

The Menoras Hamaor Midrash Anthology

Shalosh Regalim: The Three Festivals

An Annotated Excerpt from
The Light of Mitzvos,
the third Light of the Menorah

Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav

Translated by

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&&Translator's Foreword

Menoras Hamaor, The Menorah of Light, is one of the great classics of Jewish religious literature. It is a masterwork consisting of seven separate and distinct works, each dealing with a separate and distinct area of Jewish thought—the seven branches of the Menorah.

For over five hundred years, *Menoras Hamaor* has enjoyed spectacular popularity. It has appeared in seventy-nine editions and has been translated into Ladino, German, and Yiddish. First printed in Constantinople in 1514, it has since been reprinted in many cities on four continents.

As its basic premise, *Menoras Hamaor* uses the verse, Turn away from evil and do good, search out peace and pursue it (Tehillim 34:15). Drawing on the chronicles and timeless wisdom of the Agadic portion of the Talmud and on the Midrashim, it develops a system for the improvement of the individual and the fulfillment of his role in society.

This volume, *Shalosh Regalim: The Three Festivals*, is an annotated excerpt from *The Light of Mitzvos*, the Third Light of the Menorah. It is an in-depth look at the festivals and their attendant mitzvos. It directs the reader to the symbolism and meaning of these events and how they are meant to bring a person closer to Hashem.

The other Lights of the Menorah include: *The Light of Contentment*, *The Light of Expression*, *The Light of Torah*, *The Light of Teshuvah*, *The Light Of Harmony*, and *The Light of Humility*.

Shalosh Regalim: The Three Festivals appears in *The Light of Mitzvos*, the Third Light of the Menorah, as Section IV, Parts 4-6. It follows the pattern of the volume from which it is drawn, delving into the hearts of the mitzvos to find their inner meaning and symbolism and how they are designed to bring a person closer to Hashem.

This excerpt is an in-depth look at the festivals and their attendant mitzvos in the broader perspective of their significance

to the Jewish people as a nation enjoying a special relationship with Hashem. The national character of the Jewish people, the identity that sets them apart from all other nations, is their bond with Hashem. This bond was conceived in the time of our forefather Avraham; the foundations of the Jewish nation were laid by the covenant between Hashem and Avraham. But the events that actually forged the Jewish nation were their exile in Egypt, their spectacular and miraculous exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the migration to the Holy Land. Thus, the three festivals that commemorate these events are a celebration of the coalescence of the Jewish people into the most unique nation in the history of the world; they are a reaffirmation of our special privileges and responsibilities as such.

Menoras Hamaor highlights those aspects of the mitzvos that are most inspirational. In its discussion of the festival of Pesach, it points out that the exile in Egypt was the beginning of a long process of exile and redemption that would culminate only with the coming of Mashiach. It speaks of the wondrous miracles Hashem performed to effect the release of the Jewish people from bondage and to lead them to safety. It shows how these miracles were designed to demonstrate His mastery over the world to the people of that time and to all future generations.

In its discussion of the festival of Shavuot, *Menoras Hamaor* speaks of the symbolism of some of its special features. It discusses the statement, "We shall do, and we shall hear." Besides its obvious significance as a statement of profound faith in Hashem, *Menoras Hamaor* uses it to develop the theme of the practical and intellectual approaches to Judaism. It uses this interpretation to cast startling and wonderful new light on some cryptic passages in the Talmud. It then speaks of the awesome spectacle of the giving of the Torah.

In its discussion of the festival of Sukkos, *Menoras Hamaor* finds meaning upon meaning in its many attendant mitzvos. It speaks of the sukkah as a symbol of the importance of utter trust in Hashem, as a symbol of transcendent holiness. It speaks of the

four species as universal symbols, as reminders of the past, as representing the entire spectrum of the Jewish people.

It concludes with a general discussion of how a Jew should use the festival celebration as an expression of his love for and attachment to Hashem.

About the Author

The Abohav family was a very prominent Spanish family of outstanding scholars who lived in the Middle Ages. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, in 1492, branches of the family were established in North Africa, Turkey, Italy, and the ex-Marrano communities of Northern Europe.

The life of the author, Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav, is shrouded in mystery, with very few details available. It is generally accepted that he lived in Spain in the latter half of the fourteenth century. His father, Rabbeinu Avraham Abohav, was quite possibly the Rabbeinu Avraham Abohav to whom Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Asher of Toledo, the son of the Wash, addressed responsa in *Zichron Yehudah*.

The author's fame rests entirely upon his authorship of *Menoras Hamaor*, which is but one part of a trilogy. The other parts of the trilogy, *Aron Ha'edus* and *Shulchan Hapanim*, have been lost. The author describes all three parts of the trilogy, and their interrelationship, in the "Ode to the Menorah" (see Appendix A to *The Light of Contentment*, the First Light of the Menorah).

The little that is known about the author's life must be gleaned from what he himself writes in the introductory "Ode to the Menorah" and "Profile of the Menorah" (see Appendix B to *The Light of Contentment*, the First Light of the Menorah). In "Profile of the Menorah", the author writes that a substantial part of his life was devoted to secular affairs. It was in his later years that he turned to writing and the rabbinate. He implies that part of

his motivation for writing *Menoras Hamaor* was to have a systematic arrangement of the Agada to draw upon when he had to speak before the people. There is also a tantalizing reference in the "Ode to the Menorah", Part V, to some time spent in captivity. However, this might only be an allegorical allusion to the time he spent in secular pursuits.

Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II, a descendant of the author who lived one hundred years later and died in 1493, was known as "the last gaon of Castille". He studied with Rabbeinu Yitzchak Canpanton and became the head of the Toledo Yeshiva. In 1491, Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abarbanel. studied with him. Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II wrote many works, including a commentary on *Arba'ah Turim* of Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Asher, the son of the R'ash. Although this last work has been lost, it is quoted extensively in the commentaries of Rabbeinu Yosef Caro, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, who refers to him as one of the greatest scholars of his generation. The authorship of *Menoras Hamaor* is sometimes erroneously attributed to the better known Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav II, but the "Chida" proves that this is not so. (See also *Midas Haposkim* under "Aron Ha'edus".)

Part I:

PESACH

(Chap. 1-5)

Chapter One

Revelations of Exile and Redemption

&&The three major festivals of the year are celebrated in commemoration of the exile of the Jewish people in the land of Mitzraim (Egypt), their subsequent redemption, and the momentous events that followed. But for a deeper appreciation of the significance of these festivals they should be viewed in the perspective of the entire sweep of the history of the Jewish nation, from its earliest conception in the time of Avraham to its ultimate and final redemption with the triumphant coming of Mashiach.

The exile in Egypt was but the first in a cycle of exile and redemption that is destined to continue until the final redemption. It was followed by exiles in Bavel, Madai, and the exiles of Yavan and Edom (the domination of the Greek and Roman Empires, which persist even today with the domination of the world by Western civilization). Yet it was the Egyptian exile that forged the Jewish nation and set in motion the chain of events that will culminate only with the coming of Mashiach.

At the very time that the Jewish nation was being conceived, when the Holy Blessed One made the Covenant of the Pieces — the Bris Bein Habesarim — with Avraham, the entire destiny of the Jewish people was already charted. And Hashem revealed this destiny to Avraham, specifically in that which is written, And it was while the sun was setting that a heavy slumber fell upon Avram, and behold, a terror, a darkness great, fell upon him (Beraishis 15:12). The Midrash finds intimations in this verse to the future exiles of the Jewish people among the gentile nations.¹

¹ The Midrash tells us (Beraishis Rabah 44:17):

“A terror” intimates that Avram was told of the exile of the Jews in Bavel (Babylon), of which it is written, Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury (Daniel 3:19).

"A darkness" intimates that Avram was told of the exile of the Jews in Madai, an exile that darkened their lives with repeated fasts in the face of relentless persecution.

[Translator's note: This is a reference to the reign of King Achashverosh by whose early decree the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash was discontinued and by whose subsequent decree the Jewish inhabitants of the Medean Empire were turned over to the murderous Haman the Agagi.]

"Great" intimates that Avram was told of the domination of the Greeks whose empire had many officials.

... "Fell upon him" intimates that Avram was told of Edom, the Roman Empire, of which it is written, The earth trembles from the sound of their fall (Yirmiyahu 49:21).

Others say that this phrase refers to Bavel, of whom it is written, It has fallen, Bavel has fallen (Yeshayahu 21:9).

According to this interpretation, the references in the rest of the verse are as follows:

"A darkness great" refers to the exile in Madai, of which it is written, After these events, King Achashverosh made great Haman the son of Hamedasa the Agagi (Esther 3:1), 'darkness' again serving as an allusion to the relentless Medean oppression.

"A terror" refers to Edom, of whom it is written, After this I had a vision in the visions of the night, and behold, there was a fourth beast, frightful and terrifying and extremely strong, and it had great teeth of iron, it devoured and crushed, and what it left it trampled with its feet, it was different from all the beasts before it, and it had ten horns (Daniel 7:7).

[Translator's note: Rashi explains that these ten horns are an allegory for the ten Caesars preceding Vespasian, the Roman Emperor who destroyed the Second Bais Hamikdash.]

The Midrash also tells of how Hashem reassured Avraham that the Jewish people would eventually return triumphant to their homeland² and that their oppressors would be punished.³

² The Midrash tells us (Beraishis Rabah 44:19):

It is written, And He said to Avram, Know, you shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and torment them, for four hundred years, and also the nation that they will go forth with great wealth (Beraishis 15:13-14).

"Know, you shall know," Know that I will scatter them, but you shall also know that I will gather them in. Know that I will cause them to be subjugated, but you shall also know That I will deliver them. Know that I will cause them to be subjected, but you shall also know that I will emancipate them.

"That your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and torment them, for four hundred years." The term of four hundred years will begin with the birth of your offspring Yitzchak.

Rabbi Yochanan explained: "Their being strangers and their torment will last four hundred years, the term beginning even with their isopolity (the civil rights granted to aliens)."

[Translator's note: "Aspatiah" is the word used here. In the version of the text quoted here this word seems to have been used to denote isopolity, and Rabbi Yochanan is saying that the preliminary stage of the enslavement was the granting of isopolity.]

In the standard text this statement appears with a variation that indicates a different interpretation and is quoted in the name of Rabbi Yudan. Rabbi Yudan appears to be noting that instead of saying that "your offspring will be strangers, enslaved and tormented, in a land that is not theirs" the verse separates the two, being strangers and being enslaved and tormented. Thus, he interprets the verse as saying that they will be strangers in alien lands for four hundred years, the enslavement and torment during this period taking place in their own "aspatiah", their designated places.]

³ The Midrash tells us (Beraishis Rabah 44:19):

Rabbi Chelbo said: "In that which is written, And also the nation that they serve will I judge (Ibid.) 'also' refers to Mitzraim. 'And also' is an inclusionary phrase indicating the extension of judgment to the four empires that would exile and enslave the Jewish people—the Babylonian, Medean, Greek, and Roman Empires."

It is written, That they serve will I judge (Ibid.).

Rabbi Elazar said: "Hashem promised our forefather Avraham that he would redeem his descendants with the two-letter Hebrew word used here for 'judge', But if they repent He will redeem them with a seventy-two letter phrase.

...Rabbi Avin said: "Hashem will use His own Name to redeem them from exile, for the Name of Hashem also consists of seventy-two letters."

[Translator's note: The commentaries bring an additional allusion to this in the numerical significance of the fully-spelled Tetragrammaton (Yod Kay Vav Kay),

After Hashem told Avraham of the exile of his descendants in Egypt and their enslavement and torment there, of their subsequent exiles, and of their ultimate redemption, Hashem also revealed to him the oppressive conditions under which the Jewish people would be forced to live during their exiles among the imperial powers. The Midrash tells us (Beraishis Rabah 44:21):

%%It is written, And it was when the sun had set, and there was utter darkness, and behold, there was a smoking furnace and a flaming torch that passed among those pieces (Beraishis 15:17).

Shimeon the son of Aba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: 'Four things were shown to Avraham — Gehinom, the oppressive, imperial exiles, the giving of the Torah, and the Bais Hamikdash.

"Hashem said to Avraham: 'As long as your descendants concern themselves with these last two things they will not be subjected to the first two. If they neglect these last two things they will be condemned to the first two.' "

Hashem asked Avraham: "To which do you prefer that your descendants be condemned, to the oppression of the imperial exiles or to Gehinom?"

Rabbi Chanina the son of Pappa said: "Avraham chose the oppression of the imperial exiles,"

Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Meir said in the name of Rav Acha the son of Chanina: "An old man said in the name of Rahi that the Holy Blessed One chose the oppression of the imperial exiles over Gehinom,"

Both of these views are consistent and together explain that which is written, How could one pursue a thousand and two rout ten thousand, if not because their rock had

*surrendered them and God had handed them over?
(Devarim 32:30).*

"Their rock" refers to their forefather Avraham who chose this over Gehinom, "And God had handed them over" by agreeing to Avraham's choice.⁴

&&Hashem also indicated to Avraham at that time that the Bais Hamikdash would be built and then twice rebuilt. It is written, And he said, my Lord God, how will I know that I shall inherit it? and He said to him, Take for me a threesome of calves and a threesome of goats and a threesome of rams and a turtledove and a young pigeon (Beraishis 15:8-9). The calves, goats, and rams are allegories for the First, Second, and Third Bais Hamikdash respectively.

The calf is the symbol for the First Bais Hamikdash because it is the source of the guilt that eventually caused its destruction. Even as the Mishkan, the temporary Tabernacle used during the migration of the Jewish people from Egypt to the Holy Land, was just being built the Jewish people already sinned by worshipping a golden calf-idol. Many years later, Shlomo Hamelech built the first permanent Bais Hamikdash, but immediately after his death, Yeravam, the king of Yisrael, set up two calf-idols for the people to worship. These two calves combined with the golden calf-idol in the Desert to form a threesome of calves to which the abovementioned verse alludes. They were the cause of the suffering of the Jewish people throughout the duration of the First Bais Hamikdash. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 102a):

%%Rav Oshaya said: "At first the people of Yisrael suffered because of the sin of a single calf-idol. From the time of Yeravam on they suffered because of the sins of the three calf-idols."

