thirds of the Mishnah is devoted to cultic rites and the rabbis were well-aware that Sukkot was the pre-eminent Temple festival. It was for this reason that the association between the rebuilding of the Third Temple (which is eschatological in nature) and the return to the cultic Festival of Sukkot is such a natural relationship.[107]

While concepts undoubtedly pre-date their own codification, it is during the period of rabbinic writing that we first learn of certain themes that play a large role in our observance of Sukkot today. The name of the booth, סֻכָּה, offers very little explanation of what it is. In fact, Shove reminds the reader that many have asked whether the סֻכָּה was even a physical structure at all.[108] This comes from two biblical mentions of the word סֻכָּה. The first is mentioned in Isaiah.

> The LORD will create over the whole shrine and meeting place of Mount Zion cloud (עָנָן) by day and smoke with a glow of flaming fire by night. Indeed, over all the glory shall hang a canopy, (חֻפָּה) which shall serve as a pavilion (סֻכָּה) for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain.[109]

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[107] Rubenstein, pp.289-90.
[108] Shove, p.26.
[109] Isa. 4:5-6.

The second is seen in Psalms: יָשֶׁת חשֶׁךְ סִתְרוֹ סְבִיבוֹתָיו סֻכָּתוֹ חֶשְׁכַת־מַיִם עָבֵי שְׁחָקִים – He made darkness His screen; dark thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky were His pavilion round about Him. These two references lead the rabbis to debate whether the sukkot were, in fact, simply a euphemism for the Clouds of Glory. We read, in Sifra Emor, that when the Torah says: In order that future generations may know that I caused the Israelites to live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.[110] R. Eliezer says: They were literally sukkot. R. Akiba says: the sukkot were the Clouds of Glory."[111]

Similarly, the conversation about this matter is raised in the Talmud, as well. In a discussion about what materials constitute a proper covering for the physical sukkah in their day, they open the debate about whether the biblical sukkot were physical or rather metaphorical:

> Mishnah: This is the rule: Any thing that is susceptible to Tumah, etc. Gemara: From where to we derive these words? Reish Lakish said: (we dwell in a sukkah to remind ourselves of the sukkot, the clouds of Glory, in which our ancestors dwelled in the Wilderness) As is says: and a mist ascended from the earth. Just as mist is a thing that is not susceptible to impurity and its growth is from the earth, a sukkah as well must be a thing that is not susceptible to impurity and its growth is from the earth. This answer is satisfactory according to the one who said (that the sukkot) were the Clouds of Glory (עַנְנֵי כָבוֹד). However, according to the one who said they made for themselves actual booths, what is there to say? For it was taught in a Baraita: That I caused the children of Israel to dwell in sukkot.[112] They were the Clouds of Glory – these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says they made actual sukkot for themselves.[113]

It seems that in this case, the idea of the סֻכָּה represented a place under the sheltering presence of God's protection.

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[110] Lev. 23:43.
[111] Sifra Emor 17:11 (103 a-b).
[112] Lev. 23:43.
[113] b. Sukkah 11b. Notes in parentheses are from the Schottenstein Edition.

One of the first times that we relate, through text, to the temporary nature of the sukkah is in the Mishnah. The clearest demonstration of this is in the Mishnah when we read: "for seven days, man makes his sukkah permanent and his home – temporary."[114] Rubenstein explains that the reason for the rabbis to emphasize the transitory nature of sitting in the sukkah was in response to the socio-political world of the Israelites. Following the Bar Kochba revolt, and a final expulsion from the Holy City of Jerusalem, the rabbis were now specifically relating to a theme of exile and the sukkah began to represent a removal from home.[115]

Either way one explains the nature of this סֻכָּה, it seems clear that the rabbis wanted to relate to the emotional experience of being in the booth. They chose this connection because it was related to their emotional reality – the vulnerability of life in a temporary hut mirrored their sense of vulnerability in exile from their homeland. Rubenstein explains that they chose what to include because, for the Amora'im, it was "easier to inspire, edify and entertain by relating to contemporary experience than ancient custom."[116] This means that the sukkah's connection to the experience in the wilderness is downplayed because the urban-based Israelites no longer relate to life in the desert. And the Water Libation and thematic connections to rain diminished in importance and were replaced by the weaker symbols of Lulav and Etrog as well as prayer.

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[114] m. Sukkah 2:9.
[115] Rubenstein, p.270.
[116] *ibid.*, p.317.

Conclusion:

The rabbinic framers of Sukkot modified the timing of the original observance of the festival. They modified the original pagan focus on the worship of the sun into a nighttime celebration of the harvest. They emphasized the themes of happiness and rain and they ignored (thereby nullifying) the sacrificial requirements. They moved the location of the celebrations away from the inner Temple Court and out of the hands of the priesthood. They replaced the priestly leaders with rabbinical authorities. And they taught us that the sukkah is a metaphor for our own impermanence in this world and our reliance on God.

When put together, this process provides compelling evidence regarding the freedom the rabbis took in the re-writing of this aspect of the Festival of Sukkot. It is clear that, while remaining true to the earlier themes and symbols of the festival, there existed a great deal of leeway for the re-interpretation, re-institution and re-invention of tradition. This comfort with innovation set the stage for Judaism's relationship to the past for generations to come and today's Jews are the beneficiaries of the rabbis' bold approach to text and tradition.

Chapter 3 – Development of Ritual

There has been a significant amount of research and thought put into how Jewish ritual, liturgy and meaning develop over time. Among the best known theorists are Jacob Petuchowski, Ismar Elbogen, Lawrence Hoffman and, to a lesser extent, Jacob Neusner. The premise of this thesis, that tradition evolves in concert with the needs and realities of those who observe it, is based on their theories.

Petuchowski proved that the earliest establishment of a set prayer format was the enactment of Simeon HaPaqoli around the year 100 C.E. concerning the number of benedictions of the Amidah.[117] Even the establishment of eighteen left the content of those prayers open to the individual. As history marched onward, each new generation of rabbis further codified the old and added on the new. In the world of Jewish scholarship, Hoffman coined the term creative liturgy to describe the latest outgrowth of this phenomenon.[118] While his term refers to liturgies of today, he goes to great length to demonstrate that liturgical creativity is in keeping with the traditions of the rabbis. Basing his work on the research of Petuchowski, he demonstrates that the earliest prayer services were not codified into anything like what we think of today. Hoffman describes our tradition of rituals as a collection from across the centuries; claiming that creativity was the rule – not the exception.[119]

Petuchowski uses the example of Amalek to demonstrate the development of an idea over time in Jewish thought. He explains that the biblical notions of Amalek were limited to

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[117] Jakob J. Petuchowski. *Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer*. ed. Petuchowski Elizabeth R. & Petuchowski , Aaron M. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998, p.154.
[118] Lawrence A. Hoffman. "Creative Liturgy." *The Jewish Spectator*. Winter, 1975, p.42.
[119] *ibid.*, p.45.

the character from Exodus 17 who attacked the weakest members of the Israelite tribe on their Exodus from Egypt. Because King Saul fails to destroy all the Amalekites in the story of the war told in 1 Sam. 15, the rabbis had an open door to re-interpret Amalek through history. Genesis makes the connection between Amalek and Esau: Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.[120] Similarly, as Esau was interpreted as evil incarnate in the form of Amalek, he received the same association with the evil empire of Edom. The description of Edom continues to deteriorate until it becomes an accepted and widely understood euphemism for the Roman Empire.[121] This association with the evil societies of the contemporary world would continue to morph as evil (according to the definition of the Jewish community) reared its head through time. This meant that Amalek would be associated with the Gentiles and then the Christians and most recently, the German Nationalists, or Nazis. This is Petuchowski's method of showing that meaning evolves based upon what each generation needs it to be but he also claims that it did not have to be this way. We choose what to assign meaning.

Take for example the breaking of the glass at the conclusion of a Jewish wedding ceremony. This tradition was, in the estimation of Petuchowski, originally a superstitious protection. Irregardless of what it *was*, in halachic communities it is *now* associated with communal mourning over the destruction of the Temple. Further, it represents various other meanings in contemporary liberal communities. Similarly, it is unimportant why the use of instrumental music in the synagogue was legislated out of practice, the reason which is normative *now* is that we refrain from its use as a mourning rite for the Temple.[122] Again,

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[120] Gen. 36:12.
[121] Petuchowski, p. 120.
[122] *ibid.*, p.117.

this rationale failed to speak to the sensibilities of liberal Jews and so the tradition has been modified. Hoffman explains that we always see the past with new eyes.[123] This is why the statement from our Passover Haggadah has endured, "בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם – In every generation, each individual should feel personally redeemed from Egypt."[124] In other words, we struggle to reconcile the experience of those before us with the present consciousness of our age and our own ritual needs. The statement of the Haggadah may have meant something very different to a person reciting it 1000 years ago than it does today but that actually matters very little. To the individual celebrant, the meaning that is created here and now is what is essential.

