



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SUKKOT 5775 • 2014

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

October 10, 2014
Sukkot Day 2

**The Mystery of the
Crying Waters**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart 5775 Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

Sukkot - the holiday of joy. But what happens if I don't feel joyous? What can I do?

The answer lies in the pouring of the waters upon the altar in the Temple and the grand celebration of *Simchat Beit HaShueva*.

The answer lies in the mystery of the Crying Waters.

When God separated the Upper Waters and the Lower Waters, the Lower Waters began to cry. God comforted them by saying: "You shall be offered upon My altar on the Festival of Sukkot. And this shall symbolize the purpose of all of creation."

We each have "crying waters" in our lives. The secret to joy is to access these "tears" and elevate them upon a Godly altar.

A beautiful parable of a water carrier and his cracked bucket demonstrates how our own cracks and "crying waters" contain tremendous power to nourish our souls and the earth beneath us so that it may flower and bloom.

And from that comes true joy.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRYING WATERS: DRAWING WATER, PAINTING JOY

1. What is Joy? (Joke)

An Englishman, a Frenchman and a Russian were discussing joy.

“Joy,” said the Englishman, “Is when you return home tired after work and find your slippers warming by the fire. Ah, that is joy.”

“You English have no romance,” said the Frenchman. “Joy is having dinner with your beautiful wife at a fine restaurant. Now that is true joy.”

“You are both wrong,” said the Russian. “True joy is when you are at home in bed and at 4AM you hear a hammering at the door and there stands three massive KGB officers, who say to you, ‘Ivan Ivanovitch, you are under arrest.’ And you respond, ‘Ivan Ivanovitch lives next door.’ That is true joy!”

2. A Time of Joy

Chag Sameach and a Gut Yom Tov!

The Yom Tov of Sukkot, the Festival of Huts, is a time of immense happiness and complete joy. For eight days we dwell in a sukkah surrounded by rejoicing and celebration. Have you ever seen someone sad on Sukkot? Never! Sukkot is one big dance, and this dance culminates on the ninth day, on Simchat Torah, the joy of the Torah, called, *Zman Simchateinu*, the “Time of our Rejoicing.”

But just one question: What happens if you don't feel joyous? How can you ensure that you experience the joy of Sukkot in a real way? And, what tool can you develop to ensure that the natural joy of Sukkot permeates your entire year, even in tough times, even in the darkness of winter?

As the discussion between the Englishman, Frenchman and Russian demonstrates, true joy is dependent on your point of reference. If you think warm slippers are the epitome of true joy, then just have a pair of heated slippers around all year and you are guaranteed to be happy ... if you think a romantic dinner is pure joy, then have romantic dinners all life long and you shall have happiness ... and if you think being mistaken for someone else by the KGB at 4AM is true joy, then I don't think warm slippers or romantic dinners will help you much.

What new point of reference does the holiday of Sukkot bring to us so that we can be truly joyous?

Perhaps, if we examined the joyous – and not-so-well-known – ceremony of the Water Drawing, a new and profound point of reference will begin to emerge to help us appreciate and ensure joy.

3. Water Ceremony

The Talmud¹ teaches that the universe as a whole is judged and evaluated on Rosh Hashanah, but the waters of the world are judged and allocated on Sukkot. That is when all the world's waters receive their energy and life-sustenance for the coming year.

Because of this, in biblical times, every morning of Sukkot there was a special service performed in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem – this service was called *Nisuch Hamayim*, the “pouring of the waters.” These waters were drawn from a valley below the Temple Mount and brought up to be poured out and elevated upon God's altar.

Every evening of Sukkot (except for the first night of Sukkot and Shabbat) elaborate festivities were held in the courtyards of the Temple to celebrate the drawing of the water. The Talmud² describes in great detail how everywhere massive lamps were lit, whose brilliance could be seen throughout Jerusalem. All night the great sages would dance and make merry. One rabbi would juggle knives eight at a time,

¹ Rosh Hashanah 16a.

² Sukkah 51a.

another would juggle eight glasses of wine without spilling a drop, still others would do acrobatic feats to celebrate. All night long, the joy, happiness and celebration illuminated all of Jerusalem, put a smile on the world's face, and was felt all the way up to the heavens.

This joyous celebration was called *Simchat Beit HaShueva* – the “Rejoicing of the Water Drawing.”

So palpable and immense was this joy, that the Talmud makes an unequivocal – but confusing – statement:

*He who has not seen the Rejoicing of the Water Drawing (Simchat Beit Hashueva) has not seen a joyous celebration in all his days.*³

Anyone who has not seen *Simchat Beit HaShueva* has not seen joy in his life? What does this mean?

Most, if not all, of us have experienced joy and celebration and, yet, not one of us has ever seen the water drawing ceremony in the Holy Temple. As a matter of fact, none of us have seen the Temple at all. Does this mean that none of us have ever seen real joy?

Why does the Talmud state that one who has not seen *Simchat Beit HaShueva* has not seen *simcha*? Is a wedding not a *simcha*? Is the birth of a child not joyous? Is not every single mitzvah meant to be performed with gladness?