⁴ Hashem chose the oppression of the imperial exiles over the judgment of Gehinom as punishment for the sins of the Jewish people because He preferred that they be punished in this world and arrive purified in the world to come.

Rav Yitzchak said; "There is no calamity which befalls the world that is not caused at least in small part by the sin of the first golden calf-idol."

&&The goat is the symbol for the Second Bais Hamikdash for several reasons. One is because the people of Yisrael, at that time, were brazen and shameless, and the Hebrew word for this characteristic is similar to the Hebrew word for goat.

Second, they were very much under the influence of Satan who is compared to a goat. Still using the goat as a symbol for Satan, we find another connection to the Second Bais Hamikdash. It is written in reference to the time when plans were being laid for the reconstruction of the Bais Hamikdash, And during the reign of Achashverosh, in the beginning of his reign, an accusation was written against the inhabitants of Yehudah and Yerushalayim (Ezra 4:6), accusation being expressed in this verse as a satanism.

Finally, there is a connection between the Second Bais Hamikdash and a goat because the emperor of the Greeks in the early days of the Second Bais Hamikdash was Alexander the Great who was depicted as a goat in Daniel's prophecy, as it is written, And the hairy goat was the crown of Yavan (Greece), and the great horn that was between his eyes was its first king (Daniel 8:21).

These three reasons are alluded to in the threesome of goats that Hashem directed Avraham to take.

The symbol for the Third Bais Hamikdash is the ram. The ram is the symbol of peace; the Third Bais Hamikdash will be built after the coming of Mashiach brings everlasting peace to the world. The ram is also the symbol of power, the Hebrew word for ram being used in that which is written, It is in the power of my hand (Beraishis 31:29); the Third Bais Hamikdash will be built when the people of Yisrael are restored to everlasting power, and it will endure forever. Moreover, the Third Bais Hamikdash will ultimately be built in a world returned to perfection partly

because of the merit of our forefather Yitzchak who had offered himself up as a sacrifice to Hashem and was replaced by a ram. Thus is the threesome of rams a symbol for the future Third Bais Hamikdash.

The future existence of the First, Second, and Third Bais Hamikdash was also revealed to our forefather Yitzchak.⁵

When our forefather Yaakov went down to Egypt he realized that he was entering a new phase of exile, that he and his children

⁵ An intimation of this can be found in the verses that mention the names of the three wells that Yitzchak's servants dug. It is written, And the servants of Yitzchak dug in the valley, and there they found a well of fresh water, and the shepherds of Gerar quarreled with the shepherds of Yitzchak, saying, The water is ours! and he called the name of the well Eisek, because they disputed with him, and they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one as well, and he called its name Sitnah, and he moved from there, and he dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it, and he called its name Rechovos, and he said, For now God has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land (Beraishis 26:19-22). These names have no significance in themselves, nor do they reflect honorably on Yitzchak. Rather, they are mentioned because they shed light on the future.

The "well of fresh water" is a symbol for the Houses of the Lord that would be built in the future by Yitzchak's descendants, because from these Houses would emanate Torah and the Word of Hashem, which are compared to water. We find a similar usage in that which is written, For they have abandoned the source of fresh water, God (Yirmiyahu 17:13). This refers to those waters that belong to God, the Torah.

The name "Eisek" means dispute. It is a fitting allusion to the time of First Bais Hamikdash during which the people of Yisrael were embroiled in repeated wars that culminated in the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

The name "Sitnah" means satanic hatred. It alludes to the time of Second Bais Hamikdash during which the people of Yisrael encountered even greater enmity. It was of this House that it is written, And during the reign of Achashverosh, in the beginning of his reign, an accusation was written against the inhabitants of Yehudah and Yerushalayim (Ezra 4:6), the Hebrew word used here for accusation being "sitnah". This enmity and antagonism encountered by the people of Yisrael persisted during the entire duration of the Second Bais Hamikdash, finally bringing about its destruction.

The name "Rechovos" means broad places. It alludes to the Third Bais Hamikdash, which will be rebuilt, hopefully in the near future, without quarrel or strife. At that time the Lord will broaden our boundaries as it is written, And when God will broaden your boundary, as He swore to your forefathers (Devarim 19:8), the verse containing also an implicit promise for the future.

would be the first ones to actually experience alienation from their homeland. This prospect terrified him, and he brought sacrifices to the Awesome God of his father Yitzchak, imploring that the Attribute of Strict Judgment not be arraigned against him. He brought these sacrifices in Beer Sheva, the city where his fathers had prayed. He also made it a point to bring the shelamim sacrifice, the symbol of peace in the world, in order to make his peace with all of the divine Attributes, including the Attribute of Power.

It was there also that Hashem reassured him, as it is written, I will go down with you to Mitzraim, and I will bring you up again (Beraishis 46:4). This was a promise that wherever his descendants would be exiled the Divine Presence would rest among them ready to shield them from their enemies and to ultimately redeem them from exile. The Talmud tells us (Megillah 29a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Shimeon the son of Yochai says: "The people of Yisrael are beloved to Him, for wherever they are exiled the Divine Presence is with them.

"When they were exiled to Mitzraim the Divine Presence was with them, as it is written, So said God, Did I not appear in the household of your father when they were in Mitzraim in the house of Pharaoh? (Shmuel I 2:27).

"When they were exiled to Bavel the Divine Presence was with them, as it is written, Because of you was I sent to Bavel (Yeshayahu 43:14),

"When they were exiled to Eilam the Divine Presence was with them, as it is written, And I will place My Chair in Eilam, and I will destroy from there king and princes, by the Word of God (Yirmiyahu 49:38).

"When they were exiled to Edom the Divine Presence was with them, as it is written, Who is this that comes from Edom, with bloodstained clothes from Batzrah? (Yeshayahu 63:1).

"And when the people of Yisrael will be redeemed in the future the Divine Presence will be redeemed along with them. For it is written, And then God your Lord will return your captives, and he will take pity on you (Devarim 30:3). The verse does not use the Hebrew word ordinarily used for 'make to return'. Instead, it uses the reflexive form of the verb; indicating that the Holy Blessed One will Himself return along with the exiles from all of their places of exile."

&&Our Sages also made a similar derivation from that which is written, In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and an angel from His Presence rescued them (Yeshayahu 63:9).

We can find a measure of consolation in the fact that the Divine Presence will always accompany the Jewish people in exile, We can, therefore, hope that we may one day be redeemed for the sake of the Divine Presence, even if we are unworthy of being redeemed for our own sakes.

Chapter Two

Enslavement in Egypt

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hashem revealed to Avraham that his descendants would be subjected to the Egyptian exile for four hundred years, the term of which was to begin with the birth of his son Yitzchak. Elsewhere, however, the Torah tells us that the term of the Egyptian exile in Mitzraim was four hundred and thirty years (Shemos 12:40). This calculation begins at the time of the revelation, which preceded the birth of Yitzchak by thirty years.

The Egyptian exile did not enter its second phase until Yaakov went down to Egypt and the actual alienation of the Jewish people from their homeland began. At this point, there were two hundred and ten years left to the exile in Egypt. The third phase of the exile, the cruel enslavement of the Jewish people at the hands of the Egyptians, did not begin until after the death of Yosef. Indeed, we find that when Yaakov passed away, and he was taken to the Me'aras Hamachpelah to be buried as he had requested, Yosef and all of his brothers accompanied him with great pomp and ceremony. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 13a):

%%Yosef earned the privilege of personally overseeing the burial of his father.

For it is written, And the-they came to the barn of thorns (Beraishis 50:70). Are then thorns gathered and stored in a barn?

Rabbi Abahu said: "This comes to teach us that the coffin of Yaakov was encircled by a ring of kingly crowns just as a grain-filled barn is encircled by a barrier of thorns. The children of Eisav, the children of Yishmael, and all the

children of Keturah approached the funeral procession, and it was taught that they approached to do battle, However, when they saw the crown of Yosef attached to Yaakov's coffin, they too removed their crowns and attached them to Yaakov's coffin."

It was taught: There were thirty six crowns attached to the coffin of Yaakov.

&&In fact, all of the people of Yisrael held an honored place in Egyptian society until the death of Yosef. It was only after Yosef's death that the gradual process of their enslavement began. The Talmud describes this process (Sotah 11a).

%%It is written, And a new king arose who did not know Yosef (Shemos 1:8).

Rav said: "This verse is to be taken literally, meaning that a new king ascended to the throne."

Shmuel said: "This verse is to be taken figuratively. The king was the same, but after the death of Yosef, he changed his policies."

Rav bases his interpretation on the use of the word "new".

Shmuel bases his interpretation on the fact that there is no mention of the death of the previous king.

According to Shmuel, what is the meaning of that which is written, Who did not know Yosef (Ibid.)?

It means that he made himself as if he did not know Yosef.

The verse goes on, And he said to his people, Behold, this nation, the people of Yisrael, are more numerous and more powerful than we are (Shemos 1:9).

Since the king was the first to scheme against the Jewish people he was also the first to be stricken, as it is written, And over you, and over your people, and over all your servants, shall the frogs go up (Shemos 7:29).

The verse continues, Come, let us deal shrewdly with him, lest he multiplies, and if there should then be a war, he too will join up with our enemies, and he will do battle with us, and he will depart from the land (Shemos 1:10).

This again refers to the fact that Pharaoh wore a brick mold about his neck. They afflicted Pharaoh to wear the mold in order to lay their heavy burden upon the people of Yisrael.

The verse continues, And he built storehouse cities for Pharaoh (Ibid.).

There is an additional allusion in the Hebrew word used here for storehouse. Rav and Shmuel have differing opinions as to what this allusion is.

One said: "The allusion is based on an alternative meaning of the Hebrew word which is to endanger. These cities endangered their owners, because they brought retribution upon them."

The other said; "The allusion is based on another alternative meaning of the Hebrew word which is to impoverish. These cities impoverished their owners. This coincides with what the master has said: 'Whoever is constantly engaged in construction is bound to become impoverished.' "

The verse continues, Pisom and Ramses (Ibid.).

There is a difference of opinion between Rav and Shmuel about the significance of these names.

One said: "The true name of this complex of storehouses was really Pisom. Why then was it also called Ramses? Because there is an intimation in the Hebrew structure of this name that it was constantly collapsing and being rebuilt."

The other said: "The true name of this complex was really Ramses. Why then was it also called Pisom? Because there is an intimation in the Hebrew structure of this name

that whatever was built was continually being swallowed up into the abyss of the earth."

The verse continues, But as they afflicted him so will he multiply and so will he expand (Shemos 1:12).

Should it not have said "so did they multiply and so did they expand" in the past tense, instead of "so will he multiply and so will he expand" in the future tense?

Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said: "This comes to teach that these words were said to Mitzraim by the Holy Blessed One: 'In spite of everything you do, Yisrael will constantly multiply and expand.' "

The verse continues, And they were revulsed before the people of Yisrael (Ibid.).

There is an intimation in the alternative meaning of the Hebrew word used here to denote revulsion that the Egyptians looked upon the Jewish people as thorns.

The verse continues, And the Mitzriim enslaved the people of Yisrael with crushing labor (Shemos 1:13).

Rabbi Eliezer says: "There is an intimation in an alternative meaning of the Hebrew word used here to denote harsh labor that they coaxed and cajoled them into slavery."

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini says: "The intimation is to body-breaking labor."

The verse continues, And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and with bricks, and all sorts of work in the field (Shemos 1:14).

Rabah said: "They started them off with mortar and brick work, but in the end, they made them do all sorts of work in the field."

The verse concludes, All the work that they made them do with harshness (Ibid.).

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said; "This means that they would make men do women's work and women do men's work."

&&After successfully completing the enslavement of the Jewish people, Pharaoh decreed that all Jewish male infants be killed at birth. By destroying all the male children Pharaoh hoped to ensure that no leader would arise among the Jewish people to rescue them from their bondage. Afterwards, following the advice of his astrologers, he made this decree more specific, as it is written, And Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, Every son that is born you shall toss into the river, but you shall let every daughter live (Shemos 1:22). His astrologers had divined that the one who was destined to lead the Jewish people out of bondage would be vulnerable to water.

The Talmud explains that they misread this sign (Sanhedrin 101b). They thought that this meant he would die by drowning. In actuality, however, water was to be the cause of his downfall rather than the agent of his downfall. After the exodus from Egypt, traveling in the Desert, the people of Yisrael cried out rebelliously to Moshe for water. Hashem told him to speak to the rock and it would give forth water. Moshe and Aharon then gathered the people together before the rock and said angrily to them: "Hear now, you rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" (Bamidbar 20:10) In his anger at the people Moshe struck the rock with his staff instead of speaking to it, and water gushed forth. For surrendering to their anger Moshe and Aharon were punished by not being allowed to live long enough to lead the Jewish people into the Holy Land,

Elsewhere, the Talmud expands on this theme (Sotah 12b):

%%Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, Those were the waters of conflict, where the people of Yisrael quarreled with God (Bamidbar 20:13)? The verse seems to be identifying these waters according to some earlier frame of reference. To what does it refer?

"It is a reference to the waters that the Egyptian astrologers had seen in Moshe's future as causing his

downfall. They thought that this meant he would die by drowning, but they were mistaken.

"There is also an allusion to this in that which is written, And Moshe said, Six hundred thousand people on foot, that I am in their midst (Bamidbar 11:21). According to an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew words, Moshe was saying that because of him these people were saved. The decree to drown all male children had been motivated by the misread astrological sign. However, when Moshe was set adrift in the river that particular astrological sign disappeared, and the decree was rescinded."

Rabbi Chiya the son of Pappa said: "The day that the infant Moshe was set adrift in the river was the twenty-first day of the month of Nissan, the date on which many years later the Red Sea would split open before the people of Yisrael as they fled from Egypt.