Petuchowski provides a set of general rules under which he claims liturgy develops. I believe four of these rules are relevant to the development of rituals and traditions of a festival like Sukkot. First, he explains that one generation's spontaneity becomes another generation's routine.[125] In our texts this can be observed through the example of the Water Libation. Early sources suggest that libations poured to God acted as spontaneous forms of petition or thanks. As tradition marched forward, the sacrificial cult instituted the libation during Sukkot as a part of the fixed tradition, irregardless of the priest's emotional connection to the act.

Second, Petuchowski tells us that: When there is a choice between two prayers, the decision will usually be to say them both.[126] This demonstrates one generation's reluctance to excise the customs of those who preceded them. The physical booths of Sukkot filled a

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[123] Hoffman, p.43.
[124] Joy Levitt & Michael Strassfeld. *A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah.* Elkins Park, Pennsylvania: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000, p.70.
[125] Petuchowski, p.154.
[126] *ibid.*, p. 155.

historical purpose and then, during the days of pilgrimage, they filled a practical purpose of temporary housing. From the period of the Destruction of the Second Temple onward, one could not argue that they filled any functional ritual necessity. Rather, they were a custom that the rabbis did not choose to forego. Instead, they held on to the dwellings and added new layers of meaning.

Third, we learn that: The rabbis' concern with the need to not "Bother the congregation" has atrophied over the millennia.[127] Petuchowski tells us that there was a time that the rabbis would consider the proper way to accomplish a ritual and then they would factor in the attention span and the tolerance of the congregants. If they felt that what was proper was too difficult for the average individual to achieve, they would legislate on the side of leniency in order to not bother the congregation (מְשׁוּם טוֹרַח צִבּוּר).[128] This concern for the congregant has weakened over time and now our ritual traditions are full of extra material that likely would have been nullified by the rabbis if their meaning and value had eroded beyond use.

Fourth, and finally, the Conservative and the Reformer are perennial types in the history of Jewish liturgy.[129] By this, Petuchowski means to tell us that there will always be members of a community who want to conserve, or preserve, what "has always been done" and there will be others who want to reform the practice with an eye to the present/future needs of Jews. The re-contextualization of the meaning of the sukkah could be called a successful navigation of the preferences of these two personality types by the rabbis. They re-explained the act of sitting in the sukkah as an emotional experience. They also

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[127] Petuchowski, p. 160.
[128] b. Berachot 12b, & 31a.
[129] Petuchowski, p.161.

highlighted the text of Leviticus 23 and taught that the sukkah was meant to equate the experiences of the desert after the Exodus with the exile of the rabbis' period. This appealed to the needs of the Conservatives who wanted to protect the ritual of the physical sukkah and it appealed to the Reformers who required more resonant meaning to their ritual.

But the question must also be asked: what purpose does ritual serve the individual in the first place? And why do the needs of worshippers change over time? Hoffman claims that our efforts towards change, throughout history can tell us much about what we think we are. He argues that,

> We are in search of fellowship and personal meaning in life. We want religion to add sanctity to our lives by personalizing the celebrations of each stage in our growth and linking traditional feasts and fasts with new concerns occasioned by the events of the last half century. We are frequently excited by social causes, but more and more, we seem now to be turning inward, groping toward a conception of ourselves as Jews and our relationship to our own people, past and present. We want most of all to feel involved in a sense of Jewish community and a feeling of rootedness and togetherness.[130]

Despite the fact that Hoffman is writing about liturgical reform over the last half-century, this effort at rootedness and interconnectedness is not new to the community. Considering the laws of the Mishnah and Talmud concerning the construction and standardization of the physical sukkot, we can imagine that erecting sukkot and celebrating wherever they found themselves gave Israelites a sense that they were doing the same thing that the other members of their community (even the broader Israelite community) were doing all over the world. This is a pleasure that many Jews feel today knowing that, despite denominational differences or geographical remoteness, a reading from the same weekly portion of the Torah is being read in synagogues all over the world.

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[130] Hoffman, p.49.

Neusner provides a description of the types of ritual that maintain their meaning for celebrants. He claims that religious rites that convey a message to which we can all relate (i.e. addressing one's sins during the High Holidays) and those which are done as a community with a personal sense of obligation (i.e. the Passover seder)[131] are ones that will withstand the natural evolution that Petuchowski and Hoffman refer to. The early pagan fertility rituals of the sukkot and the Four Species have endured long past the age where we believe in their efficacy. According to the precepts of Neusner, this means that they must posses some meaning for the Jewish community (e.g. the sense of reliance on God for material safety and comfort) and that they are done as a community (binding us to the Jews in the world today who are building sukkot and those throughout history who built them in their own era).

Shove supports the idea that even in the days of the rabbis, those writing new meaning understood the need for celebrant buy-in. The construction of the themes of Sukkot show that the rabbis knew that they would have to speak to the sensibilities of the Israelites. Based on the other two Pilgrimage Festivals, Pesach marking the Exodus and Shavuot marking the Revelation, the rabbis could have, and perhaps should have, based Sukkot on the conquest of the land of Israel. This would have been the natural continuation of historical story of the Creation of the Jewish People. But they knew that military victory of the conquest of the Land was a theme that would find little favor amongst Israelites of their times and so they connected the theme to that of the desert wandering.[132]

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[131] Jacob Neusner. *Medium and Message in Judaism.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, Brown University, 1989. p.154*f.*
[132] Shove, p.29.

Hoffman adds that a community will create new ritual or liturgy, to add to or replace old traditions, when existing tradition fails to address the contemporary situational emotional needs. There are hundreds of prayers composed after earthquakes, wars, pogroms etc. He says, "Ages of intensive social change are especially rich in liturgical additions and alterations."[133] The rabbis' answers to the Jewish Exiles fit into this category of re-creating a meaning to address a period of "intensive social change." The world-view that had been in use ceased to function in the years post 70 C.E. and a new paradigm needed to be created.

Liturgical innovation is a search for a new Jewish identity that reflects one's social context. The challenge facing the rabbis of the generation of the Destruction of the Temple was: How would an emerging post-Temple, rabbinic Judaism express its identity? One of their answers was through the use of new definitive practices and meanings for Sukkot. The innovations in the Water libation, Simchat Beit HaShoevah, and Hakhel all show a common thread: they were all outgrowths of the rabbis' political and social agendas. They reflected the reality that the rabbis had to contend with and the vision they hoped to achieve for the community. This approach to writing ritual, explaining tradition and re-telling stories has continued until today. Hoffman argues that this principle is why we've seen such innovation in the American synagogue. Modern American Jews found themselves in a new milieu to which old traditional ritual and liturgy failed to respond and so there was a need to develop new liturgy.[134] What begins to become perfectly clear is that we are the beneficiaries of a tradition of liturgical reform that we now take for granted.[135]

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[133] Hoffman, p. 44.
[134] *ibid.*, p.46.
[135] Eric L. Friedland. *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship: Jewish Worship Since its Canonization.* Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, p.149.

As has been shown, the development of ritual can be seen as a response to socio-political current events, economic and demographic changes. For it to endure, it must reflect the *zeitgeist.* Writing in 1987, Paul Mendes-Flohr describes the twentieth century as "a secularized world and so the pursuit of religious experience has taken an inward turn. It is not a communal experience as it once was rather, the *homo religious* must create his own inner spiritual experience."[136] Mendes-Flohr expands upon the notion that religion is now not only a choice, but a purely personal experience. This is in contrast to the earlier periods of the Jewish community in which an individual was unable to choose to affiliate or not. Before Emancipation and Enlightenment, failure to participate in and observe Jewish law resulted in the expulsion of the individual from the safety of the community. This excommunicated member would find no welcome in the gentile communities and this knowledge made religious coercion easy for the Jewish authorities. The effort to hold onto this religious coercive power can be seen in the traditionalists' protests against emancipation in France[137] and in their reactions to the reformers in Germany who denied rabbinic authority.[138]

Mendes-Flohr, drawing on Kantian philosophy, states, "Our (religious) autonomy is liberation from heteronomy."[139] What he is suggesting is that we have moved beyond the era of compulsory participation in the religious life of the Jewish community. This freedom

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[136] Paul Mendes-Flohr. "Law and Sacrament: Ritual Observance in Twentieth Century Jewish Thought." *Jewish Spirituality*. Ed. Green, Arthur. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1987, p.317.
[137] Michael A. Meyer. *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, p.28.
[138] David Ellenson. *After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity.* Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004, p.155*ff.*
[139] Mendes-Flohr, p. 319.

from religious hegemony has provided individuals with two choices: whether to affiliate with the Jewish community at all and to what degree they will participate.