And yet, the single greatest and most detailed description of joy in the Talmud is that of *Simchat Beit Hashueva*. What warranted this level of celebration? Why were the greatest sages and saintliest leaders dancing, juggling, and turning into acrobats. Should not scholars be studying? Should not *tzaddikim* be praying? Should Israel's leaders not be leading with their heads instead of doing headstands? What profound revolution was occurring at the water drawing ceremony to mandate such complete and utter abandon?

And what does this mean for us?

³Sukkah 51a.

4. Midrash: Crying Waters

Simchat Beit HaShueva embodied the very purpose of creation itself. As we shall come to see, the drawing of the water from below to be poured upon the altar embodied a significant and world-altering experience.⁴

To better understand this, let us introduce a story from the Midrash that describes the waters of the world during creation, at the time of Genesis:

When the Holy One Blessed Be divided the waters, He placed half above and half below. The Lower Waters, those that He placed below, began to cry: "Oy, we have not merited to be close to our Creator." They tried to ascend on high, until the Holy Blessed One ... captured them under the sole of His foot.

The Lower Waters said: "It is revealed and known before You that we have only done this for the sake of Your honor." "If that's the case," said God, "the Upper Waters will not be able to sing praise without your prior permission. Furthermore, in the future you will come to be offered upon the altar at the time of ... the pouring of the water."⁵

When God created the world, it was one large, unyielding body of water. But creation of earth could not happen if all was water. Thus, God divided the water into two bodies, the Upper Waters and the Lower Waters, and the world was situated between these two bodies of water.

The Midrash describes the lowest level of water as the "Crying Waters." Why?

When the Lower Waters saw that they were sent down below, they began to cry and tried to rise back up to heaven, to be close to their source and fountainhead, God. But God put His foot down and declared their place was below. They said that they only wanted to rise upward to be close to Him. "If that's the case," said God,

⁴See Likkutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 420-424.

⁵Brought in Rabbeinu Bechai, Vayikra 2:13. See also Midrash Aseret Hadibrot 1; Reshimot of the Tzemach Tzedek on Pslams 92.

“then you are indeed special, and the Upper Waters will not sing songs of praise without your permission. And not only that, you will be poured upon My altar and exalted in My Temple.”

This pouring of the waters upon the altar – *Nisuch Hamayim* – is what is done on Sukkot and what is celebrated with the ceremony of the drawing of the waters, *Simchat Beit HaShueva*.

Why is the drawing and pouring of water so joyful? And what can it teach us about joy and about celebration?

5. Smiling Waters

Joy and celebration occur when something new or revolutionary happens:

- o When a man and woman get married, a new entity is established and joy commences.
- o When that couple give birth to a child, a new life is created and joy abounds.
- o When that child meets its soul-mate and gets married, again, a new home is started and the joy is beyond words.
- o Every time we do a mitzvah, new energy is infused into the world and joy is the result.

This plays out in other arenas as well. Getting hired at your dream job, succeeding at what you do, or fulfilling a major goal also causes happiness and joy. Why? Because you have done something new that before you hadn't. Before the achievement, things were one way; after it, another. The new reality creates joy.

The transition from what was in the past to the new reality in the present is the impetus for joy.

However, joy does not come easy. It takes the journey of singlehood to reach the celebration of marriage. It takes nine months of waiting and a painful delivery to reach the joy of holding a new life, your child,

in your hands. It takes the humble dedication of raising that child, often with many challenges, before you can marry him or her off and dance at the wedding.

Joy is the result of this revolutionary – and usually tumultuous – process.

This is joy on a personal scale. But joy on a personal scale devolves from joy on a global scale – from joy that has its origins in the creation of the world.

Exactly 5775 years ago, God created the world with a specific vision and dream in mind, namely that this physical earth should become a sanctuary for Him, a divine dwelling place. This vision is the metaphorical equivalent of marriage or birth as it calls for the creation of a new reality in an old landscape, revealing spirit in matter and soul in body.

To achieve this vision, at the creation of the world, God divided the waters into the Upper Waters and the Lower Waters. *And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, and let it be a separation between water and water."*⁶

In the beginning, all was water, all was energy. Water, the source of life, was everything, and there was no room for land. So that there could be a universe, and so that men and women in this universe could serve God and turn their earthly home into a sanctuary for the Divine, God separated the waters and created space for the earth.

Without the separation of the upper and lower waters, creating a home for God on earth would be like trying to get married without ever being single, or trying to have children without getting pregnant – impossible! Hence, the separation of the waters was necessary for a physical earth to exist, so that there may be a home for God in this physical plain.

But though this separation was necessary to achieve the end goal, this separation was by no means pleasant. Like the dating process or childbirth, the divide between waters caused many tears. When the Lower Waters descended beneath the earth, away from the heavenly reality of their Creator, they began to cry and tried to ascend back up to their source.

⁶Genesis 1:6.

When God saw this, He explained to the Lower Waters that “the Upper Waters cannot sing praise without your existence. The world cannot serve its Creator without you descending down below. For the global marriage of heaven and earth to occur, you must descend below to create room for material existence.”