"The angels of service said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe! Can it be that one who is destined to say the Shirah on this date, singing your praises, at the splitting of the sea, should be stricken on this date?' "

Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina said: "That day was the sixth day of the month of Sivan, the date on which many years later Moshe would receive the Torah on Mount Sinai.

"The angels of service said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe! Can it be that one who is destined to receive the Torah on this date should be stricken on this date?' "

&&The unfolding story of Moshe Rabbeinu sheds light on the Divine Providence behind Pharaoh's evil decree. It was to escape this decree that the infant Moshe was set adrift on the river in a small basket. There he was discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh who took him home with her and brought him up in the royal palace. Thus did this Jewish boy, who would have been

expected to grow up under the crushing burden of slavery, grow and develop as a prince in the palace. This self-assurance, this inner strength, enabled him to rise as the champion of his people. It enabled him to stand fearless before Pharaoh and deliver the commands of Hashem.

It is interesting to note that it was the Jewish women who especially distinguished themselves during the duration of this evil decree, and it was through their merit that our ancestors were eventually redeemed from the Egyptian bondage. The Talmud explains (Sotah 11b):

%%Rabbi Akiva expounded: "Our ancestors were redeemed from the Egyptian bondage through the merit of the righteous Jewish women of the generation that lived through the infant-killing decree. When they went to the river to draw water the Holy Blessed One made it that they should find fish in their water jugs. They would fill half their jugs with water and half their jugs with fish and take them home. There they would put up two pots to cook, one of fish and one of plain water. They would then take these pots and go out to the fields where their husbands were laboring. They would wash their husbands' feet with the boiled water they had prepared, rub them with liniment, feed them, and give them to drink. Then they would join with their husbands in conjugal union in a secluded nook at the edge of the field, as it is written, If you lie between the hedges you will be as the wings of a dove that are covered with silver (Tehillim 65:14).

"This verse also implies that the enormous wealth which the people of Yisrael managed to collect as they left Egypt came as a reward for their surreptitious defiance of Pharaoh's decree.

"When the women became pregnant they would leave the work fields and would return home to wait out the term of their pregnancies. Then they would sneak out into the fields

to give birth, as it is written, Under the apple tree have I awakened you, there your mother gave birth to you (Shir Hashirim 8:5).

"And the Holy Blessed One sent down an angel from the Upper Heavens who would cleanse the infants and beautify them, just as a midwife prepares the newborn child, as it is written, And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel was not cut, nor were you washed in water to be cleansed (Yechezkel 16:4).

"And the angel would then give them two round jars, one of oil and one of honey, as it is written, And He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of a flinty stone (Devarim 32:13).

"Whenever malicious Egyptians became aware of the existence of these secret children they would immediately come to kill them, but they were not successful. A miracle would occur, and the children would be swallowed up by the earth. Egyptian plowers would then bring oxen and plow over the spots where they had been swallowed up, as it is written, Plowers have plowed above me (Tehillim 129:3).

"When the Egyptians had left, the Jewish children burst forth from the land, sprouting like grass on the meadows, as it is written, I have made you multitudinous as the growths of the field (Yechezkel 16:7).

"And when these children grew older they would return in droves to their homes, as it is written, And you thrived, and you grew, and you came to great beauty (Ibid.). With a slight variation in form, the Hebrew words can be read as saying that they came in great droves.

"And when the Holy Blessed One revealed Himself to the Jewish people at the splitting of the sea, these children who had already experienced the Divine Presence, were the first to recognize Him, as it is written, This is my Lord, and I will exalt Him (Shemos 15:2)."

Chapter Three

The Ten Plagues

&&It must be understood that the Jewish people had no guarantee that they would be redeemed from their Egyptian bondage two hundred and ten years after Yaakov descended to Egypt. The heavenly decree was only that they would definitely be enslaved until that time; afterwards they would be eligible for redemption, but only if they were deemed worthy.

When the term specified in the heavenly decree elapsed the Jewish people were indeed redeemed, but it was not through the merit of the deeds. Rather, it was because of their anguished cries of suffering that went up to Heaven. When Hashem heard their groans and recalled the covenant He had made with their forefathers he took pity on the Jewish people. He dispatched His prophet Moshe to lead them out of their terrible exile.

Hashem then revealed the secrets of one of His great Names to Moshe, the Name that translates to "I Will Be". With the secret power released from this Name, Moshe was able to exert tremendous control over nature. Thus, Moshe was able to stand up against the collective might of Egypt, even though he was alone and unarmed. There was also another reason for the use of this Name in connection with Moshe's mission. It also served as a reminder that Hashem would accompany the Jewish people even in their exile, that He would protect them from their enemies and liberate them. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 9b):

%%It is written, And the Lord said to Moshe, I Will Be that I Will Be (Shemos 3:14).

The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: "Go tell the people of Yisrael that I will be with them in this bondage, and I will also be with them during their bondage under the imperial exiles."

Moshe said before Him: "Master of the Universe, is it not sufficient for them to learn of this future affliction at the time when it comes?"

The Holy Blessed One agreed that the people should not yet be told of their future exiles, as it is written, And He said, So shall you say to the people of Yisrael, I Will Be has sent me to you (Ibid.), the duality of the Name being omitted.

&Hashem sent Moshe to command Pharaoh to set the Jewish people free, but Pharaoh refused to heed the Word of Hashem. Moreover, he was insulting in his hardhearted resistance, as it is written, And Pharaoh said, Who is God that I should listen to His Voice? (Shemos 5:2). The Talmud tells us that in retribution the Holy Blessed One administered Pharaoh's punishment by His own Hand (Sanhedrin 94a).⁶

Hashem then afflicted the land of Egypt with plague after plague. It was only after the tenth plague that Pharaoh relented and released the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that Hashem "hardened" Pharaoh's heart to refuse to liberate the Jewish people in spite of the plagues.⁷ In this way He was able to punish Pharaoh severely for the exploitation and injustice to which he had subjected the Jews; the longer Pharaoh refused to release them the more suffering was showered upon him. This "hardening of his heart" was very fitting. Pharaoh had taken away the freedom of the Jews; therefore, Hashem took away Pharaoh's freedom to repent and save himself and his people from the dreadful plagues.

⁶ See *The Light of Contentment*, Section I, Chapter 2.

⁷ [Translator's note: This is not to say that Hashem took away Pharaoh's free will. For if it were not of his own free will that he kept the Jews in bondage, how could he be punished for it? Rather, it means that Hashem did not let Pharaoh's decision be influenced by his affliction. If he was to decide to free the Jews it was to be because he decided that it was the proper thing to do; it was not to be because he was forced into an unwilling decision by his suffering.]

The ten plagues to which Hashem subjected the Egyptians were precisely calculated to demonstrate Hashem's domination of all aspects of the world. The first eight were manifested in the four elements of the earth—water, earth, air, and fire.⁸ The ninth plague was manifested in the fifth element that affects the world—the influence exerted by the heavenly bodies in the skies. The tenth and final plague was manifested in the people themselves.

In the first plague the waters of the great Nile River, the crown jewel of Egypt, turned to blood. Pharaoh had taken the credit for this majestic and bountiful river and its continued existence; he declared himself a god. Therefore, it was this river that was struck first to show that it is Hashem who reigns over the element of water, as it is written, Through this shall you know that I am God (Shemos 7:17).

The second plague again struck at the Nile River. Countless frogs swarmed out of the river and overran the land. They found their way into every corner, into the very beds of the Egyptians and their household utensils. And they demonstrated the power of Hashem. The bountiful Nile, from which they had pulled fish for their tables, was suddenly spewing forth harmful creatures. Clearly, Hashem controlled nature, making it beneficial or harmful according to the merit of the people affected by it.

Having shown his domination of the element of water, Hashem turned to the element of earth. In the third plague, the dust that covered the earth turned into lice, as the water had turned to blood. In the fourth plague, swarms of wild, ferocious beasts sprang forth from the earth, just as the frogs had sprung forth from the water. And indeed, after the fourth plague it is written, So that you will know that I am God in the midst of the land (Shemos 8:18).

The next four plagues affected the elements of air and fire. The fifth plague, the plague of epidemic pestilence, was caused by contamination of the air. The sixth plague, the inflammation of boils, was a form of the element of fire, as was the seventh plague,

⁸ [Translator's note: These four elements correspond to the four forms of matter—solid, liquid, gas, and energy.]

the fiery hailstorm. The eighth plague, the locusts that filled the air, was again meant to manifest Hashem's domination of the element of air, just as the frogs had come from the water and the wild beasts from the earth.

These eight plagues were clear proof that Hashem had not abandoned the earth after creating it as the heretics had claimed. On the contrary, the workings of nature are at His command. Every element is dependent on His Will.

Next, Hashem turned His attention to the hosts of the skies. The ninth plague blotted out the sun's rays and plunged Egypt into a deep darkness for three days. The heretics, who had claimed that Hashem had no sovereignty over the hosts of the skies that were gods in themselves, were again refuted as Hashem manifested His Power over the heavens. At the same time, it is written, And for all the people of Yisrael there was light in their dwellings (Shemos 10:23). Again it was made perfectly clear that the entire world is under His complete control. He can do with it as He sees fit.

These nine plagues manifested themselves in the physical elements of the world, causing suffering to the affected people. The tenth plague, however, the death of the firstborn, manifested itself directly in the people.

The hardhearted Pharaoh ignored all of the manifestations of Hashem's power over the universe and his own resulting affliction; he still refused to release the people of Yisrael from bondage. But when the Blessed Lord Himself visited His vengeance upon the firstborn of the Egyptians Pharaoh was overcome with mortal terror. He rose in the middle of the night and went looking for Moshe and Aharon. All of a sudden he was no longer arrogant but conciliatory. He encouraged them to leave Egypt and go forth to serve Hashem.

Thus, as a culmination of the plagues, Hashem had shown His Power over the creatures of the world, as well as the physical elements of the world. He had shown how the fear of Hashem could make an earthly lord seek out his slaves and beg them to accept their emancipation and go free in peace.

And so the people of Yisrael left Egypt with their heads held high.

The Midrash tells us (Tanchuma Bo 4):

%%Our rabbis say: The Holy Blessed One brought the plagues upon the Egyptians in the manner of a royal military siege. If a province of a mortal king of flesh and blood rebels he sends his legions to lay siege to it. The first step in the siege is to cut off that province's water supply. If they surrender, the siege is over. If they continue to resist, more and more pressure is brought to bear until they finally capitulate.

Similarly, the Egyptians were first stricken by plagues that affected their water supply. Then, more and more plagues were brought upon them until they finally capitulated.

Chapter Four

Mitzvos and Redemption

&&The Holy Blessed One decided to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt, not because they were deserving of it, but because he took pity on them, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Still, it was necessary for them to have some merit for the actual redemption to take place. Therefore, Hashem began to initiate the Jewish people into the performance of mitzvos while they were still in bondage. These mitzvos would provide them with the merit that would be the passport to take them out of Egypt. These mitzvos would shield them in the perilous days that lay ahead.

It is for this reason that there is a difference between the Pesach sacrifice (Paschal lamb) that was brought in Egypt and all future Pesach sacrifices. According to the law, the Pesach sacrifice is brought on the fourteenth day of Nissan, one day before the festival of Pesach begins. In Egypt, however, the Jewish people were commanded to bring the Pesach sacrifice on the tenth day of Nissan, a full four days before the festival of Pesach. This was in order to give them the opportunity to perform two mitzvos—the bringing of the Pesach sacrifice and the mitzvah of circumcision, which is a precondition to it—before the tenth plague was unleashed over Egypt. Only thus could they be completely invulnerable to the destructive forces that were let loose over Egypt.

The Mechilta tells us (Mechilta Bo 5):

%%Rabbi Masia the son of Cheresh used to say: "It is written, And I passed you by, and I saw you, and behold, your time was a time of beloved ones (Yechezkel 16:8).

"This means that the time had come to fulfill the oath that Hashem had sworn to Avraham, namely that He would redeem his descendants. But they did not have any mitzvos

to perform through which they would merit their redemption, as it is written, And you were naked and bare (Yechezkel 16:7).

"Therefore, Hashem gave them two mitzvos, the Pesach sacrifice and circumcision. The blood of the Pesach sacrifice and the blood of circumcision would afford them protection from the plague of firstborn death. They would be 'passed by'.

"For it is written, And I passed you by, and I saw you stained by your bloods (Yechezkel 16:6)—two bloods, of the Pesach sacrifice and of circumcision.

"And it is also written, And you also, because of the blood of your covenant have I released your captives (Zechariah 9:11), a reference to the role of the blood of circumcision in the exodus from Egypt.

"The Pesach sacrifice, at this time, was particularly designed to counteract the widespread practice of idolatry among the Jewish people, as it is written, And Moshe called all the elders of Yisrael, and he said to them, Draw back and take for yourselves sheep for your families and slaughter the Pesach sacrifice (Shemos 12:21). 'Draw back' from idolatry, and take instead the lambs of the Pesach sacrifice."

&&Indeed, we find that whenever the Jewish people sinned they made amends by performing mitzvos. The Midrash traces this down through history (Shir Hashirim Rabah 1:35):

%%It is written, Black am I, yet beautiful (Shir Hashirim 1:5). The nation of Yisrael is speaking about itself:

Black was I in Mitzraim, as it is written, And they rebelled against Me, and they did not want to listen to Me, they did not discard the abominations of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Mitzraim (Yechezkel 20:8). Yet was I made beautiful in Mitzraim through the mitzvos of the

Pesach sacrifice and circumcision, as it is written, And I passed you by, and I saw you stained by your bloods, and I said to you, Through your bloods you shall stay alive, and I said to you, Through your blood you shall stay alive (Yechezkel 16:6). One blood refers to the blood of the Pesach sacrifice, the other to the blood of circumcision.