Mendes-Flohr indicates that the options available to the Jew in the modern world exist on two poles. He uses the words of Buber: "People of faith face the issue of the conflict between faith as ritual piety and faith as an active responsibility for the "secular" spheres of interpersonal relations and history."[140] Buber, he explains, claims it is critical to reach beyond the "narrow" precincts of the ecclesia – the corridors of prayer – and affirm the secular as the most meaningful arena of divine service.[141] Again, this makes it sound as though there are two distinct identities caught within the confines of our bodies: One, "*homo religious*", concerned with performing the rituals, rites and traditions which God and one's sense of spirituality demand; and the other, "Modern American Wo/Man" concerned about the expression of our civic identity in the secular world.

This accurately describes the generations of the end of the 20th century. The so-called "red-diaper babies" were individuals whose political and social motivations were completely disconnected from a religious affiliation. Yet, the members of these communities came from largely Jewish backgrounds. They held a strong sense of the ethical and the just but would never have thought to step into a synagogue to aid in the expression of their religious/ spiritual needs.

Mendes-Flohr was correct, in that participation is no longer compulsory and that we are all Jews by choice. But he could not have forecasted the resurgence in America of an interest in religious ritual life. What has begun to occur in our contemporary liberal Jewish spheres is a melding of the two historical personalities: the religious Jew who affiliates and

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[140] Mendes-Flohr, p. 335.
[141] *ibid.*

participates in the synagogue community with the secular Jew who seeks full actualization of his 21st century American identity. But this new type of religious and secular affiliated Jew requires approaches that are sensitive to his/her social realities.

In his article on Creative Liturgy, written in 1975, Hoffman explained that the short attention span of modern Jews needed constantly evolving liturgy and meaning to keep us interested.[142] We were unsatisfied by the *keva* – the fixed practice – and sought constantly stimulating *kavanah* – actively engaging moments of spiritual connection. Even immersed in the midst of the trend, he went on to describe what is easy to see today in hindsight: "our people today (in 1975) are not into prayer qua direct communication with God. Instead, creative liturgy often looks more like programming."[143] This, he is careful to add, is not evaluative – simply descriptive.

In 2000, the sociologist, Robert Wuthnow, was able to make the observation that a shift was underway in the religious lives of Americans.[144] He contrasts this with the situation after World War II in which we exercised a "dwelling-oriented" practice of religion. This form demanded very little from us emotionally and was centered on attendance at a house of worship. As Americans grew dissatisfied with this model, due to a lack of spiritual fulfillment, they began to seek other outlets for their religious needs. He argues that this "seeking oriented" practice dabbles in various forms of shallow spirituality. One need only to study the layout of popular bookstores to observe the accuracy of Wuthnow's claim; the sections devoted to religion (and self-help; a type of non-organized religion) have grown to record size. The Jewish world saw this yearning manifested through the numbers of seekers

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[142] Hoffman, p.42
[143] *ibid.*, p.48.
[144] Robert Wuthnow. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p.16.

who pursued their spirituality in other traditions – the so-called Jewish-Buddhists or, JuBu's, and others who believed their goal of engaging spirituality lay elsewhere.

Finally, Wuthnow illustrates and predicts that into the 21st century, we are already looking, and will increasingly look, for a more stable and, at the same time, spiritually productive way to exercise our religious needs. This new model of "practice-oriented" religious mindset aims to establish a healthy balance in which religion plays an integral role in one's day-to-day life; inseparable from one's secular identity. This resonates with the argument laid out by Mendes-Flohr and Buber. As one looks at the trends in America today, one will see the accuracy of this evaluation. The role of religion in the lives of political candidates has taken a place of prime consideration in the minds of many voters. The boom of mega churches and the visibility of Christian influence in popular culture demonstrate that a major social change is underway and Jews are certainly affected by it. Dissatisfaction and lack of spiritual fulfillment are spurring Jews (and others) to establish a practice-oriented spirituality.[145] This type of organic combination and expression of the multiple, sometimes competing, parts of the Jew's identity may eliminate the dichotomy described by Buber and Mendes-Flohr.

But to suggest that today's Jews can utilize the traditions of the Bible, of the rabbis and of the halachic world without modification would be to ignore Petuchowski's, accurate, evaluation of our need to embrace change and development. It is possible to produce a synthesis of the old traditions (the attempts of rabbis of a different era to make religious experiences meaningful for their own contemporaries) and the new mindset (described by Friedman and Hoffman). This would result in what Zalman Schachter-Shelomi describes as

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[145] Wuthnow, p.28.

the success of the Reconstructionist Movement: the ability to "deconstruct the original intent of the mitzvah, then reconstruct it for the modern era."[146]

There are some obvious pitfalls and dangers to the congregational leader who decides to pursue this end. One concern is, of course, keeping in mind the healthy balance of this goal of innovative liturgical and ritual changes; remembering Petuchowski's words: there will be members of our community – the conservatives – who value the traditions of the past and for whom innovation and reconstruction will do damage to the ritual. A community leader who seeks to modify rituals will need to have both ears listening for the response of the celebrants. Liturgy and ritual either stood the test of time or were excised from the script based on the acceptance of the members. It is an ongoing, organic process. If it works for most, it will remain. If it fails to speak to the needs of most, it will fall away. The congregants, then, must be the judges and jury regarding the innovations that the *shaliach tzibur* makes to their observance. Better yet, changes can be made in consultation with laity, leaders and non-leaders.

Weisblatt uses Maimonides' explanation of the commanded happiness to demonstrate this point. The Rambam questions how one can command an emotional experience within a celebrant. He is concerned that the demonstration of happiness will be disingenuous and the Jews will simply be going through the motions. Instead, Maimonides tries to offer his readers a way to apply the concept to their own lives in their own times. Namely, the performance of the mitzvot should be done voluntarily and not reluctantly – this will create the happiness (עבודה גדולה) as it is commanded in the Torah. While this explanation from

[146] Zalman Schacter-Shelomi. *Jewish with Feeling: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Practice.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2005, p.125.

Rambam may fail to speak to Jews today, it is an example of the leaders' efforts, throughout history, to find meaningful connections to the tradition for their congregants.

The final chapter will be devoted to examining the relevance of Sukkot to the lives of contemporary liberal Jews. What might today's rabbis, cantors and Jewish leaders offer their congregants, the way Rambam sought to offer his readers? In doing so, we must take into consideration the evaluations of Hoffman and Wuthnow and ask, "Where do today's progressive Jews find themselves in the resurgence of interest in religion?" As we look around and listen to the Christian Right's influence in politics does it make us more or less interested in giving voice to our own religious needs? Are our congregants feeling any lack in their spiritual needs which will make them receptive to ritualistic innovations in a festival like Sukkot?

It is my belief that, even if our congregants denied feeling any lack, liturgy and ritual that are pertinent and timely in their lives will be embraced and will enter into today's religious expression. Perhaps, then, it is possible to present a metaphorical table laden with savory delicacies and in this way remind our congregants that they are, in fact, rather hungry.

Chapter 4 – Today and Tomorrow

In his analysis of the symbols of the festival of Sukkot, Rubenstein explains that the lulav and sukkah are polysemous and multivalent. In other words, they contain multiple values, evoke many feelings and operate simultaneously on different levels.[147] There is no need for us to limit the message of a symbol to one theme. Even if the themes are unconnected or, in some cases, even contradictory, we are able to utilize them. Take for example, the breaking of the glass at the end of the wedding. In a contemporary liberal setting, the two most common explanations given for the meaning of the ritual have to do with communal sadness over the destruction of the Temple and our joy over the delicate love of the couple (which, if broken could no more be repaired than the glass could be). These are meanings that are nearly opposite in their message but it is still possible to keep them both in mind in the moment of the breaking.

Rubenstein is referring to the meanings of the sukkah as mentioned above (see above, page #11) it is both an historical reminder of the Israelite's sojourn through the desert and also the harvest booths used by Jewish farmers during their harvests.

If you were to ask children in religious school today, they would probably be able to provide both these answers. There would be no conflict in their minds about what the sukkah means; this dual meaning has become institutionalized. But if asked about their connection to the sukkah, how many children today could relate to the emotional-didactic messages the sukkah is meant to transmit about the temporality of our lives and the instability of our existence? How many adults could do so? What then does the sukkah and its accompanying symbols mean to celebrants in the twenty-first century?

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[147] Rubenstein, p.315.