But then God said even more, then God revealed to the Lower Waters the ultimate end-goal that He had in mind:

“On Sukkot, when all the waters of existence are judged and allocated, I will create a ceremony, *Nisuch Hamayim*, wherein you Lower Waters will be drawn from the valley below and poured upon My holy altar, and thus you will be raised up and reunited with your source.”

This is why the great sages of Israel would dance all night long. They weren't merely celebrating the drawing and pouring of the water, they were celebrating the purpose and culmination of existence itself!

6. Have You Ever SEEN Joy?

Now we can understand the words of the Talmud, *He who has not seen the Joyous Celebration of the Water Drawing (Simchat Beit Hashueva) has not seen a joyous celebration in all his days.*

How can one find true joy in life, especially in trying situations? By looking into and understanding this idea of *Simchat Beit Hashueva*. By *seeing* and understanding what causes the joy of *Simchat Beit Hahueva* – the reunion of the Lower Waters with the Upper Waters.

Often times in life we cry. We all have parts of us that are like the Upper Waters, close to our source in God, but we also have parts that are like the Lower Waters, distant from our source. It is very painful. Often very dark and seemingly hopeless. So we cry.

We try to stem the tears with all kinds of artificial joys: warm slippers or romantic dinners. These are all wonderful things, but they aren't the key ingredients of joy.

But, whenever we are down, we can get back up by *seeing* the inner meaning of *Simchat Beit Hahueva*, for then we realize that our difficult or sad situation is just the result of the separated waters, and once they reunite, there will be immense joy.

When we look into and meditate on the drawing of the waters, then we understand that everything that is happening is happening so that the waters may be uplifted, and then we celebrate with joy. This is a principle to keep in mind the whole year.

On a global scale, true joy and celebration occurs when the waters below ascend upon the altar and are made sacred. And, on a personal scale, true joy and celebration occurs when we wipe away the pain of the crying waters of below and turn those tears into smiles.

7. The Parable of the Water Carrier

There is a pertinent parable that brings all this home.

There was once a water carrier. The water carrier would draw water from a well and put the water into two buckets. One bucket would hang on one end of the pole he slung across his shoulders, and the second bucket would hang on the other end of the pole. Every day the water carrier would walk from the well at the outskirts of town to bring water to the townspeople. That was the water carrier's job. The water carrier made a meager living, if that, but this was his job, and he did it to the best of his abilities.

One of the water carrier's best customers was a great mystical master.

One day, under his great burden, the water carrier dropped his pole and one of the buckets cracked against the side of a rock. The carrier could not afford a new bucket and, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water, at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For two years this went on daily, with the carrier delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfections and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been created to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water carrier one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why," asked the carrier? "What are you ashamed of?"

“I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master’s house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work and you don’t get full value for your efforts,” the pot said. The water carrier felt sorry for the old cracked pot and in his compassion he said, “As we return to the master’s house I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.”

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the carrier for its failure. The carrier said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path but not on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you’ve watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master’s table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house.”

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We’re all cracked pots. But if we will allow it, we can use our flaws to grace the pathways of life with flowers. When we realize the purpose of creation, that there are seeds everywhere on the path of life, we realize that any flaw that is created by the Lower Waters is really but a means to water the earth and make it bloom.

8. We Are All Cracked Pots (Conclusion)

The joy of *Simchat Beit Hashueva* is the joy of uplifting the crying waters of below up onto the altar of God.

Every single one of us has buckets – *keilim* – vessels that are cracked, that are imperfect, that leak waters down to the ground. And the waters cry, whimper, and tear.

And then, if we look a little closer, we notice that these waters that fall below do so only for one purpose: so that they may make the world grow, so that they may quench the thirst of the seeds planted in the earth by the Creator of the world.

And this realization causes the world to flower and bloom. Such waters are indeed worthy of being offered upon God's holy altar.

And tell me, how could the Upper Waters of the world ever sing praise if they did not first acquire permission from the holy Lower Waters that change the world?

There are crying waters everywhere we look. It is our job to go down into the valleys to draw up these waters, to bring these waters to the holy Temple, and to elevate these waters upon God's holy altar.

I know - today there is no Temple and no altar. But God gave us the Torah and its commandments, and they are our temples. God gave us ways to elevate the crying waters of the world - by offering them upon the holy altars we create with our deeds.

You feed a hungry child? This is elevating the crying waters upon God's holy altar. You learn *aleph* with a Jew who has never learned an *aleph* in his or her life? This is elevating the crying waters of the valley upon God's holy altar. You invite your neighbor or co-worker or stranger (or all three!) for a meal in your sukkah? This is turning the crying waters of the world into an offering upon God's pure altar.

And this, my dear friends, is the absolute epitome of joy.

Anyone that has not seen this message in the ceremony of *Simchat Beit Hashueva* has not seen true joy in his lifetime.

But each and every one of us has seen this level of joy, and each and every one of us will make sure we carry on this joy throughout the entirety of Sukkot, throughout Simchat Torah, and into the rest of the year.

Ah Frelichen Sukkos! A Happy and Joyous Sukkot! Chag Same'ach!
And a Gut Yom Tov!

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