Black was I at the shores of the Red Sea pursued by the armies of Mizraim, as it is written, And they rebelled against Me by the sea, at the Red Sea (Tehillim 106:7). Yet was I made beautiful singing the praises of Hashem at the splitting of the sea, as it is written, This is my Lord, and I will exalt Him (Shemos 15:25).

Black was I at Marah, as it is written, And the people grumbled to Moshe, saying, What shall we drink? (Shemos 15:24). Yet was I made beautiful at Marah, as it is written, There He set down for them a decree and a law, and there He tested them (Shemos 15:25).

Black was I at Refidim, as it is written, And he called the name of the place Massah and Merivah, because of the quarrel of the people of Yisrael, and because they vexed God, saying, Is God among us or not? (Shemos 17:7). Yet was I made beautiful at Refidim, as it is written, And Moshe built an altar (Shemos 17:15).

Black was I in the Desert, as it is written, How much did they rebel against Him in the Desert! (Tehillim 78:40). Yet was I made beautiful in the Desert, as it is written, And on the day that the tabernacle was erected (Bamidbar 9:15).

Black was I at Chorev, as it is written, They made a calf-idol in Chorev (Tehillim 106:19). Yet was I made beautiful at Chorev, as it is written, All that God speaks we shall do (Shemos 24:7).

Black was I in the incident of the twelve spies who were sent to scout the land, as it is written, And they gave out a slanderous report of the land that they had scouted to the people of Yisrael, saying, The land through which we

passed to scout it out is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are huge people (Bamidbar 13:32). Yet was I made beautiful by the two great men among that group, Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh.

Black was I at Shittim, as it is written, And Yisrael encamped at Shittim, and the people began to be promiscuous with the women of Moav (Bamidbar 25:1). Yet was I made beautiful at Shittim, as it is written, And Pinchas stood up and prayed, and the plague subsided (Tehillim 106:30).

Blackened was I, after the partition of the kingdom after the death of Shlomo Hamelech, by the evil kings of the Kingdom of Yisrael. Yet was I made beautiful by the righteous kings of the Kingdom of Yehudah.

Furthermore, if even my "black" kings showed flashes of virtue, how much greater then were my "beautiful" kings!

What is it written of Achav, the evil king of Yisrael, when he learned of the heavenly decree against him?

It is written, And it was when Achav heard of these things, and he tore his clothes, and he put sackcloth on his flesh, and he fasted, and he slept in the sackcloth, and he walked slowly (Melachim I 21:27).

What is the meaning of "slowly"?

Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said: "Barefoot."

What is it written of Yoram, the evil king of Yisrael, when the tragic famine struck the capital, Shomron?

It is written, And the king said to her, What is with you? and she said, This woman said to me, Give your son that we should eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow, and we cooked my son and ate him, and I said to her on the following day, Give your son that we should eat him, but she had hidden away her son, and it was when the king heard the words of the woman, and he tore his clothes as he was passing along the wall, and the people saw that, behold, he

was already wearing sackcloth underneath (Melachim II 6:28-30).

Otherwise: It is written, Black am I, yet beautiful (Shir Hashirim 1:5).

Rabbi Levi said: "Black am I during the weekdays, yet am I made beautiful on Shabbos. Black am I throughout the year, yet am I made beautiful on Yom Kippur. Black am I in this world, yet am I made beautiful in the world to come."

&&These two mitzvos that were instrumental in the redemption of the Jewish people—the Pesach sacrifice and circumcision—are unique among all of the mitzvos. Mitzvos fall into two categories, prohibitions and positive commandments. Many of the prohibitions are punishable by premature death. Neglecting to fulfill a positive commandment carries no such penalty—except for neglecting to bring the Pesach sacrifice and to perform circumcision (Kerisos 2a).

One of the rules of the Pesach sacrifice is that it must be of a young sheep. Some people suggest a reason for this. When the Jewish people left Egypt the astrological sign of the ram was in its ascendancy. The Egyptians may have thought that it was the power of the astrological sign that effected the exodus. Therefore, Hashem commanded that a lamb be sacrificed and eaten to signify the impotence of the signs of the Zodiac and thus to underscore the Divine Providence behind the exodus.

This explanation might also shed some light on the Talmudic statement that a leap year may be declared to ensure that the festival of Pesach comes after the vernal (spring) equinox (Rosh Hashana 21a). The reason would then be to ensure that the slaughter of the lamb would be under its own astrological sign.

Another explanation for the use of a lamb for the Pesach sacrifice can be found in the attitude of the Egyptians towards sheep. It was the Egyptian custom not to eat sheep, as it is written, For every shepherd is an abomination in Mitzraim (Beraishis 46:34). They would let them run wild and revere them as gods.

Therefore, the Torah directed that sheep be slaughtered, roasted whole, and eaten as a symbol for the Egyptians of the vulnerability of their gods. This was the fulfillment of that which is written, And against all the deities of Mitzraim I will execute judgments, I am God (Shemos 12:2). Although the Mechilta tells us that all their wooden idols rotted and all their metal idols melted, there is no explicit mention, however, of judgment being executed against the idols of Egypt, besides the slaughter of sheep for the Pesach sacrifice.

Following this line of reasoning we can gain new insight into some of the other rules of the Pesach sacrifice. The Torah directs that none of the bones of the sacrifice be broken. This was to keep the form of the lamb intact so that it could be readily identified by the Egyptians. The Torah also directs, And they shall take of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the crossbeam (Shemos 12:7). This was a sign of public defiance by the Jews that they did not revere the sheep and were not afraid to slaughter them.

As a culmination of these events, the Jewish people were able to leave Egypt proudly with heads held high. There is an important lesson to be learned here: When Yisrael heeds the commands of their Creator and performs His mitzvos they need fear no one.

During the revelation of the impending Egyptian bondage, Hashem had told Avraham, And afterwards they will go forth with great wealth (Beraishis 15:14). Therefore, at the time of the exodus, Hashem directed that the Jews borrow gold and silver vessels and luxurious garments from their Egyptian neighbors. The Jews had learned of the existence of these riches during the three-day plague of darkness which affected only the Egyptians, not the Jews. Hashem also made the Egyptians look favorably on the requests of their Jewish neighbors. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 9a):

%%It is written, Please speak in the ears of the people and let each man borrow from his neighbor, and each

woman from her neighbor, vessels of silver and vessels of gold (Shemos 11:2).

Rabbi Yanai said: "This directive was made in the form of a request.

"The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: 'Tell the people of Yisrael that I want them to borrow gold and silver vessels. Let not that righteous man, Avraham, claim that I have fulfilled that which is written, And they will enslave them and torment them (Beraishis 15:13), but I have not fulfilled that which is written, And afterwards they will go forth with great wealth (Beraishis 15:14)9.'"

Moshe relayed this message to the Jewish people, and they replied: "If only we ourselves could go free! It is as a slave locked in the dungeon whose jailers inform him that tomorrow they will release him and give him much money. The slave tells them: 'Release me now, and I don't need any money from you.'"

It is written, And God made the people find favor in the eyes of Mitzraim, and they lent them (Shemos 12:36).

Rabbi Ami said: "The Hebrew syntax implies that this lending was forced. Some say that it was against the will of the Jews; others say that it was against the will of the Egyptians."

It is written, And they emptied Mitzraim (Ibid.).

Rabbi Ami said: "This comes to teach that they made Egypt as empty as a trap without bait."

Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish: "They made it as empty as the deepest ocean waters are empty of fish."

&&Years later, when Yisrael again lost its independence, the Egyptians came to claim the return of the borrowed property. The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 91a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: On the twenty-eighth day of Nissan the larcenous claimants were turned away from Yehudah and Yerushalayim.

. . . One time, the people of Mitzraim brought suit against Yisrael before Alexander of Macedonia.

They said to him: "Behold, it is written, And God made the people find favor in the eyes of Mitzraim, and they lent them (Shemos 12:36). Let them give us back the gold and silver that they borrowed from us."

Geviha the son of Pesisa said to the Sages: "Permit me to go before Alexander's court to argue our case. If they best me, you can claim that they have only bested a layman among us. But If I best them, you can claim that the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu has bested them."

The Sages gave him their permission, and he went off to argue the case.

The Egyptians arrogantly said to him: "We have shown you from your own Torah that you owe us the return of our gold and silver. All we ask of you is that you show us where your own Torah frees you from this obligation."

Geviha the son of Pesisa replied: "Indeed, I will show it to you in the Torah itself.

"Behold, it is written, And the settlement of the people of Yisrael, that they inhabited in Mitzraim, lasted four hundred and thirty years (Shemos 12:40). We demand that you pay us the wages of the six hundred thousand people that you enslaved during that time."

Alexander turned to the Egyptians and said: "Reply to this claim."

The Egyptians withdrew to study this claim, but they could not think of an adequate reply. Terrified, they fled.

&&In the future, the land of Egypt will send gifts in tribute to Mashiach, the anointed King of Yisrael. In spite of their enslavement of Jews, Mashiach will accept the tribute of the

Egyptians in memory of their hosting Yaakov and his family during the famine years. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 118b):

%%Rav Kehana said: "When Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi fell ill Rabi sent him a message: 'Tell us two or three things that you say over in the name of your father.'

"Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi sent back a message: 'This is what my father said: 'It is written, Praise God all nations, exalt him all peoples, for His kindness prevailed for us (Tehillim 117:1-2).

"Why are the peoples of the world mentioned here? Should they sing His praises because His kindness prevailed for us?

"Only this is the meaning of the verse: All nations and peoples give praise to God. And certainly we, for whom His kindness has prevailed, should do so as well.

"This too did my father say: 'In the future the land of Mitzraim will send gifts in tribute to Mashiach, the anointed King of Yisrael. Mashiach will be inclined not to accept their tribute.

"The Holy Blessed One will say to him: 'Accept it from them. My children enjoyed their hospitality in Mitzraim.'

"There will then be a fulfillment of that which is written, Nobles will come out of Mitzraim (Tehillim 68:32).

"The people of Kush will then relate this to themselves. If Mashiach accepts tribute even from the Egyptians who had held the Jews in bondage, certainly he would accept tribute from them. There will then be a fulfillment of that which is written, Kush will rush to reach out its hands to the Lord (Ibid.).' "

Chapter Five

The Splitting of the Red Sea

&&It was on the seventh day of Pesach, the twenty-second day of Nissan, that the wonderful miracles took place on the Red Sea. On this date the pursuing Egyptian armies finally caught up to the fleeing Jewish people on the shores of the Red Sea. There the Jewish people stood with the sea before them and the Egyptian armies closing quickly behind them. The Holy Blessed One directed Moshe to tell the Jewish people to continue to travel, even into the sea itself. The Talmud tells us (Sotah 36b):

It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say: "At the time when Yisrael stood on the shores of the sea the tribes were all vying with each other, each claiming that it wanted to be the first to travel into the sea. While this was going on, the tribe of Binyamin broke camp and was the first to travel into the sea, as it is written, There Binyamin, the youngest, leads them (Tehillim 68:28). In a variant reading of the Hebrew words, 'lead them' can be read as 'goes down to the sea'. Seeing the tribe of Binyamin running ahead, the princes of Yehudah pelted them with stones, as it is written, The princes of Yehudah stone them (Ibid.).

"Binyamin's diligence earned it the privilege of being host to the Divine Presence, as it is written, And He dwells between his shoulders (Devarim 33:12).⁹"

Rabbi Yehudah said to him: "That is not what actually happened. In fact, the tribes were all vying with each other, each refusing to be the first to travel into the sea. Then Nachshon the son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah, went ahead and was the first to enter the sea, as it is

⁹ [Translator's note: This is a reference to the Bais Hamikdash which was built in the land of Binyamin.]

written, Ephraim has surrounded Me with lies, and the house of Yisrael with deceit, but Yehudah still goes down with the Lord (Hoshaya 12:1).

"Of Nachshon the son of Aminadav it is written, Save me, O Lord, for the waters are threatening my life, I have sunk in the mire of the deep, and there is no standing, I have come into the deep waters, and the current overwhelms me, I am wearied by calling out, my throat is parched, my eyes fail from looking hopefully to my Lord, my undeserved enemies number more than the hairs of my head, those that seek my destruction are strong, my false foes, that I return to them what I have not stolen, O Lord, You know of my folly, and my guilts are not hidden from You, let not those that wait for You be shamed through me, My Lord God of Hosts, and let not those that seek You be disgraced through me, O Lord of Yisrael, I was a stranger to my brothers, and a foreigner to my mother's children, for the jealousy caused by Your House devours me, and the reproaches of those that reproach You have fallen on me, and I wept at the fasting of my soul, and it became a reproach to me, and I made my clothing of sackcloth, and I became an example for them, those that sit at the gate speak about me, and those that drink ale sing about me, but I, my prayer is to You, O God, for a time of favor, O Lord, in Your great kindness, answer me in the truth of Your deliverance, save me from the mud and I will not drown, let me be rescued from my enemies and from the deep waters, let not the water current overwhelm me, and let not the deep swallow me down, and let not the pit close its mouth over me (Tehillim 69:2-16). "

While this was going on, Moshe Rabbeinu was praying and praying.

The Holy Blessed One said to him: "Moshe! My creatures are drowning in the sea and you pray lengthily to Me!"

Moshe said before Him: "Master of the Universe, what can I possibly do?"

He answered: "Speak to the people of Yisrael and let them move forward, and you raise up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and split it open and the people of Yisrael will come into the midst of the sea on dry ground (Shemos 14:15-16). "

And because the tribe of Yehudah was the first to go forward into the sea they were chosen to reign over Yisrael, as it is written, Yehudah became His sanctifier, Yisrael was his dominion, the sea saw and it fled, the Yarden retreated backward (Tehillim 114:2-3).