In discussing the evolution in meaning for the festival of Sukkot, Shove quotes Nechama Leibovitch who suggests that many have tried to re-interpret the festival over time. In an effort to make it pertinent in the lives of their children and to ensure its transmission to future generations, the earlier pagan themes relating to the natural world were shed in favor of agricultural themes. This, Leibovitch argues is preferable to the loss of a festival's relevance.[148] She appears to be encouraging Jews to examine a festival and to determine what, if any, traditional themes will "speak to them" and if there are none, to imbue the festival with new messages and meanings that are timely and pertinent.

If it is safe to assume that some members of the liberal Jewish community rely on ritual as a type of choreography for a spiritual connection to God, then one must wonder why the rituals of Sukkot fail to enhance this relationship. As one considers the conditions of Jews in America today, it may become clear why the traditional rituals connected with Sukkot fail to spiritually motivate Progressive Jews: we are temporally more distant than ever from the experience of life in the Wilderness and we are, culturally, worlds away from life as farmers on our land. So the two major, traditional themes of the sukkah are foreign to us – They do not reflect our zeitgeist. Trying to pretend that we do connect to them would be like trying to force ourselves into an unwanted partnership; our partner would know the difference and what would be the benefit to either person. So too with a ritual to which we cannot relate: Our partner (God) will know the difference and what would be our benefit from forcing it anyway. Better that we find a way to make the experience authentic and meaningful. We are more likely to celebrate and perpetuate those festivals that speak to themes and messages to which we *can* relate.

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[148] Shove, p.26.

This can happen in one of two ways. A Jewish ritual can be assigned new meaning that resonates with the modern sensibilities of its celebrants. Or a contemporary issue, which is on the minds of Jews, can be applied to an existing holiday. This process of the creation of meaning is not new to Judaism. Hoffman praises the benefits of Creative Liturgy which he says "has a penchant for reviving traditional customs and giving them added dimensions."[149] The second option, Shohama Harris Wiener argues, is a process that has been occurring, as needed, for a very long time. She says, "Judaism has a history of taking festivals and ceremonies from the prevalent culture and making them Jewish. This has been part of the ingeniousness that has allowed Judaism to survive, for through this process contemporary needs are woven into a sacred Jewish framework."[150]

The remainder of this chapter will examine a sampling of contemporary efforts to reclaim a viable and authentic expression of themes (both old and new) of Sukkot. These efforts come from a cross-section of Jewish liturgists, ritualists, leaders and individuals across the modern liberal Jewish world. If one considers the themes and issues that seem to be important to liberal Jews today, one will almost certainly find them expressed in the festival of Sukkot.

Jewish Nationalism

Nationalistic allegiance to the Land of Israel played a significant role in the observance of Sukkot over the millennia. Shove suggests that the festival of Sukkot has received renewed attention during each of the three entries to the Land during the history of the Jewish people. First, as mentioned, it was the natural conclusion to the story of the

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[149] Hoffman, p.46.

[150] Shohama Harris Wiener. "Ritualizing the Birthday as Sacred Jewish Time". *Worlds of Jewish Prayer*. Ed. Wiener Harris, Shohama & Omer-Man, Jonathan. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1993, p.221.

Exodus. Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, Shavuot marks the revelation of the Law at Mount Sinai and Sukkot remembers the arrival in the Promised Land. Shove suggests that, since military conquest is not a Jewish value, attention was shifted to physical land and the agricultural bounty it offers. The second entry to the land occurred at the end of the Babylonian exile under the leadership and guidance of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah. (See above, chapter 2) In this time period, too, Sukkot received renewed emphasis and observance as the Israelites returned to a life lived in connection to the land and its agricultural cycle. The third, and most recent, entry to the land began with the early Zionists of the late 19th century. Shove indicates that these pioneers enjoyed Sukkot in a way that had been lost for nearly two thousand years.[151] Again, they were able to return to the land of their forefathers and to engage in a life connected to the physical earth and governed by its seasons. The joy they felt at this opportunity was translated into outward expression during the festival of Sukkot.

Shove suggests that the important values of Judaism can be expressed with this Zionistic theme in mind: Happiness – that we've been returned to our land; Humility – in the recognition that it could only have happened with God's help, and Zionism – feeling that this latest exile (like all others) was only temporary and maintaining our commitment to the Land/State of Israel.[152]

The liberal Jewish world has spanned the full spectrum of stances on Zionism and its relationship to Israel. The early anti-Zionism of the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 stated unequivocally:

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[151] Shove, p.30.
[152] *ibid.*

> We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.[153]

And, in a diametrically opposed stance, the most recent Statement of Principles explained on behalf of Reform Jews today:

> We are committed to מדינת ישראל (*Medinat Yisrael*), the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in ארץ ישראל (*Eretz Yisrael*), the land of Israel, and encourage עליה (*aliyah*), immigration to Israel.[154]

It could be argued that a Zionist oriented celebration of Sukkot would have fallen on the deaf ears of American Reform Jews of a century ago. But that may not be the case today. While I came across no examples of it, the renewed emotional connection to the modern State of Israel, may indicate that it is appropriate for congregational leaders to consider ways to express the community's sentiments during the holiday.

Community building

As the modern world has grown more complex, the individual's need to feel membership in a community that values his or her presence has not diminished. We live in a world that is too big to afford us a sense of belonging without smaller sub-divisions of community. A sense of loneliness and isolation can be countered by membership in any community, including a religious community. But the health and continuity of the Jewish community is not something that can be taken for granted. It requires individuals to maintain it and care for it and, in return, it offers individuals a sense of belonging and acceptance.

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[153] Paul Mendes-Flohr & Jehuda Reinharz. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.469.
[154] "A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism." Adopted in Pittsburgh, PA. 1999. Dec. 31, 2006. *CCARNET.ORG* <http://ccarnet.org/Articles/>. Path: Documents & Positions; Platforms.

Participation in the community has been a value inherent in Judaism since its earliest days. Even when other sects and religious groups were lauding the value of asceticism and isolation (for the purposes of fostering a more intense relationship with God), Judaism maintained its commitment and demand for communal life. This value is expressed in multiple ways through the themes and rituals of the Festival of Sukkot.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is typically read during the festival on Shabbat and has many themes and parallels which have been connected to the festival. But one message that is useful to this theme of the Value of Community comes from the fourth chapter:

> Two are better off than one, in that they have greater benefit from their earnings. For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him! Further, when two lie together they are warm; but how can he who is alone get warm? Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not readily broken![155]

Human beings are better off, on many different axes of measurement, when they are in community and sukkot is well-designed to foster it.

The literal coming together to physically construct the booths has been a traditionally communal activity, similar to the barn-raisings of the Amish community. Seen as an activity that one person cannot do as well as multiple people, it is an ideal project around which Jews can gather. The tradition has been to pound the first nails of the sukkah immediately following the conclusion of the Yom Kippur services when the congregation is already gathered, but I have little evidence that this continues to take place in the liberal community today.

Many of the members of our community will report that they have already spent more time than they are accustomed to in Jewish activities and further expectations would become

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[155] Ecc. 4:9-12

a burden. Vis-à-vis the discussion in the previous chapter, contemporary Jews balance competing identities for expression and the High Holiday season demands a significant shift of expression towards one's Jewish identity. Congregants report that further demands on their time and to their Jewish identities during this busy holiday season would be ignored. But that does not mean that there are not other, potentially successful, ways of engaging in the activity of raising sukkot as a community.

Dr. Nancy Wiener reports that the chavurah, of which she is the rabbi, has engaged in a meaningful and much-anticipated sukkah-building tradition for many years. What is interesting about the community's tradition is that it focuses communal attention on one booth rather than on the many booths of individual families. Members of the community raised the sukkah in one family's yard for many years, until the members of the family became too old. Their yard accommodated the structure without making it obvious to passers-by. This secrecy, according to Dr. Wiener, was somewhat important to the congregants. They desired a sukkah but not in their own backyards which would draw unwanted attention from non-Jews.

In an effort to find a new location for the sukkah, another family has volunteered to host the structure even though the anonymity has been compromised and congregants seem comfortable with the public nature of their observance. This may be due to the fact that the site of the sukkah is in close proximity to other congregants' homes.

By Dr. Wiener's estimation, approximately 70% of the chavurah's membership will enter the sukkah in one form or another--either to attend the programming aimed at small children or to participate in a well-liked pot-luck meal. Others still will participate in the construction effort itself but will not return to take part in the religious rituals of the festival.

Because of the success of the programming for young children, Dr. Wiener reports that it has become desirable, to the kids, to have the sukkah at their own home. It is interesting to consider how we transform something like this which may be seen as a burdensome obligation into an exciting opportunity. It is important to remember that various expressions of various aspects of the festival will appeal to different individuals.

Similarly, Rabbi Scott Weiner, The Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation, attributes a resurgence of interest among his congregants in Sukkot to the re-introduction of the tradition of actually constructing a sukkah. He explains that, for many years, the congregation had no communal sukkah and that few if any member families constructed their own. This, he reports, all changed about 10 years ago, when they revisited the tradition with stunning success. He could not emphasize how important the tradition of building the sukkah was to the rebirth of interest and pleasure in the festival. This gathering of the community seems to offer a sense of partnership in a tradition that extends beyond one's self and imbues the experience with more meaning and value.

In addition to this type of gathering, Arthur Waskow reminds the reader of the Hakhel ceremony which took place every seven years following the Shmitah Year. (See above, page #17 and 31) Like the yearly gathering to construct a sukkah, there is significant value to be gained if the whole community will choose to be present; Hakhel offers the Jew the chance to look around herself and to appreciate the rare opportunity to see what her physical community looks like. Waskow acknowledges that the practice of a community-wide gathering for Hakhel fell out of use following the destruction of the Second Temple. However, he reports that some progressive communities resurrected the tradition in 1973 and

1980.[156] In lieu of the reading of passages from the book of Deuteronomy, Waskow suggests that this gathering of all Jews from a congregation would be a good time to perform a communal *cheshbon hanefesh*; a State of the Union of sorts. In his words: "a seven-year review of how the Jewish community and the general society are doing in regard to preservation of the earth-environment and in regard to economic equality and social justice."[157]

Choosing to remain more closely tied to the traditional observance of the ceremony, the United Jewish Communities' website reports that, in 1987, Hakhel was observed in Israel at the Western Wall. The president of the State, Chaim Herzog, officiated over the ceremony filling the role of the king (as described in the Mishnah) and 100,000 Jews from around the world gathered to be present. According to the website, the tradition has been growing at every gathering and it promises to continue to do so.[158] It seems that participation in this type of mass gathering has some degree of appeal to many contemporary Jews.

In 2006, the New Israel Fund, in cooperation with Panim, appropriated the tradition of Hakhel and morphed it into a meeting between the observant and liberal Jewish communities in Israel to discuss what common ground they share and how they can move forward into the future.[159]

In an effort to reinforce the idea that what we do as Jews in our local community is connected to what Jews are doing all over the world, it may be helpful for congregational

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[156] Waskow, p.64. These are the years which would have been the continuation of the seven-year cycle from biblical times and are still acknowledged as the Shmitah years.
[157] *ibid.*
[158] "Hakhel Ceremony To Be Held in Jerusalem on 10/4." *United Jewish Communities Website*. Nov. 28, 2006. <http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=17150>..
[159] "Jewish Pluralist Festival Boosts the Morale of Israel's Northern Residents." *New Israel Fund Website*. Jan. 4, 2007. <http://www.nif.org/content.cfm?id=2807&currbody=3>.

leaders to draw on the resources of various agencies. Each year, many of our community's constituent organizations create valuable programming ideas and resources to offer congregations in an effort to strengthen, deepen and develop their festival celebrations. The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), the Religious Action Center (RAC) and Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) are just a very few. They have the resources and time to create programming on a level that many congregational leaders do not. And, unlike individual synagogues, they have the ability to connect communities of Jews across the world.

These agencies often pick a theme and work the rituals and traditions of the festival into the contemporary issue. This is similar to the words of Schachter-Shelomi who suggested reconstructing traditions in a way in which they address a modern issue with modern sensibilities. For example, this past Sukkot, Rabbis for Human Rights used the messages of the festival to teach and preach about one of their central missions: the elimination of torture. In one of their publications they wrote:

> "Lest there be useless time between one mitzvah and the next, it is customary to hurry home from shul after *neilah* and immediately drive the first nail for one's sukkah into the ground. In that spirit of hastening to construct a *sukkat shalom*, Jews all over the United States are joining together at this most holy and hopeful moment. We will drive that first nail together by calling on our government to take an essential first step of *teshuvah* in the direction of abolishing torture."[160]

In addition to furthering valuable causes, one of the most important contributions of this type of programming is that it provides a sense of connection to other Jews around the country and the world. Many Jews admit that their attendance at High Holiday services is due, in part, to a sense that it is the thing to do and all the other Jews around the world are doing it.

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[160] "The First Nail in the Sukkah". *Rabbis for Human Rights – North America website.* January 4, 2007. <http://www.rhr-na.org/torture/firstnail.html>.

This sense of joining one's voice to the collective voices of others can be a powerful motivation to go beyond one's normal level of involvement and should be embraced by congregational leaders as they deem appropriate for their community.

Yet another way in which the contemporary Jewish community may choose to reclaim traditional aspects of the festival in a meaningful way is through the rebirth of Simchat Beit HaShoevah. A form of the festival of Simchat Beit HaShoevah is still celebrated in some Chasidic communities in Crown Heights and in Jerusalem. It is unclear to what extent they look like the descriptions of the Mishnah. (but it is equally unclear to what extent the descriptions of the Mishnah looked like the reality of the celebrations in the Temple). There are video recordings of various celebrations of Simchat Beit HaShoevah on the internet and, while there appear to be no menorahs requiring ladders to light them, the celebrants seem to enjoy the experience.[161]

Late night celebrations (like the secular New Year's Eve or Tikkun Leil Shavuot) and gatherings around fire (like Chanukah, the 4th of July and the Memorial Day Bar-B-Que) already have popular appeal in the Jewish as well as secular community. One who has witnessed the pleasure that Israelis (observant and secular, alike) take in the holiday of Lag B'omer cannot deny that a minor holiday becomes a major pleasure due to the type of activities associated with it. Similarly, I have experienced many liberal communities that are embracing the tradition of late night study programs for Shavuot with surprising enthusiasm. It would be a natural step to synthesize activities, which we already know have appeal to our

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[161] The videos can be observed at http://www.youtube.com by searching "Simchas Beis Hashoevah."
The specific videos I viewed were located at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hq-2qFd4lVs, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gwv9e0BsoU, and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnRUJFlortE&mode=related&search=

congregants, to form a reconstituted tradition for contemporary progressive communities. While the tradition of Simchat Beit HaShoevah occurred every evening of the festival during the days of the Temple, today it might make sense to choose one of the seven nights. Most likely, congregants would respond to an event planned late on Friday or Saturday night for obvious logistical reasons.

Planned as a large-scale celebration, the synagogue could consider the creation of a synthesis of these three traditions for a yearly meaningful and enjoyable sukkot observance. A Shabbaton during the weekend of Sukkot would function as a pilgrimage during which a large percentage of the community would gather as a form of Hakhel. This would be a good time for discussion about the direction the synagogue is headed and a planning session for the future (as Waskow suggests). During this retreat, a late night bonfire with singing, dancing, instruments and marshmallows would be modern expression of Simchat Beit HaShoevah and an event that celebrants could look forward to each year.

There is an interesting precept laid out in the fourth chapter of Mishnah Sukkah. The rabbis said:

> How was the rite of the lulav fulfilled on the Sabbath? If the first festival day of the Feast fell on a Sabbath, they brought their lulavs to the Temple and the ministers took them and set them in order on the roof of the portico, but the elders set theirs in a special chamber. The people were taught to say, "Whosoever gets possession of my lulav, let it be his as a gift." The next day they came early and the ministers threw the lulavs down before them and the people snatched at them and beat each other. And when the court saw that they incurred danger, they ordained that every one could carry his lulav in his own home.[162]

Because of the fear of the Israelites carrying their lulavs to the Temple on Shabbat and thus violating the Law, the rabbis ordained that they would be left overnight and reclaimed in the morning. The next day, the individual's proclamation "let it be his as a gift" would remove

[162] m. Sukkah 4:4.

one's concern that he got back the exact lulav he had had the previous day. Any lulav would do and the rabbis tried to eliminate concern over ownership.

While it is disappointing to read the description of the actual practice of the Israelites in this ritual, there is an underlying concept of the willow ritual which is quite beautiful. One message gleaned from the Mishnah is that of shared resources. There were enough lulavs to meet the needs of all of the celebrants and the rabbis put self-less words in the mouths of the Israelites who came to enjoy the holiday. While we do not, generally, each have our own lulav and etrog today, there may be valuable kernels to harvest from this defunct ritual. Congregations could participate in some sort of mass exchange of gifts or materials or books or other items with a statement like that of the Mishnah. The message of such an activity is that a community of Jews, today, is a mutually supportive community that relies on each member for the survival of the whole. In keeping with the theme of community building, this gesture reminds all present that their contribution is important and their presence is valued.