*Why did Yisrael become the dominion of Yehudah?
Because the sea saw and it fled.*

&&Certainly, the mere splitting of the sea is a wondrous miracle in itself. But, in fact, the Holy Blessed One heaped miracle upon miracle, splitting the sea with twelve cleavages to provide a separate corridor for the passage of each tribe. The Midrash further tells us that the actual splitting of the sea was but one of a series of ten miracles (Tanchuma, Beshalach 7-8):

%%Ten miracles were performed for the people of Yisrael at the sea:

When Moshe Rabbeinu raised his staff and stretched it out over the sea a cavelike opening at first appeared, as it is written, You punctured with his staff the head of the open places (Chavakuk 3:14).

Then the sea was split asunder, as it is written, And stretch out your hand over the sea and split it open (Shemos 14:16).

The seabed became dry ground, as it is written, And the people of Yisrael walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea (Shemos 14:29).

The seawater turned to mud, as it is written, You passed over the sea with Your Steeds, the clay of much water (Chavakuk 3:15).

Then the seawater turned into crumbs, as it is written, With Your strength You crumbled the sea (Tehillim 74:13).

Then these crumbs hardened into stones, as it is written, You smashed the dragon heads against the water (Ibid.).

These rocks then combined into huge boulders, as it is written, To the One who cuts the Red Sea into pieces (Tehillim 136:13).

These boulders collected in piles, as it is written, And with the breath of Your Nostrils the waters were piled up (Shemos 15:8).

They were able to draw jugfuls of sweet water from the salty seawater. Finally, the water of the sea congealed and became transparent as glass.

It is written, And the angel of the Lord that traveled before the camp of Yisrael went forth and traveled behind them, and the pillar of cloud went forth from before them and stood behind them (Shemos 15:19).

Rabbi Yehudah says: "This verse is fully explained by verses from many sources.

"There is an analogy to this situation. A man was traveling on the road leading his son in front of him. Suddenly, highwaymen appeared before him and tried to kidnap the child. He moved the child from in front of him and interposed his own body between the child and the highwaymen. Wolves then appeared behind him, trying to snatch the child. The man lifted the child up and held him in the safety of his own arms.

"Here too, the Holy Blessed One saw that Yisrael was trapped, the sea before them and the Egyptians behind them, and it is written, He took them into his arms (Hoshaya 11:3).

"When the exposure to the elements made them uncomfortable He covered them, as it is written, He spread out a cloud as a canopy (Tehillim 105:39).

"When they became hungry He fed them, as it is written, Behold, I shall rain down bread for you from the skies (Shemos 16:4).

"When they became thirsty He gave them water, as it is written, And He brought forth running water from a rock, and He made the water run down like rivers (Tehillim 78:16).

&&The people of Yisrael responded to the ten miracles that Hashem performed for them by singing his praises. The Midrash tells us that they sang Shirah to Him ten times (Tanchuma, Beshalach 12):

%%The first time was in Egypt. Speaking of the fall of the oppressor Sancheriv, the prophet says, You shall then have song as on the night of the festival inauguration (Yeshayahu 30:29), a reference to the first night of the first Pesach in Egypt.

The second time was at the Red Sea, as it is written, Then did Moshe and the people of Yisrael ... (Shemos 15:1).

The third time was when they were provided with a well in the Desert, as it is written, Then did Yisrael sing (Bamidbar 21:17).

The fourth time was by Moshe, as it is written, Pay heed O heavens, and I will speak (Devarim 32:1)

The fifth time was by Yehoshua, as it is written, Then did Yehoshua speak to God (Yehoshua 10:12).

The sixth time was by the prophetess Devorah, as it is written, And Devorah sang (Shoftim 5:1).

The seventh time was by David Hamelech, as it is written, And David spoke the words of this song to God (Shmuel II 22:1).

The eighth time was in that which is written, A psalm, a song for the dedication of the House by David (Tehillim 30:1). Since Shlomo Hamelech was the one who actually

dedicated the Bais Hamikdash, why does the verse tell of its dedication by David? Since David had devoted his life to bring about the building of the Bais Hamikdash its dedication was attributed to him.

The ninth time was by Shlomo Hamelech, as it is written, Song of songs, which is by Shlomo (Shir Hashirim 1:1).

The tenth time will be in the future time, as it is written, A psalm, sing to God a new song, for he has done wonders (Tehillim 98:1). This song will be about the emerging glory of Hashem, not about mortals of flesh and blood.

To what does the verse refer in its continuation, His right Hand and His holy Arm have prevailed for Him (Ibid.)?

It refers to the great right Hand of which it is written, He has drawn back His right Hand before the enemy (Eichah 2:3). This Hand will then be returned to strike them down.

&&When the people of Yisrael passed safely through the split sea the pursuing armies of the Egyptians stormed after them into the sea. But when all of the people of Yisrael had come out of the sea it returned to its former state and the Egyptian legions were drowned. The Talmud tells us that the Holy Blessed One made the dead bodies of the Egyptians wash up on the shore in full view of the Jewish people (Pesachim 118b):

%%Rabah the son of Meraimar expounded: "What is the meaning of that which is written, And they rebelled against Me by the sea, at the Red Sea (Tehillim 106:7)?

"This teaches us that Yisrael rebelled at the Red Sea, saying: 'We are still not secure, for just as we have emerged safely on this side of the sea, they will emerge safely on the other side. '

"The Holy Blessed One said to the angel assigned to the sea: 'Spew out the dead bodies of the Egyptians onto the shore. '

"The angel said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, is there such a thing as a master giving a gift to his servant then taking it back from him?'"

"The Holy Blessed One replied: 'I will later return to you half again what I am taking from you now. '

"The angel said before Him: 'Master of the Universe is there such a thing as a servant demanding that his master repay a debt?'"

"The Holy Blessed One said to him: 'The river Kishon shall be a guarantor on this thing.'

"Thereupon, the sea immediately spewed out the dead bodies of the Egyptians onto the shore, and the people of Yisrael came and looked at them, as it is written, And Yisrael saw Mitzraim dead on the seashore (Shemos 14:30).

"And how was the sea repaid half again?"

"Of Pharaoh it is written, And he took six hundred chosen chariots (Shemos 14:7), while of Sisera it is written, Nine hundred iron chariots (Shoftim 4:3)."

&&The Mechilta tells us that by faithfully accepting the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu the people of Yisrael were deemed worthy of singing His praises through Divine Inspiration (Mechilta, Beshalach 2:6):

%%It is written, And they believed in God (Shemos 14:31),and it is also written, Then did Moshe and the people of Yisrael sing (Shemos 15:1).

Rabbi Nechemiah says: "How do we know that whoever performs even one mitzvah faithfully before the One who commanded the creation of the world is considered worthy of Divine Inspiration and singing His praises?"

"For so have we found that as reward for their faith our ancestors earned the privilege of Divine Inspiration and singing His praises, as it is written, And they believed in

God (Shemos 14:31), after which it is written, Then did Moshe and the people of Yisrael sing (Shemos 15:1).

"So too will you find that our forefather Avraham gained this world and the next only because of his faith, as it is written, And he believed in God (Beraishis 15:16).

"So too will you find that the people of Yisrael were redeemed only because of their faith, as it is written, And the people believed (Shemos 4:31) . . .

"And so too is it written, And your faithfulness in the night (Tehillim 92:3), after which it is written, For you have gladdened me, O God, with Your deeds (Tehillim 92:5). How did they earn this future rejoicing? By their faith when the world was as one long night.

"And so too did Yehoshafat say, Listen to me, Yehudah and the inhabitants of Yerushalayim, believe in God your Lord and you will endure (Divrei Hayamim L 20:20).

"And so too will you find that the exiles will be gathered in only because of the faith, as it is written, Come with me from Levanon, O bride, with me from Levanon, look about from the peak of Amanah (Shir Hashirim 4:8), the name Amanah, in a variant reading, meaning faith. And it is also written, And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness (Hoshaya 2:22).

&&From all of these sources, the great power of faith in the Creator becomes abundantly clear, even to the point of achieving Divine Inspiration and earning the right to say Shirah, singing His praises.

The manifestations of power and the performance of wondrous miracles by the Creator of the World during the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt was unbelievably awesome, far greater than was necessary to extricate the Jewish people from bondage. This was the greatest show of Divine Power in the history of the world, before and since. And it was revealed to all, not only to a few select individuals. Hashem

chose this setting to demonstrate to the entire world, for all time, that He is master of everything. And He gave the people of the world a glimpse of the awesome Divine Power that would be revealed to the survivors of the world at the end of time. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 58a):

%%Rav Shaila went to the house of study and expounded: "It is written, To You, O God, belong all greatness, and power, and glory, and success, and splendor, indeed, all that is in the skies and on the earth, O God, the kingdom is yours, and the sovereignty over all rulers (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This greatness refers to the exodus from Egypt, as it is written, And Yisrael saw the great Hand (Shemos 14:31).

"The verse goes on, And power (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11) This refers to the splitting of the Red Sea.

"The verse goes on, And glory (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This refers to the sun and the moon stopping for Yehoshua, as it is written, And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped (Yehoshua 10:13).

"The verse goes on, And success (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This refers to the downfall of Rome, as it is written, And the spray of their lifeblood on My Clothes (Yeshayahu 63:3), the Hebrew word for success also being the word used to express lifeblood.

"The verse goes on, And splendor, indeed all that is in the skies and on the earth (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This refers to the wars against Sisera, as it is written, From the skies they fought, the stars from their paths fought against Sisera (Shoftim 5:20).

"The verse continues, O God, the kingdom is Yours (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This refers to the war against Amalek, as it is written, And he said, Because by placing His Hand on the chair of the Lord, God has sworn war

against Amalek for generation after generation (Shemos 17:16).

"The verse continues, And the sovereignty (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11). This refers to the War of Gog and Magog, as it is written, And you shall say, So said the Lord God, Behold, I will be against you, Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tuval (Yechezkel 38:3).

The verse concludes, Over all rulers (Divrei Hayamim I 29:11).

Rav Chanan the son of Rav said: "Even the foreman who supervises the digging of irrigation ditches is appointed by decree of Heaven."

Part II:
SHAVUOS

(Chap. 6-8)

Chapter Six

The Giving of the Torah

&&The second of the three festivals is referred to in the Torah as Chag Shavuos, the Festival of Weeks. This is because it is celebrated at the end of the seven-week Sefirah period that follows the festival of Pesach. Our Sages, however, generally refer to this festival either as Atzeres or as the Day of the Giving of the Torah. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 68b):

%%Rabbi Elazar said: "All are agreed that the celebration of Atzeres requires physical enjoyment. Why? Because this day commemorates the giving of the Torah. Therefore, we are required to eat and drink to show our satisfaction and delight with this day. "

...Mar the son of Ravina would fast on any day of the year except for Atzeres, Purim, and the day before Yom Kippur. He would not fast of Atzeres because the day on which the Torah was given to Yisrael is a day of pure rejoicing.

...On the day of Atzeres Rav Yosef used to feast on a fatted calf, saying: "Were it not for this day that enabled me to study the Torah I would be just another of the many Yosefs in the marketplace."

&&The name Atzeres means the Festival of Restraint. This is meant to signify that this day is set aside for the Holy Blessed One and His people Yisrael to enjoy each other's company.¹⁰

The commemorative purposes of the other festivals are specifically stated in the Scriptures. Of Pesach it is written, For on this very day did I bring forth your hosts from the land of Mitzraim (Shemos 12:17). Of Sukkos it is written, That your future generations may know that I lodged the people of Yisrael in sukkos when I brought them forth from the land of Mitzraim

¹⁰ We find a similar use of the word "atzeres" on the eighth day of Sukkos, which is called Shemini Atzeres. See Chapter Sixteen.

(Vayikra 23:43). However, although the Talmud repeatedly points out that the festival of Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, this point is not explicit in the Scriptures themselves. Why was it necessary to spell out the purpose of Pesach and Sukkot, while it was not necessary to spell out the purpose of Shavuot?

In order to answer this question we must first take a closer look at the religious beliefs of the ancient cultures.

When the ancients first began to observe the skies they noticed that there were seven heavenly bodies that moved perceptibly in relation to the other "stationary stars". These were the sun, the moon, and the five planets of the solar system closest to the earth. They assumed that these seven "moving stars" were deities that controlled all the forces of nature. Furthermore, because of the seven "moving stars" they placed special significance on the numeral seven. They would take all groupings of seven that appeared in nature or in their cultures and relate them to these seven "moving stars". Thus, the seven continents of the world were considered reflections of the seven "moving stars". Some cultures even related the seven days of the week to the "moving stars".

The leading thinkers of these primitive societies closely studied these seven "moving stars" and found that their orbits corresponded to many of the seasonal changes and occurrences on earth. Since people were profoundly affected by these events it seemed only logical to view these "moving stars" as gods, pray to them, and worship them.

This was why Bilam built seven altars, and sacrificed seven oxen and seven rams upon them, when he wanted to curse the Jewish people coming out of Egypt (Bamidbar 23:1).

His seeming preoccupation with the numeral seven was, in fact, an attempt to kindle the wrath of his seven gods and direct it at the Jewish people.

Many of the ancient cultures believed the sun to be dominant among these seven gods. The sun was more brilliant than the

others; its effect on the earth was pervasive. Clearly, they believed, sun-worship would be most effective as a religious cult. Still, they did not deny the divinity of the other seven "moving stars"; they merely singled out the sun as the god most worthy of worship. Other cultures turned to moon-worship, focusing their religious cults on the "moving star" with the second most visible influence. Yet others turned to one or another of the more obscure "moving stars", the planets. They were all in agreement, however, that these seven "moving stars" represented a seven-member pantheon of gods.

Out of ignorance, these ancients drew erroneous conclusions from accurate observations. They mistook the manifestations of divine power for the source of divine power. The orbits of these heavenly spheres are indeed related to many of the phenomena that occur on earth, but only because such are the workings of nature as instituted by the Creator; they possess neither the intelligence nor the power to deviate from the Creator's design. Worship of these spheres is a useless practice. Moreover, it is an affront to the true Creator.