I will make one final comment about a community's effort to encourage participation and attendance. Many years ago, I engaged in an ongoing debate with a member of a traditional community concerning the importance of the date chosen for a festival observance. He criticized the Reform community's willingness to move the seder to the closest, convenient Sunday in order for as many people to attend as possible. At the time, I disagreed with him although I have begun to think he is right regarding most holidays. Sukkot may be the exception to this rule. Recall that the earliest iterations of the festival migrated on the calendar according to the end of the growing season. (See above, page #9) It was, therefore, based largely on the availability and convenience of the celebrants; they would not have had the free time to enjoy the celebrations until after the harvest was

complete. In our day, it might be appropriate to use this historical precedent as a way for leaders to consider calendrical migration of the festival to a time that is more convenient to congregational members. As it sits right now, Sukkot begins a mere five days after the most demanding period of the Jewish yearly cycle and many congregants report that they do not participate because it is "too much Jewish".

This shift might happen on larger or smaller scales. For example, on a national scale, the Jewish community of England might decide that their early cold season better supports an earlier Harvest Festival. On a local level, some Jewish communities may find it meaningful to shift the celebration of Sukkot to a time when they can connect with the completion of a local harvest – perhaps a trip to the cider mill when the apples are ready. Similarly, on a familial level, individual homes may decide to observe the festival on their own schedule. It might be that one family's celebration is not in sync with that of their neighbor's because of personal considerations. Whatever the manifestation of this flexible starting time for Sukkot, I believe that the historical precedent would support the innovation.

Thanksgiving

It has been pointed out that it is no coincidence that the symbols of the American holiday of Thanksgiving look so similar to some of those of Sukkot. The use of items of the harvest in the creation of cornucopia of bounty utilizing seasonal produce parallel those in the Jewish festival. This is because Thanksgiving can justifiably be called the American version of Sukkot and it borrowed consciously from Sukkot's traditions. But, for all the attention in many American families placed on "giving thanks" at the Thanksgiving table, the theme is often lost around the Sukkot table. Waskow explains that the theme of Thanksgiving has always been central to the festival and can be most clearly observed in the

relationship between the Israelites and God in the Wilderness of Sinai. The primary symbol of Sukkot, the sukkah, is the best representation of the fact that we could not have survived in the wilderness with such feeble shelter without the aid of God and the primary expression of Sukkot is our gratitude for God's grace.[163] This, however, may be a theme that is difficult for contemporary liberal Jews to express.

Our sense of thanks need not be limited to God's protection. Martin Buber extends the concept of thanksgiving in a slightly different direction to express the Israelite's thanks for the gift of the Promised Land. He looks to other contemporary examples in the ancient world in order to clarify the rites of the Israelites:

> Gifts to gods from the first of the harvest are known to us from all the lands and all the peoples, for their culture influenced the culture of Israel, for example Babylonia, Egypt and Canaan. And also the prayers that they had that are expressed in the intentions of sacrificing. Thanks to the gods for the blessing of the land; inviting them to a meal; petitioning them to make fertile again. But amongst all the prayers like this that I know of in the world, there is only one in which all of these are replaced by the worshipper praising his God for giving him the land.[164]

The question of the contemporary liberal Jew's appreciation of and connection to the land is an interesting topic for further examination.

In discussing the nature of the commanded happiness of Sukkot, Shove explores these last two themes of thanksgiving and adds on yet another: an appreciation of the present. This, she argues is the central theme, and she quotes Nechama Leibovitch, RaShBaM and Philo. Philo was the first to clearly demonstrate this concept:

> Or again, it may be a reminder of the long journey of our ancestors which they made through a wide desert, living in tents for many years at each station. And it is proper in the time of riches to remember one's poverty and in an hour of glory to recollect the days of one's disgrace, and at a season of peace to think upon the dangers that are past. In addition to the pleasure it provides, a not inconsiderable advantage for the

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[163] Waskow, p.53.
[164] Buber in Shove, p.33.

> practice of virtue comes from this. For people who have had prosperity and adversity before their eyes and have pushed the latter away and are enjoying the free use of the better, of necessity become thankful in disposition and are being urged on to piety by fear of a change of state to the contrary condition. As a result they honor God in songs and words fro their present wealth and persistently entreat and conciliate him with supplications that they will no longer be tested with calamities.[165]

When one finds oneself in times of adversity or strife, the advice often given is to remember that it is temporary and a return to good times is just around the corner. Conversely however, we tend to forget bad times when everything is going well in our lives. A conscious reminder is an ideal way of sanctifying the good as well as the bad. This is, along with the previously mentioned theme as well as others, one of the messages of the book of Kohelet: everything under the sun, both subjectively good and bad, has its time and its place under heaven.[166] Rami Shapiro paraphrases the message of Kohelet in a way that is applicable to the themes of Sukkot: "What we want is permanence and safety, but Sukkot says there is no safety. Yet there's incredible bounty. In the temporal, we feast."[167] Irving Greenberg adds that, "moving into the sukkah for a week is not a renunciation of self-protection, but a recognition of its limits: fifty-one weeks a year Jews are allowed to live in homes and are encouraged to build up the world and increase security and well-being. But the sukkah teaches us that builders of homes should be able to give them up or move out if necessary. Renunciation is the secret of mastery."[168] A pastoral caregiver would do well to remember the value of these texts when comforting one who is in grief or asking theologically difficult questions.

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[165] Philo Judæus of Alexandria. *The Works of Philo.* Trans. Yonge, C.D. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993, p.587-8.
[166] See Ecc. 3:1-8.
[167] Rami Shapiro. *The Way of Solomon: Finding Joy and Contentment in the Wisdom of Ecclesiastes.* San Francisco: Harper, 2000, p.119.
[168] Irving Greenberg. "Journey to Liberation: Sukkot." *Tikkun Magazine.* Vol. 3, No. 5, p.35.

This message of the reality of pain alongside joy and love is one of the timeless sermonic themes that congregants appreciate hearing over and over again. Kohelet emphasizes the experience of the temporal against the permanent.[169] This could explain the popularity of the passage from the third chapter of Kohelet. These words find voice at funerals, tragedies both large and small, and even the lyrics of the popular song by the Byrds, Turn Turn Turn. This theme dovetails nicely with the liturgy of the festival in the recitation of the Hallel service; a practice that many liberal congregations have eliminated from their worship services. To the extant that a worship leader seeks to make liturgy both relevant to the lives of the congregants and enjoyable for its participants, the traditional liturgy of Sukkot accomplishes each.

The Hallel service accomplishes, in its traditional form, what many prayer leaders seek to achieve through innovative new creative liturgical forms: it contains catchy tunes, it stimulates participation and it utilizes melodies in major keys to create a positive mood. For a festival known as *Z'man Simchateinu*, and one in which happiness is woven throughout the choreography, recitation of the Hallel service at synagogue seems to be a logical tradition which is already in place and does not need much recreation.

Despite its obvious potential for success, many congregants would fail to connect to the Hallel service due to unfamiliarity with the liturgy. Its recitation has even been excised from the services of many Reform synagogues. On the other hand, it might be fair to say that many congregants fail to attend worship services during Sukkot because of an expectation that they will be just like every other Shabbat service during the year. The double-edged sword then demands that a leader walk the narrow bridge of embracing the old, giving voice

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[169] Shove, p.34.

to the new, and inspiring each congregant according to his or her needs. A creative prayer leader would not have to work hard in order to break the notion that Hallel is not a prayer service that the Reform community uses. It would require little innovation to transform a Sukkot Shabbat service into an experience that congregants would want to attend.

Replaceable Materials

Maimonides taught that each of the four species had a connection to the experience of the Israelites arriving at Israel. Nogah Harovni explains this concept in more detail:

> "Kapot HaTamarim" symbolize the beauty of the desert in which the Israelites stopped during the wanderings in the Sinai; "Arvei HaNahal" symbolize the crossing of the Jordan; "Anaf Eitz Avot" symbolizes the thick forests in the hills of the land of Israel that the Israelites were forced to clear before they could transition to permanent farming; "Pri Etz Hadar" symbolize the last stop: which is the goal of permanent settlement of the Land of Israel.[170]

Weisblatt paraphrases this concept and explains that the Four Species represent the land into which they were brought and they facilitate happiness. There were, however, a variety of plants that would have, for instance, symbolized the desert or the thick forests of Israel. RamBam provides a clarification on why these particular species were incorporated into the tradition:

> Regarding the potential question, how did the Torah decide *davka* on these species – etrog, lulav, hadas, aravah – and not others, RamBam counts three reasons: one – these species are located in the land of Israel and in the era of harvest, everyone could acquire them without difficulty. Second – these plants are more pleasant in their external form and have a pleasant odor. Third – these plants stand (remain erect/fresh) seven days.[171]

From these sources, it is important to note the themes and rationale behind the traditional choice of materials for the observance: They were located in Israel (where the

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[170] נגה הראובני, p.76.
[171] Weisblatt, p.45.

celebrants themselves were living), they were accessible and pleasant and they were functional. While these particular four species all possessed these attributes for Jews living in other locales and at other times, it might be argued that this is no longer the case for most Jews in the world. In other words, most Jews do not live in Israel and it becomes a significant process to acquire the materials, especially the etrog. In an age of concern over the environmental impact of shipping produce around the world, the insistence on an etrog incurs added cost and environmental impact.