For altogether different reasons, the numeral seven and multiples of seven are prominent in the Torah as well. Shabbos comes every seventh day. The fallow shemitah year is observed every seventh year. The jubilee yovail year is observed after seven of these seven-year shemitah cycles. The Pesach and Sukkos festivals are seven days long. At the siege of Yericho seven kohanim blowing seven shofars walked a complete circle around the city on seven consecutive days, and on the seventh day they walked around it seven times.

Thus, it would have been possible for Jewish people living among the ancient cultures to fall into grave error. They could have thought that the significance of the number seven in the Torah reflects a substantive role for the seven "moving stars" in the control of the world. The Torah addresses itself to this

potential danger; it repeatedly emphasizes the supremacy and unity of the Creator¹¹ and the impotence of idolatry.

Here then we can also find the reason for the Torah's omission of the commemorative purpose of the festival of Shavuot from the Scriptures, while it does specify mention the purposes of the Pesach and Sukkot festivals. Since the festivals of Pesach and Sukkot are both seven days long they might have been erroneously assumed to be tributes to the seven "moving stars". Thus, the Torah found it necessary to be very explicit in relating these festivals to the Creator, and the Creator alone. The Shavuot festival, however, is only one day long, and consequently, it was sufficient for the Torah to direct the celebration of this festival without going into the details of its commemorative purpose; this information could just as well be included in the vast body of oral Rabbinic tradition.

Indeed, the Holy Blessed One has created certain cosmic forces in the world and has made these forces coincide with the revolutions of the heavenly spheres and constellations. Susceptibility to these forces constitutes *mazel*, luck. These forces can be recognized by their accompanying signs, although they are, of course, not caused by these signs.

The Torah, however reassures the Jewish people on this matter. It tells us that although people are susceptible to these forces the Jewish people need not be. If they fulfill the Will of the Omnipresent they rise to a higher level of existence; they become immune to the haphazard vagaries of natural forces; they cannot be persecuted by any other nation or nationality.

This then is the meaning of that which is written, And lest you lift up your eyes heavenward, and you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of the skies, and you are led astray, and you bow down to them, and you worship them, that God your Lord has appointed them to all the peoples under all the

¹¹ As it is written, You alone are God, You created the skies and the upper reaches of the universe and all of their hosts, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that they contain, and You sustain them all (Nehemiah 9:6).

heavens (Devarim 4:19). Do not mistakenly worship the host of the skies. Intermittent forces coinciding with the movements of these spheres have been appointed by the Creator to affect the peoples of the world, but you need not be affected.¹²

The prophet continues this theme, as it is written, So said God, Do not accustom yourselves to the way of the nations, and do not tremble before the signs of the skies, because the nations tremble before them (Yirmiyahu 10:2). The Talmud interprets this as saying that the nations should properly tremble before them, but Yisrael need not tremble (Shabbos 156a, Sukkah 29a).

Besides the frequent recurrence of the numeral seven in the Torah, the multiple of seven times seven, forty-nine, also appears repeatedly. The prophet Zechariah speaks of the seven-branched golden menorah, each branch containing seven pipes (Zechariah 4:2). When the prophet Yeshayahu speaks of the future time he says, And the light of the sun shall be sevenfold more than the light of the seven days (Yeshayahu 30:26). We also find that the yovail cycle consists of seven seven-year shemitah cycles. The sefirah period of daily counting between Pesach and Shavuos numbers forty nine days. Again there is the danger of erroneously connecting the use of this multiple of seven with the seven "moving stars".

Therefore, every time the Torah formulated a period consisting of forty nine units it commanded that the period conclude with a single sanctified unit. Thus, the seven seven-year shemitah cycles are crowned by the single yovail year during which slaves are emancipated and ancestral properties are restored to their original owners. The forty nine day sefirah period is culminated by the single day of the Shavuos festival.¹³ In a sense, Shavuos is also a

¹² [Translator's note: Rashi offers two different explanations of this verse. One is that these bodies have been appointed to give light to the peoples of the world. Otherwise, they have been conditioned to serve as traps for those who mistake them for gods. This second interpretation is taken from the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 55a).]

¹³ [Translator's note: Shavuos is traditionally celebrated for two days outside of the Holy Land because of calendar difficulties during the Mishnaic period.]

day of emancipation of slaves, because the Torah helps a person free himself from the tyranny of his physical desires. The series of forty-nine units culminating in a single holy unit is meant to symbolize that there is only One who is above everything and who is the immovable moving force of the world.

The Midrash also makes reference to this theme (Devarim Rabah). It tells us that at the time of the giving of the Torah the Holy Blessed One tore apart the seven canopies of heaven and split open the seven lands and said to the people of Yisrael, "Look carefully at the upper and lower worlds, and you will know that there is no deity besides Me." The people of Yisrael immediately responded by saying, "We shall do, and we shall hear." First they agreed to "do", then they would "hear"; their acceptance of the Torah was unquestioning and did not depend on their evaluation of what they would hear. Here again we pick up the thread of the same symbolism. Hashem tears apart the mysterious seven to indicate that sovereignty over the world is His alone; it is not shared by any other being.

And so the people of Yisrael received the Torah on the day commemorated by the festival of Shavuot with a full realization that Hashem alone ruled the world, that the only true and endless good was contained in His Torah. And they voiced their acceptance with the intriguing statement, "We shall do, and we shall hear", which as previously mentioned, the Talmud describes as an unequivocal statement of faith in Hashem. A closer analysis of this statement yields an additional insight.

The mitzvos of the Torah fall into two general categories. One group of mitzvos is concerned with the preservation of civilized society, the improvement of character, the prevention of injustice, and the encouragement of the beneficial. This group is known as mitzvos maasiyos, the practical mitzvos. The other group of mitzvos is concerned with nurturing faith in the Blessed Creator and reinforcing that faith through an intelligent and truthful examination of the world. This group is known as mitzvos shimiyyos, the intellectual mitzvos.

Certainly, the intellectual mitzvos, which deal with the Creator and the true nature of this world, are inherently greater than the practical mitzvos, which are more concerned with the efficient function of society.¹⁴ Still, human nature dictates concern with practical mitzvos before intellectual mitzvos; the individual must perfect his flawed character before going on to develop his intellectual scope. True, the Talmud has told us that study is greater than practice because prior study leads to subsequent practice (Kedushin 40b). This, however, is not a reference to pure intellectual pursuits. Rather, it refers to the study of the laws pertaining to the practical mitzvos.

Thus, the proper sequence for embracing the Torah is to begin with a study of the practical mitzvos and to put that knowledge to practical use. Having achieved a measure of personal refinement, one can then enter the perplexing world of the intellect.

This perspective sheds new light on the statement of the Jewish people at the giving of the Torah. "We shall do" refers to the execution of the practical portion of the Torah. "We shall hear" refers to immersion in the intellectual portion of the Torah. "Do", therefore, necessarily comes before "hear".

This is also the underlying theme of that which the Talmud tells us (Shabbos 88a):

%%Rabbi Simai expounded: "When the people of Yisrael put 'doing' before 'hearing' six hundred thousand angels of service came and attached two halos to the head of every one of them, one corresponding to 'doing', the other corresponding to 'hearing'. But when they sinned one million two hundred thousand avenging angels descended and removed these halos, as it is written, And the people of Yisrael were stripped of their ornaments from Mount Chorev (Shemos 33:6)."

¹⁴ As the prophet has said, But love the truth and the peace (Zechariah 8:19), truth coming before peace.

Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina said: "The Hebrew syntax implies that these ornaments were both donned and removed at Chorev, thus referring to these ornamental halos which were donned at the giving of the Torah and removed after the making of the golden calf idol. "

Rabbi Yochanan said: "And Moshe was deemed worthy of taking all these halos for himself, for after the verse telling of the removal of the ornaments, it is written, And Moshe took (Shemos 33:7). "

Raish Lakish said: "In the future the Holy Blessed One will return the halos to the people of Yisrael, as it is written, And God's redeemed shall return, and they shall come to Zion with joyful song, and eternal happiness on their heads (Yeshayahu 35:10). 'Eternal happiness on their heads' refers to these halos which have existed since ancient times."

&&The explanation of this portion of the Talmud is as follows:

When the people of Yisrael accepted the Torah and wholeheartedly devoted themselves to the service of Hashem they became as angels of service. The only difference at this point was that the angels of service were disembodied intelligent beings dedicated to the service of the Creator, while the Jewish people were embodied intelligent beings dedicated to the service of the Creator. As the Jewish people began to perceive the ultimate truth their intellects reached out to the Primal Intelligence, the Creator. This yearning for pure intelligence and rapport with the Creator became the essence of their being; their bodies became holy vessels designed to heighten their spiritual existence. Thus were the Jewish people sanctified on two levels, both in the "do" function of practical mitzvos and in the "hear" function of intellectual mitzvos.

Now we begin to understand the allegory of the six hundred thousand angels of service attaching two halos to each Jew, one

corresponding to "doing", the other to "hearing". The six hundred thousand angels of service are the six hundred thousand people of Yisrael who were exalted by the acceptance of the Torah.¹⁵ The halos are the reflections of the radiance of the Divine Presence that adhere to those intelligent beings that strive for union with the Primal Intelligence, one representing adherence through the "do" function, the other adherence through the "hear" function. Even the gentile philosophers, Aristotle among them, agree that only through a combination of deed and intellect can the human spirit adhere to the Primal Intelligence.

When the people of Yisrael sinned by making the golden calf-idol, however, they defiled their bodies. And by believing that it had divine powers they contaminated their minds. Their bodies became hungry physical machines bent on gratification, their minds confused and deranged by silly beliefs. No longer were their bodies and minds united in the one common purpose of adherence to Hashem; they had become two separate entities dominated by their respective individual needs. Thus, at this point, the bodies and the minds of the six hundred thousand people of Yisrael could be compared to one million two hundred thousand avenging angels. As such, they no longer deserved to be adorned by a reflection of the radiance of the Divine Presence, and their halos were taken from them, as it is written, And the people of Yisrael were stripped of their ornaments (Shemos 33:6).

¹⁵ We find that any entity that is assigned a particular function is called a mal'ach, an angel. For example, it is written, He makes the winds His messengers (Tehillim 104:4). The word used here for messengers is mal'achim, angels. The Talmud tells us that a person is escorted by two angels, one good, the other evil (Shabbos 119b). Here again the reference is to the two entities in a person's composition, the body whose natural inclination is towards evil and the soul whose natural inclination is toward good.

[Translator's note: A prime example would also be that which is written, And Yaakov sent messengers before him (Beraishis 32:4), the word mal'achim being used to denote messengers. The author probably declines to cite this verse because Rashi mentions the possibility that these were actual angels, not human messengers.]

Rabbi Yochanan then tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu, still being on the level of the angels of service and not having lost his own ornaments, was deemed worthy of collecting all these discarded halos. In other words, because of his merit these halos did not cease to exist altogether, these reflections of the radiance of the Divine Presence disappearing from the physical world. Instead, they were given to Moshe for safekeeping, and anyone who learned from Moshe or immersed himself in Moshe's teachings could become eligible for one of these halos.

Raish Lakish concludes that in the future time everyone will be immersed in the teachings of the Torah, as it is written, For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of God (Yeshayahu 11:9). Therefore, the Holy Blessed One will restore the halos, the reflections of the radiance of the Divine Presence, to all of the Jewish people, as it is written, And God's redeemed shall return, and they shall come to Zion with joyful song, and eternal happiness on their heads (Yeshayahu 35:10).

It can also be said that the Talmud's comparison of the Jewish people to angels of service is a commentary on their diligence. By offering to "do" even before "hearing" what had to be done, not knowing if they would even be capable of doing it, they had shown how strongly they desired to fulfill His Will. Such an attitude is characteristic of angels of service. The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 88a):

%%Rabbi Elazar said: "When the Jewish people offered to 'do' even before 'hearing' a Divine Echo was heard to say: 'Who divulged this secret to you? The angels of service avail themselves of this secret, as it is written, His angels bless God, the mighty in strength that execute His Word to hear the sound of His Word (Tehillim 103:20). "

&&Alternatively, it can be said that the angels of service in the abovementioned Talmudic passage are not an allegory for the Jewish people but for the Commandments that were given to

them. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that an angel is created from every Word spoken by the Holy Blessed One (Chagigah 14a). Since each word spoken by Hashem performs its assigned function in exact accordance with His Will it can properly be called an ange¹⁶. These Commandments are a dual force. They perfect the body, and they perfect the soul. "Do" represents the perfection of the body; "hear" represents the perfection of the soul. Thus, the Word of Hashem that reached out with dual capability to six hundred thousand Jewish people can be compared to six hundred thousand angels of service adorned by the dual crowns of "do" and "hear". Indeed, we find this concept in a further passage of the Talmud (Shabbos 88b):

%%Otherwise: It is written, Listen, for I shall speak princely things (Mishlei 8:6). Every Word spoken by the Holy Blessed One had two crowns attached to it.

¹⁶ [Translator's note: See Footnote 15 for the author's definition of an angel.]

Chapter Seven

The Proper Recipient for the Torah

&&The Talmud tells us that the Torah was the precious tool with which the Holy Blessed One created the world (Avos 3:14).

The purpose of the creation of the world was to provide a setting in which Yisrael would be able to fulfill the Torah. The Midrash tells us that the idea of creating Yisrael preceded any other thoughts of creation (Beraishis Rabah 1:4). The Talmud also emphasizes the centrality of the Torah in the existence of the world (Shabbos 88a):

%%Chizkiah said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, From heaven You proclaimed judgment, the earth feared and was still (Tehillim 76:9)? If the earth feared why was it still? And if it was still why did it fear?

"Only, the verse is saying that in the beginning it was afraid, but then it became still. Why then was it afraid in the beginning?

"This is explained by that which Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said: 'What is the meaning of that which is written, And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day (Beraishis 1:31)? There is an additional letter in the Hebrew word for 'the sixth' that is an expression of particular emphasis and does not appear on the other days of creation. Why is this so?