In his commentary on Leviticus 23:40, "the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees (פרי עץ הדר)...", Rashi inserts the words, "עץ שטעם עצו ופריו שוה",[172] that is "a tree the taste of whose wood and fruit are the same." In other words, Rashi permits a replaceable tree and its fruit for the completion of this mitzvah. It might be possible for liberal Jews to consider replacing the traditional four species with other species that better accomplish RamBam's set requirements. For example, in lieu of an etrog, perhaps a Jew in the Northeastern United States might choose a freshly picked, organic apple from a nearby orchard. A Jew from one of the Southwestern states might use one of the fruits of the locally blooming prickly pear cacti. A Jew in France might choose a fresh bunch of grapes from a local vineyard. Each of these examples enables the celebrant to meet the guidelines laid out by Maimonides. This type of change for sukkot would not be without precedent. Julius H. Greenstone reports that in small Jewish towns of Poland and Lithuania they would replace the myrtle and palm branches for the more readily available branches of the region.[173]

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[172] Rashi on Lev. 23:40.
[173] Philip Goodman. *The Sukkot/Simhat Torah Anthology*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988, p.143.

In a parallel effort to make the experience speak more personally to modern American celebrants, Ruth Heiges encourages the use of foods that are regional and represent one's cultural influence. This is nice because it emphasizes locally-grown responsible consumption. She writes:

> "Any dish incorporating the harvest of one's own region is appropriate for Sukkot, but particularly those which feature a number of ingredients within, like stuffed vegetables, fruits, and main-dish pies – miniature cornucopia symbolizing the plenty with which we have been blessed and for which we hope throughout the coming new year. This concept is seen in the Ashkenazic tradition of serving kreplach or stuffed cabbage during this holiday and the Sephardic tradition of serving couscous, with its accompanying variety of vegetables and toppings. In cooler climates, baked casseroles or hearty one-pot meals are especially favored, since it is convenient to ferry them to the sukkah, in which as many meals as possible are eaten during the eight-day holiday (one week in Israel). According to the Talmud, the table should be decorated with pomegranates, themselves a symbol of plenty, and flasks of wine."[174]

Many Jews express their connection to tradition and ritual better at the festive table than in the synagogue. The creation of a regional, meaningful and thematic meal is an additional point of connection that some Jews may prefer over more mainline traditions.

Environmentalism

Many have based their understanding of Judaism and even their theological understanding of the universe on our role as stewards and stewardesses of the physical world. It is a theme that is introduced as early as the first chapters of the book of Genesis.[175] The festivals that are most closely connected to the physical world were, not surprisingly, those which developed the strongest ties to environmental themes. Most obviously are the holidays

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[174] Ruth Heiges. "Sukkot Food Traditions." *Ritualwell.org*. December 28, 2006. <http://www.ritualwell.org/holidays/sukkot/primaryobject.2005-10-12.7705800336>

[175] cf. Gen. 1:28 and 2:15.

of Tu B'Shvat and Sukkot. As Rahel Musleah writes: but from inside the shelter of our homes we are much less aware and less grounded in nature.[176]

It is not even a stretch to apply modern notions of environmental activism to today's version of Sukkot. As discussed in chapter two, the priests and rabbis of the Second Temple period and earlier engaged in the pouring of water libations. This exercise was an effort at controlling the physical world and affecting changes that they believed needed their help to come to fruition. In our own day, issues like global warming, dependence on carbon-based fuels, the damage being done to the ozone layer, and other pertinent matters of varying degrees of importance, demand our action like the drought demanded the attention of the rabbis. While we have a clearer understanding of the workings of the physical world, we feel the same drive to make a difference in our world that our predecessors felt. Just as food alternatives may offer new points of access to some Jews, active environmentalism may achieve the same effect for others. They may prefer to celebrate Sukkot as political lobbyists or as community organizers in their local congregation.

As many rabbis look for any and every opportunity to educate their congregants, this environmental approach to Sukkot offers new possibilities. The construction of the congregational sukkah out of entirely recycled materials[177] is fodder for effective sermonic explanations and a charge from the bimah. Congregational contests for the environmentally "greenest" sukkah can stimulate extended participation. Connecting to larger campaigns run by national organizations further connects individuals to mass efforts. For example, Sukkot

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[176] Rahel Musleah. "Sacred Space; Harvesting Sukkot's Many Layers of Meaning." *Jewish Women International*. January 3, 2007. <http://www.jwmag.org/articles/16Fall05/ p22.asp>.
[177] Daniel Treiman. "On Sukkot, Linking a Living Wage to the Theme of Shelter." *The Forward website*. September 13, 2002. <http://www.pjalliance.org/article.aspx?ID=183&CID=20>.

2006 saw a massive push, organized by COEJL, for the exchanging of conventional light bulbs with Compressed Fluorescent Light bulbs. Whatever the current campaign or pressing issue to be addressed, making Sukkot timely by focusing on environmental needs may be another way to create a point of access for celebrants.

Social Responsibility

The legendary framers of the rabbinic period furthered the idea that Judaism would not be an individualistic religion in which individuals were overly concerned with their own needs. Rather, among others, they coined the expression כל ישראל ערבין זה בזה,[178] and they bequeathed to us the concept of תיקון העולם.[179] It should therefore come as no surprise that the commitment to others in one's community has held a place of prominence and continues to play a major role in the character of many people's Judaism. Relating this concept to Sukkot, Philip Goodman shares an old Hasidic story in which Rabbi Mordechai of Neschiz scrimped and saved in order to purchase a fine etrog for Sukkot. On his way to town to make the purchase, he encountered a merchant crying whose horse had just died. Rabbi Mordechai gave him the money to purchase a new horse reasoning that "the etrog is a precept of the Lord and charity is a precept of the Lord." When he returned home without an etrog, he told his villagers, "All Jews will pronounce the benediction over the etrog during sukkot...only I have been granted the rare privilege of reciting the blessing over a horse."[180] The reader is meant to understand that, as important as the traditional ways of observance are, there are some causes that must take precedence. Contemporary liberal Jews spend a great deal of

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[178] m. Rosh Hashanah 29a.

[179] This expression has undergone significant evolution since its introduction. Both the early meaning of creating social balance between communities and the modern meaning of repairing a broken world are applicable in this case. See b. Pesachim 88b; b. Ketubot 56b; b. Gitin 33a, 34b and 48b.

[180] Goodman, p.101.

energy seeking ways to express their commitment to Social Justice and Sukkot offers great opportunity.

In an editorial for Tikkun Magazine, Michael Lerner encouraged the reader to look at the festival of Sukkot in a new light: Living in a sukkah, we remind ourselves of the dominant historical experience of being Jewish: homelessness.[181] While the Jewish condition of wandering and homelessness may remain true for some, it is also true that twenty-first century American Jews are likely to have a hard time relating to this claim. It does not take very many years of distance from hardship to forget the feeling of strife. A reminder of this condition of distance from our spiritual/historical home may be a way to help congregants regain an intensity of experience that will re-commit them to pursuing justice. In the words of SocialAction.com, Sukkot presents an inherent challenge:

> May the joy of Sukkot strengthen our determination to do what we can to allow others to experience those blessings. We cannot end hunger and homelessness, but we can find ways to help the hungry and the homeless. In doing so, we fulfill the words we say upon leaving the sukkah for the last time, bringing God's holy light to our world, a mission we must commit to each day.[182]

These last words: "May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our forefathers, that just as I have fulfilled and dwelled in this sukkah, so may I merit in the coming year to dwell in *the sukkah of the skin of Leviathan.* Next year in Jerusalem." send two messages: first, that there is work to be accomplished during the coming year; and second, that our success in these tasks will merit our return to next year's sukkah. The author of SocialAction.com

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[181] Michael Lerner. "Celebrating Sukkot this Year: The Jewish Thanksgiving and Reconnection to Nature." *Tikkun Magazine*. Vol.10, No.5. 1995, p.96.
[182] "Temporary Homes and Homelessness: A Dot.com and Dot.org Partner at Sukkot." *SocialAction.com*. December 25, 2006. <http://www.socialaction.com/10-2000/sukkot_homelessness.phtml>.

encourages the reader to see that required action as Social Action on behalf of the hungry and the homeless.