"This comes to teach us that the Holy Blessed One made the creation of the world conditional. If Yisrael would accept the Torah all would be well. If, however, they would refuse to accept it He would dismantle the world. ¹⁷

¹⁷ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that the particular emphasis indicated by the additional letter, according to this interpretation, is intended to direct attention to another important "sixth day" - the sixth day of Sivan, Shavuot, the day on which the Torah was given. Thus, the completion of the process of creation, which took

"This uncertainty was the cause of the original fear of the earth. When Yisrael accepted the Torah the earth became still. "

&&Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish's statement, that the very existence of the world depends on the Torah, is not inconsistent with the fact that the world existed for twenty-six generations before the Torah was given. The Holy Blessed One, in His great benevolence, sustained the foundationless world during this entire period until a nation worthy of accepting the Torah appeared. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 118a):

%%Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "There are twenty-six consecutive verses that all conclude, For His kindness endures forever (Tehillim 136:1-26). What is the significance of this number?

"It alludes to the twenty-six generations with which the Holy Blessed One populated the world before the giving of the Torah. Although there was no justification for the existence of the world during this period the Holy Blessed One sustained it through His kindness. "

&&The Midrash takes note of that which is written, The Word which He commanded for a thousand generations (Tehillim 105:8) and infers from this that the Torah existed for a thousand generations before it was given on Mount Sinai. Subtracting the twenty-six generations that lived before the giving of the Torah, the Midrash concludes that the Torah was created and hidden away for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world (Beraishis Rabah 1:4). This number is also mentioned in passing in that which the Talmud tells us (Shabbos 88b):

place on the sixth day, is conditional on the acceptance of the Torah, which is also scheduled to take place on a sixth day.]

%%And Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "When Moshe went up to heaven to receive the Torah the angels of service said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe, what is this mortal born of woman doing among us?'

"He replied: 'He has come to receive the Torah. '

"They said to Him: 'Master of the Universe! This treasure that you have hidden away nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, in which You find renewed delight every single day, do you wish to give it away to a mere mortal of flesh and blood? What is a human that You should remember him? (Tehillim 8:5) O God, our Lord, how great is Your Name over all of the earth , O that You would invest Your splendor upon the heavens (Tehillim 8:2).'

"The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: 'Moshe, reply to their objection. '

"Moshe said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, I am afraid that the angels will incinerate me with the hot breath that emanates from between their lips. '

"The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: 'Hold onto My Throne of Glory, and you will be able to reply in safety, as it is written, Who grasps the surface of the Throne, He spreads His cloud over him (Iyov 26:9).'

['And Rabbi Tanchum said: 'There is an acronymic intimation in this verse that Hashem enfolded Moshe in the radiance of the Divine Presence to protect him. ']

"Moshe then said before Him: 'Master of the Universe, what is written in this Torah that You are giving to me? It is written, I am God your Lord who has brought you forth from the land of Mitzraim, from the house of bondage (Shemos 20:2).'

"Moshe then said to the angels: 'Did you go down to Mitzraim? Did Pharaoh enslave you? What has the Torah to do with you?'

"What else is written in the Torah? It is written, You shall not have other deities before Me (Shemos 20:3). Do you live among the uncircumcised idolators of the world that you need to be warned against idolatry?

"What else is written in the Torah? It is written, You shall not take the Name of God your Lord in vain (Shemos 20:7). What business do you have with each other that you have the opportunity to swear?

"What else is written in the Torah? It is written, Remember the day of Shabbos to sanctify it (Shemos 20:8) and, Observe the day of Shabbos to sanctify it (Devarim 5:12), Do you work the entire week that you need the rest day of Shabbos?

"What else is written in the Torah? It is written, Honor your father and your mother (Shemos 20:12). Do you have fathers and mothers?

" You shall not kill (Shemos 20:13). You shall not commit adultery (Shemos 20:14). You shall not steal (Shemos 20:15). Does jealousy exist among you? Does the evil inclination exist among you? Does adultery exist among you? Why do you need the Torah?'

"Immediately upon hearing Moshe's arguments the angels withdrew their objections to Moshe's receiving the Torah.

"They again gave praise to the Holy Blessed One, saying: 'O God, our Lord, how great is Your Name over all of the earth (Tehillim 8:2).'

"This time, however, they omitted the conclusion of the verse, O that You would invest Your splendor upon the heavens (Ibid.).

"Thereupon, every one of the angels imparted something to Moshe, as it is written, You went up to heaven, you carried off captives, you acquired gifts among people (Tehillim 68:19). There is an allusion in the Hebrew words that because the angels at first spoke disdainfully to you they eventually gave you special gifts.

"And even the angel of death imparted something to Moshe, as it is written, And Aharon took as Moshe had commanded, and he ran into the midst of the crowd, and behold, the plague had begun among the people, and he put on the incense, and he atoned for the people (Bamidbar 17:12). How could Moshe have known that the putting on of incense would stop the plague had not the angel of death told him so?"¹⁸

&As for the other nations of the world, they cannot complain that the Torah was given to the Jewish people and not to them. Indeed, Hashem had offered the Torah to each of the nations, in its

¹⁸ [Translator's note: Maharsha clarifies this entire passage:

He explains that there are two aspects to the Torah. One is the surface form that deals with the conduct of the physical world. The other aspect is the hidden aspect that deals with the metaphysical secrets of the spiritual world. (The author discusses the complex nature of the Torah in the Second Light of the Menorah, *The Light of Expression*, Section I, Chapter 3.)

The angels objected to the giving of the entire Torah to Moshe. They felt that "the splendor", the hidden aspects, were beyond the conception of mortals mired in the physical world and should be entrusted to totally spiritual celestial beings. Hashem directed Moshe to reply to this objection.

Moshe answered that he could not debate the angels; they would easily vanquish him with "the hot breath that emanates from between their lips", the unadulterated spirituality of their arguments. Hashem told Moshe that even mortals can aspire to spirituality and pure intelligence by adhering the Throne of Glory, a reference to the fact that the souls of righteous people are wrapped in eternal life under the Throne of Glory.

Having been reassured of the human capacity to achieve spirituality, Moshe then replied to the angels. He claimed that since humans were not incapable of relating to the hidden aspect of the Torah, while angels were incapable of relating to the surface aspect of the Torah, it was only proper that the entirety of the Torah be maintained and that it all be given to humans.

The angels admitted that this argument was indeed valid. Moreover, now that they knew that humans could also absorb the secrets of the Torah, they were eager to impart some of the secrets they knew to Moshe. Thus, the passage concludes with the angels telling Moshe various things.]

own language, but they all refused it. Only the Jewish people were prepared to accept the Torah. The Sifrei tells us (Piska 343):

%%When the Omnipresent revealed Himself to give the Torah to Yisrael, this revelation was not in one but in four languages.

It is written, And he said, God has come from Sinai (Devarim 33:2). This manifestation was in Hebrew.

The verse goes on, And He rose from Se'ir to them (Ibid.). This manifestation was in the language of the Romans.

The verse goes on, He appeared from Mount Paran (Ibid.). This manifestation was in Arabic.

The verse concludes, And He came with holy multitudes (Ibid.). This manifestation was in Aramaic (Chaldean).

When the Omnipresent revealed Himself to give the Torah, this revelation was not only to Yisrael but to the nations of the world as well.

At first, He approached the descendants of Eisav, asking: 'Will you accept the Torah?'

They asked Him: "What is written in it?"

He replied: "You shall not kill (Shemos 20:13). "

They said before Him: "Master of the Universe! The ancestor of those people was a murderer to his core,¹⁹ as it is written, But the hands are the hands of Eisav (Beraishis 27:22). And this his father Yitzchak promised him, And by your sword shall you live (Beraishis 27:40). "

He approached the people of Ammon and asked them: "Will you accept the Torah?"

They asked Him: "What is written in it?"

He replied: "You shall not commit adultery (Shemos 20:14)."

They said before Him: "Master of the Universe! That whole nation only came about through an incestuous

¹⁹ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to their own ancestor Eisav.]

union,²⁰ as it is written, *And the daughters of Lot conceived from their father (Beraishis 19:36).*"

He approached the descendants of Yishmael and asked them: "Will you accept the Torah?"

They asked Him: "What is written in it?"

He replied: "You shall not steal (Shemos 20:15). "

They said before Him: "Master of the Universe! The ancestor of those people was a robber to his core,²¹ as it is written, And he will be a wild man (Beraishis 16:12). "

There was not a nation that He did not approach, upon whose gates he did not knock, to whom he did not speak, offering them the Torah, as it is written, All the kings of the earth will praise You, O God, for they heard the sayings of Your Mouth (Tehillim 138:4).

You might think they heard them and accepted them, therefore it is written, And they will hear Your Words, but they will not fulfill them (Yechezkel 33:31). And it is also written, And I will wreak vengeance in wrath and rage upon the nations, for they have not listened (Michah 5:14).

Moreover, the nations of the world could not even manage to fulfill the seven commandments to the gentiles. Thus, Hashem added these too to the mitzvos of the Jewish people.

There is an analogy to this. A man takes his donkey and his dog into his granary. He loads a large measure of grain onto the donkey and a very small measure onto the dog. The donkey walks along carrying his load, but the dog drags himself along. What does the owner do? He takes the load off the dog and adds it to the load on the donkey.

²⁰ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to themselves.]

²¹ [Translator's note: An oblique reference to their own ancestor Yishmael.]

Chapter Eight

The Ten Commandments

&&The Ten Commandments are the foundation of the Jewish faith; in broad terms, they encompass all of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos of the Torah.

The Jewish people heard the announcement of the Ten Commandments directly from the Divine Power at Mount Sinai. Under normal circumstances mere human beings would be incapable of attuning to such a sublimely spiritual direct communication. The Holy Blessed One, however, imbued the Jewish people gathered at Mount Sinai with a temporarily heightened intelligence that enabled them to absorb this Divine communication.

There were several motivations behind these extraordinary measures to enable the Jewish people to attune directly to Divine communication. For one, the profound impression of this direct communication would strengthen their faith in Moshe's future prophecies.²² Also, having even once heard a direct Divine communication would elevate the Jewish people above all other nations and nationalities for all time.²³ Finally, this spiritual enhancement would cleanse the Jewish nation of the pollution with which the ancient serpent had contaminated humankind, as the Talmud tells us (Shabbos 145b, Avodah Zarah 22b):

%%Why are the gentile nations polluted?

²² As it is written, In order that the people will hear when I speak with you, then they will also believe in you forever (Shemos 19:9).

²³ As it is written, For please ask about the early times that were before you, from the day that the Lord created people upon the earth, and from one end of the skies to the other end of the skies, whether there was ever such a great thing as this, or if the like of it has been heard, if ever a people had heard the Voice of the Lord speaking from the midst of a fire, as you have heard, and has remained alive (Devarim 4:32-33).

Because they were not gathered about Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the Torah. For when the ancient serpent seduced Chavah, the original woman, in the Garden of Eden, he polluted her. The Jewish people that were gathered about Mount Sinai were cleansed of this pollution; the gentile nations who were not gathered about Mount Sinai remain polluted.

&&There can be no doubt that, even without these additional enhancements, Yisrael was the nation most worthy of receiving the Torah. The people of Yisrael were the descendants of Avraham, the beloved of Hashem; they were marked by the covenant of circumcision; and they were conditioned to selfless service. Indeed, to bear the yoke of Torah one must be free of arrogance and the overpowering need for physical gratification. Otherwise, one might easily become oblivious of the Creator and sin.²⁴ How then could the yoke of Torah have lain comfortably across the shoulders of the other nations, steeped as they were in pleasure and intoxication? How could nations that were helpless against their own arrogance and the overpowering drives of their bodies have fulfilled the body-weakening Torah²⁵ and mitzvos? Only the people of Yisrael, prepared as they were to disregard their physical condition, were worthy of receiving the Torah.

The Talmud further tells us that the Holy Blessed One provided the people of Yisrael with wonderful scents and a special measure of strength to withstand the awesome physical ordeal of the events at Mount Sinai (Shabbos 88b):

²⁴ As it is written, And your heart will become arrogant and you will forget God your Lord who brought you forth from the land of Mitzraim, from the house of bondage (Devarim 8:14), and it is also written, And Yeshurun became prosperous and kicked out (Devarim 32:15).

²⁵ The Talmud infers that the Torah is body-weakening from that which is written, He gave excellent counsel, and He expanded wisdom (Yeshayahu 28:29), and Rabbi Chanan said that the Hebrew word for wisdom used here to describe the Torah intimates that it dissipates a person's physical strength (Sanhedrin 26b).

%%And Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, His Cheeks are as a garden bed of fragrant spices (Shir Hashirim 5:13)?

"With every utterance spoken by the Holy Blessed One the world was filled with the fragrance of spices.

"If the world was already full of fragrant scent after the first utterance what happened to the scent that came with the following utterances?

"The Holy Blessed One brought forth a special wind from his treasurehouse and swept the lingering fragrance into the Garden of Eden before each new utterance, as the verse concludes, His lips are like roses flowing with passing myrrh (Ibid.). "

And Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi also said: "With every utterance spoken by the Holy Blessed One at Mount Sinai the souls of the Jewish people became separated from their bodies, as it is written, My soul went out as He spoke (Shir Hashirim 5 :6).

"If their souls went out at the first utterance to whom then were the following utterances spoken?

"Only, the Holy Blessed One sent down some of the dew that will resurrect the dead in the future time, and this dew revived them, as it is written, Bountiful rain did You pour down, O Lord, You have set Your exhausted estate to right (Tehillim 68:10)."

*And Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi also said: "With every utterance spoken by the Holy Blessed One on Mount Sinai the Jewish people shrank back twelve miles, but the angels of service kept prodding them to return. For it written, The kings of hosts flee, they flee (Tehillim 68:13). Do not read the Hebrew word in the form whereby it means flee but in the slightly different form whereby it means prod.
"*

&&It would appear from this passage of the Talmud that the people of Yisrael heard every single one of the Commandments directly from the Divine Power. So it would also seem from that which is written, And the Lord spoke all of these words, saying... (Shemos 20:1) and from that which is written at the conclusion of the review of the Ten Commandments, These words did God speak to all your congregation at the mount (Devarim 5:19).