The text from Deuteronomy concerning Sukkot reads, "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."[183] One way of accomplishing this may be to commit time to serve at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. An effective opportunity to reach members and to gain their support would occur one week before the festival. Because of the high degree of attendance at the High Holiday services, a community leader might solicit pledges during the High Holidays. The congregational leader may ask congregants to agree to a certain amount of service; either one night during sukkot or, preferably, a recurring agreed amount (e.g. once a month). In this way, the congregant will fulfill the instructions of Deuteronomy and deepen the experience and the meaning of the festival as well as creating a natural thematic connection and continuity between the holidays.

In addition to considering the stranger in our communities, the Israelites are also commanded to bring offerings from their bounty as a gift to God. Liberal Jews today are unanimous in their relief that the era of sacrifices and cultic worship has come to an end. But it is possible that there are valuable themes to be recovered from this period. Leviticus 23 includes instructions concerning Temple offerings:

> Those are the set times of the LORD that you shall celebrate as sacred occasions, bringing offerings by fire to the LORD -- burnt offerings, meal offerings, sacrifices, and libations, on each day what is proper to it - apart from the sabbaths of the LORD, and apart from your gifts and from all your votive offerings and from all your freewill offerings that you give to the LORD.[184]

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[183] Deut., 16:14.
[184] Lev. 23:37-38.

The size and value of their offering due to the Temple was dependant on their agricultural and financial successes during the year. Like so many of the ancient traditions, it can be very difficult for modern Jews to relate to this idea; those who produce no bounty from the land and who are unaccustomed to pre-set philanthropic expectations that are proportionate to their financial successes. As a way to connect to much older traditions, a congregational leader might consider organizing a program for celebrants to demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility by donating food to shelters or food banks to fulfill the mitzvah of tithing their bounty.[185]

With the return to Israel as a focus of many liberal Jews, a certain degree of discomfort has arisen over the country's policies and procedures concerning its Arab citizens. Home demolitions, security walls and sweeping economic hardships that penalize the entire community are making it difficult for some liberal Jews to maintain unequivocal support for Israel. RamBam suggested that Sukkot is a natural celebration for communities that are thankful for God's grace,[186] but perhaps it can be a forum for modern communities to challenge an unsatisfactory world. In the midst of our happiness, we proclaim dissatisfaction and commit ourselves to working to eliminate injustice. As the New Israel Fund suggests:

> As Sukkot approaches, perhaps we can give some thought to the thousands of Arab Israeli citizens whose homes are essentially as precarious and fragile as our temporary sukkot.[187]

In this way, the festival of Sukkot becomes transformed into a form of social protest.

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[185] Musleah, Sacred Space.
[186] Weisblatt, p.44.
[187] "Sukkot and a 'Precarious Roof': The Shame of Arab Housing in Israel." *New Israel Fund website*. September 29, 2006. <http://www.nif.org/content.cfm?id=2785&currBody=1>.

As has been shown, Jews have continuously updated and modified tradition to meet their contemporary emotional, spiritual and socio-political needs. There is no reason that this process should cease in our age. Much of what I have suggested is meant to push the boundaries of what we have, for too long, thought was required and inflexible. It may be that congregational leaders might pick and choose from material suggested in this paper but, if this is to be a success, then the goal would be for those leaders to think about the traditions they have always done in a new way--asking themselves if those traditions should be perpetuated and if there is another way to experience them.

Most importantly, individuals and communities must engage in a process of making the observance of this festival (and others) a personally significant experience. The festivities will need to appeal to children and adults alike. As Nancy Wiener reports, the parents buy-in, through participating in their children's wonder and excitement, led to the success of a communal observance of Sukkot.

Gone are the days when enough congregants will be satisfied with a simple reading through the festival *machzor* and with rising to shake the Four Species simply because the service instructs. Today's progressive Jews need more and, luckily, there is a great deal of material out there to draw upon. Hoffman acknowledges that a proliferation of material in the twentieth century changes the face of the liturgical world. In his article, Creative Liturgy, published in 1975, he attributed the phenomenon to the invention of the Xerox machine.[188] In our day, we would point to the internet. Both pieces of technology launched Jewish leaders into a world in which new ideas could be reproduced and passed around the planet much more efficiently than ever before in history. As leaders encountered an innovation they

[188] Hoffman, p.45.

valued, they would either use it as-is or modify it and perpetuate the transmission – a virtual game of "Liturgical Operator".

Hoffman also warns that there is a danger in liturgical modification. Without a degree of commitment to the original sentiment of liturgy, the meaning or themes can be lost along the way. His proof is the blessing from the second blessing of the Amidah, "מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים". This prayer, he says, found theological disfavor in the eyes of the progressive community and, in an effort to make it palatable (ironically trying to preserve the traditional words) they crafted a figurative translation that changes the whole meaning of the original Hebrew. In this way, the traditional translation of "who revivest the dead"[189] becomes in Reform prayerbooks, "who frees man from his limits".[190]

Acknowledging the long historical precedent for the modification of liturgy and ritual to speak to the contemporary concerns of its celebrants, the question must then be asked: what responsibility do Jewish leaders have to maintain the traditional direction and themes of the Festival of Sukkot as they modify it for their contemporary and communal needs? Might it be appropriate to create a new association between Sukkot and, as Rahel Musleah suggests, the problem of Domestic Violence? Thereby creating a connection between the celebration of the *sukkat shalom*, a peaceful shelter, and the efforts to assure that victims of domestic violence may enjoy what the rest of society takes for granted.

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[189] Philip Birnbaum. *Prayer Book for Sabbath and Festivals*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1950, p.170.
[190] Hoffman, p.45.

Conclusion

The millennia of Jewish history and ritual development have offered a great deal of evidence about when, why and how changes take place. Looking carefully at the development of one Jewish festival has provided a typological example from which to learn. From the earliest origins of Sukkot, its celebrants looked backwards to tradition, around them at contemporary sensibility and forward to future needs and they modified the ritual accordingly.

The earliest descriptions of Sukkot found in the Bible betray their pagan roots but also rely on significant adaptation. This occurred as the development of the cultic forms of worship and the monotheism of the Israelite religion demanded innovation to keep the traditions relevant. Similarly, the rabbis' socio-political milieu meant that the biblical forms of Sukkot celebrations would no longer meet their needs. Life in exile from their Temple and from their land forced not only innovations in the rituals themselves but also evolution of the meaning behind the ritual. A more comprehensive project would no doubt have demonstrated that the festival continued to enjoy evolution, revolution and innovation as the Jews migrated to new lands and new milieus. This remains a field for further study.

I remain confident that this phenomenon of innovation and evolution has remained a constant because even the most cursory survey of contemporary Jewish communities has demonstrated that it is still underway. The academic studies of Hoffman, Petuchowski and Neusner have offered deeper understanding of the meaning in the lives of celebrants and their relationship to ritual. Sociologists, like Wuthnow, are able to make broad observations about social trends in modern American society which also explain Jewish experience and motivations. But long before they could rely on the contributions of these scholars,

communities had perpetuated the system. The process has been and will continue to take place; the key to its effective development is the conscious recognition by congregational leaders about the goal of ritual observances.

The primary goal should be the provision of meaningful rituals and festival observances that are relevant to the lives of its celebrants. In the case of Sukkot, congregational leaders should maintain two, sometimes competing, considerations in mind. First, the traditional themes and rituals which have been the glue keeping one generation connected to those that came before them. These customs and traditions remain valuable and should inform our liturgical decisions but, as liberal Jews, need not close off other possibilities. This leads to the leaders' second consideration: the ethical, communal and political demands of the modern era. There will be themes which a leader feels demand a voice in the celebration. This, it seems to me, is as compelling as tradition when making decisions about the innovation of ritual.

As discussed in Chapter Four, these themes (among others) might include the Building/Strengthening of the local community; the expression of the community's commitment to Jewish Nationalism/Zionism; it might include theologically charged themes such as communal/individual senses of Thanksgiving or communal and individual commitment to stewardship of the environment and Social Responsibility. Each of these broad themes contains endless possibilities and are only meant as suggestions. I have offered examples of some innovative and successful approaches to each and, in many cases, have provided my own hypothetical contributions to be tested in future congregations.

Judaism has been able to survive threats to its existence because of its built-in commitment to flexibility, living participation of its members and responsiveness to reality.

While, in every generation, some have striven to freeze Jewish traditions in time, others have maintained a commitment to a living religion that reflects its members' needs. As liberal Jews, we enjoy permission (perhaps even the obligation) to participate in the effort to keep Judaism alive for another generation. Engaging in conscious wrestling with the tradition in concert with the real world will make the experience of Sukkot meaningful to us and will hand the rituals, themes and meanings onto our children for them to make their own decisions. Thus, we become a link in the שלשלת הקבלה, the unbroken chain of transmission.

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