Elsewhere, however, the Talmud tells us that they heard the first two Commandments—I am God your Lord who has brought you forth from the land of Mitzraim, from the house of bondage, you shall have no other deities before me (Shemos 20:2-3)—directly from the Divine Power (Makos 24a). This would seem to imply that they heard the others, only from Moshe.

Several solutions have been offered to this apparent discrepancy. Some say that they heard all the Commandments directly from the Divine Power but that the only two they were able to comprehend were the first and the second. They heard the others only as incomprehensible sounds, and Moshe had to tell them what it was that they had heard.

Others say that that which is written, And they said to Moshe, You speak with us and we will hear (Shemos 20:19) had actually occurred immediately after the first two Commandments. The Torah, however, did not record this request immediately so as not to interrupt the Ten Commandments. This school of thought supports its thesis by the difference in expression between the first two Commandments and the other Commandments. In the first two Hashem seems to be speaking directly to the Jewish people, while in the others Moshe seems to be repeating the words of Hashem.²⁶

²⁶ In the first two Commandments: I am God your Lord who has brought you forth from the land of Mitzraim (Shemos 20:2). You shall have no other deities before Me (Shemos 20:3). For I am God your Lord (Shemos 20:5). Clearly, Hashem Himself is speaking.

In the other Commandments: You shall not take the Name of God your Lord in vain (Shemos 20:7). Therefore God blessed the day of Shabbos (Shemos 20:11). And so are all of them written in the impersonal form, Moshe apparently speaking to Yisrael, relating the directives of Hashem.

In my opinion, however, the Talmud singles out the first two Commandments, not because these were the only two that the Jewish people heard directly from Hashem, but for a different reason altogether. These two Commandments are the roots and the foundations for all the other Commandments and for the entire Torah. The mitzvos of the Torah fall into two major categories, positive commandments and prohibitions. The first Commandment—I am God your Lord who has brought you forth from the land of Mitzraim—is a positive commandment; it directs the Jewish people to have faith in Hashem and to adhere to Him. The second Commandment—You shall have no other deities before me—is a prohibition; it enjoins the Jewish people not to believe in false gods or in any other false creeds. Thus, if a person has faith in Hashem, loves Him, and adheres to His Ways, he will fulfill all the other mitzvos of the Torah; if a person avoids all forms of idolatry and false ideologies he will also be able to avoid transgressing the prohibitions of the Torah. It is for this reason that the Torah continually repeats the prohibition against any form of idolatry; the avoidance of idolatry and false beliefs is the foundation of the entire Torah.

This fundamental quality of the first two Commandments is implicit in the form of their expression, the first two apparently spoken directly to the Jewish people, the others apparently related through Moshe.²⁷ In actuality, there was no difference between them, all being spoken directly to the Jewish people. The more

I have also found support for this thesis in the Midrash (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 39). The Midrash states that of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos the first two Commandments were spoken by the Holy Blessed One directly to the Jewish people. Thus, the mitzvos related by Moshe numbered six hundred and eleven, which is also the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the word Torah.

This thesis would also provide a new interpretation for that which is written, The Lord spoke once, but these two I heard (Tehillim 62:12). This then would be referring to the first two Commandments which were spoken simultaneously but heard individually.

²⁷ [Translator's note: See Footnote 26.]

personal tone of the first two Commandments was only meant to impress upon the Jewish people the utter dependence of the entire Torah on these two basic Commandments.

Part III:

SUKKOS

(Chap. 9-17)

Chapter Nine

The Meaning of the Sukkah

The final of the three festivals, the festival of Sukkos, takes place several months after Shavuos, on the fifteenth day of Tishrei. The month of Tishrei begins with the Ten Days of Teshuvah, inaugurated by Rosh Hashanah and climaxing with Yom Kippur. These are days of repentance and self-denial designed to induce the wayward to return to the straight path. Immediately upon the heels of this period of torment the Torah has given us the joyous festival of Sukkos.

There is a lesson to be learned here. The Torah is teaching us that the Holy Blessed One does not demand a life of torment as an end in itself. He only demands a short period of torment to serve a specific purpose, repentance and return. Once that goal is accomplished we can return to our natural joyful state. The first expression of this renewed joyfulness is the festival of Sukkos and the preparations for it. During this time we are told to rejoice together with our families in the performance of the mitzvos.

The Sages gave each of the three festivals a particular designation: Pesach is called "the time of our emancipation"; Shavuos is called "the time of the giving of our Torah"; Sukkos is called "the time of our joy". Although all three festivals are equally joyous occasions, the festival of Sukkos is singled out as "the time of our joy". A close study of the verses relating to the festivals offers an explanation.

After describing the first two festivals the Torah tells us, But on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement (Vayikra 23:7). The Torah uses the word "but" to differentiate between the previously mentioned festivals and Yom Kippur; the festivals are times of joy, "but" Yom Kippur is a time of self-denial, therefore, when the Torah goes on to describe the festival of Sukkos it is written, But on the fifteenth day of the seventh

month, when you gather the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the festival of God for seven days (Vayikra 23:39). Again, the word "but" is used to differentiate. It points out that this festival is not an extension of the period of self-denial highlighted by Yom Kippur, "but" it is a festival that signals the return to a natural joyous state. It is a seven-day period of heightened joy, a time for eating, drinking, and bringing shelamim and other sacrifices to Hashem. The Sages also underscored the return to joyousness signaled by the festival of Sukkos by designating it "the time of our joy."

This joy is not the joy of wild revelry and physical gratification; it is an inner, spiritual joy that is directed towards Hashem. The food and the drink are merely meant to produce an expansive mood and to release the joyousness of the spirit. The Torah therefore writes, The festival of Sukkos shall be seven days for God (Vayikra 23:34).

The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 9a):

%%Rav Shashess said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: "How do we know that no benefit may be derived from the wood of the sukkah for the entire seven-day period of the festival?"

"For it is written, The festival of Sukkos shall be seven days for God (Vayikra 23:34)."

And it was taught: Rabbi Yehudah says; "How do we know that just as the festival offering is imprinted with the Name of Heaven, so too is the sukkah imprinted with the Name of Heaven?"

"For it is written, The festival of Sukkos shall be seven days for God (ibid.). A parallel is indicated between the sukkah that is 'for God' and the festival offering that is also 'for God'."

&&Although this passage of the Talmud is obviously discussing the permissibility of using the wood of the sukkah during the festival, it can be homiletically extended to include our

theme as well. The sukkah that houses us during the festival is "for God"; it is imprinted with the Name of Heaven. The focus of our rejoicing in the sukkah should be Hashem, not our own physical gratification.

The sukkah booth itself is a multiple symbol. The Talmud tells us that Hashem wants us to leave our permanent dwelling and reside in a temporary dwelling (Sukkah 2a). This is meant to teach us not to gain a false sense of security from the size and sturdiness of our homes and the richness of its contents. Nor should we rely totally on the assistance of a person, no matter how influential and powerful he may be. The only true protection emanates from the One who commanded the creation of the world. He alone has the ability to do anything, and He alone is worthy of faith. Only his promises will surely be kept;²⁸ He alone can provide shelter and refuge.²⁹ Thus, the fragility of the sukkah dwelling symbolizes the futility of faith in anything and anyone other than Hashem.

To add further emphasis to this symbolism the time for the mitzvah of sukkah is during the early fall, the time of harvest in the land of Yisrael, as it is written, When you have gathered from your threshing-floor and your wine-press (Devarim 16:13). This is a time when people become overly confident of themselves. They are no longer in the fields but in the protective cocoon of the city. Their roofs are tarred, and their houses are fortified against the onslaught of the winter, Their storehouses are bursting with food for the winter. And it is at this particular time that Hashem directs us to leave the protection of our solid homes and reside in the vulnerable sukkos. Thus will we give thought to the fact that all we possess is only through the Will of Hashem. Thus will we be

²⁸ As it is written, The Lord is not a man that deceives, nor a person that reconsiders (Bamidbar 23:19).

²⁹ As it is written, But the one that trusts in God will He surround with kindness (Tehillim 32:10), and it is also written, I will say of God, He is my refuge and my fortress (Tehillim 91:2).

stimulated to reinforce our faith in Hashem without whom we are forever vulnerable,

This is also the intention of the Talmud when it tells us to make the sukkah from the by-products of the threshing house and the winery (Sukkah 12a). This is a reminder that the rains Hashem gave in their proper time have provided us with food and shelter. Everything comes from Hashem, and one must not rely on oneself.

The sukkah is also meant to symbolize the sukkos with which Hashem provided the Jewish people in the Desert³⁰. These sukkos protected them from the winter cold and the summer heat, from the snow and from the rains, even though they had no roofs over their heads. And they served as a reminder that the Creator does not need houses and walls and bolted doors to protect them in future generations as well.

There is a difference of opinion among the Sages as to the nature of the sukkos mentioned in the Torah. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 11b):

%%It was taught: It is written, That I lodged the people of Yisrael in sukkos (Vayikra 23:43).

"This is referring to the cloud-pillars of glory that escorted the people of Yisrael in the Desert," so said Rabbi Eliezer Rabbi Akiva says: "These were actual booth-dwellings."

&&According to Rabbi Eliezer the sukkah serves as a reminder of the wondrous miracle of the cloud-pillars of glory. For the forty years that the Jewish people traveled through the Desert they were escorted by seven cloud-pillars of glory,

Four of these cloud-pillars encircled the encampment on all four sides, as it is written, He found him in a desert land and in the

³⁰ As it is written, That your future generations may know that I lodged the people of Yisrael in sukkos when I brought them forth from the land of Mitzraim (Vayikra 23:43).

desolation of a howling wilderness, He encircled him, He instructed him, He watched over him as the apple of His Eye (Devarim 32:10). The fifth cloud-pillar was situated above the encampment to shield it from the burning rays of the sun, as it is written, He spread out a cloud as a canopy (Tehillim 105:39).

The sixth cloud-pillar served a dual purpose. By night it illuminated the encampment, as it is written, And God went before them, by day in a cloud-pillar to pave the way, and by night (Shemos 13:21). With this pillar leading the way they needed no other illumination; it was, as David Hamelech has written, And the night will shine like the day, the darkness as light (Tehillim 139:12). This cloud-pillar also leveled the way before them. It flattened the steep rises and filled in the holes in the road, as it is written, That he led them through the deeps, like a horse in the desert, that they should not stumble, as a beast that likes to go down into the valley, so did the Spirit of God ease their way, thus did You guide Your people to make for Yourself a glorious Name (Yeshayahu 63:13-14).

The seventh and final cloud-pillar followed behind the travelling encampment. It would search out all the stragglers who had fallen behind—the sick, the old, the very young, women who were pregnant or had just given birth, nursing mothers. Then the cloud-pillar would carry them along as if they were riding in coaches, as it is written, As an eagle awakens his nest, hovering over his nestlings, he spreads out his wings, takes them, lifts them up on his plumes (Devarim 32:1).

The Jewish people were privileged to be escorted by these wondrous cloud-pillars because of the merit of seven of their righteous men: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Kehas, Amram, Aharon, and Moshe.

Others say that it was because of the merit of the seven groups of righteous people that are worthy of greeting the Divine Presence. The Midrash describes these seven groups (Vayikra Rabah 30:2):

%%It is written, Let me know the way of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence (Tehillim 16:11). Do not read the Hebrew word in the form whereby it means fullness but in the variant form whereby it means seven.

This is an allusion to the seven groups of righteous people that are worthy of greeting the Divine Presence. These seven groups are differentiated by their appearances. Some resemble the sun, some the moon, some the sky. Some resemble lightning, some the stars, Some resemble roses. Some resemble the menorah in the Bais Hamikdash.

...The verse concludes, The pleasures of Your right Hand are eternal (Tehillim 16:11).

David Hamelech said before the Holy Blessed One: "Master of all Worlds, who will tell me which of these groups is the most pleasant and beloved?"

There is a difference of opinion between. two amoraim about the answer David received to this question.

One said: "It is the group whose righteousness derives from the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos."

The other said: It is the group of scribes, teachers of the Mishnah, and sincere teachers of small children. These righteous people are destined to reside in the protective shelter at the right of the Eternal One."

Otherwise: It is written, Let me know the way of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence (Tehillim 16:11). This is the voice of the people of Yisrael speaking to the Holy Blessed One. The people of Yisrael said: "Let me know the way of life (Ibid.)."

The Holy Blessed One said to them: "Behold, I am giving you the Ten Days of Teshuvah that begin with Rosh Hashanah and culminate with Yom Kippur."

The people of Yisrael continued: "The seven joys in Your Presence (Ibid.). ³¹

³¹ Translator's note: The variant form of the Hebrew word is used here to denote seven instead of fullness, as in the beginning of this passage from the Midrash

The Holy Blessed One said to them: "I am giving you seven mitzvos during the festival of Sukkos: the four species, the sukkah, the festival offering, and the mitzvah of being joyful."

What is the meaning of that which is written, The pleasures of Your right Hand are eternal (Ibid.)?

Rabbi Avin said: "This refers to the mitzvah of taking the lulav (palm-branch) which resembles the spear held aloft by the victor.

"There is an analogy to this. Two people go before the court to argue their cases against each other. When they emerge, how do we know which one was victorious? The one that is holding the symbolic spear in his right hand is the victorious one.

"So too do the Jewish people and the peoples of the world argue their cases against each other before the Holy Blessed One during the days of judgment. When the Jewish people emerge from the days of judgment before the Holy Blessed One with their lulavim in their right hands on the festival of Sukkos it becomes clear that they were victorious.
"

&&Furthermore, it would appear to me that the taking of the four species is in itself a sevenfold mitzvah. The requirement is for one esrog, one lulav, two aravos, and three hadasim, totaling seven elements. The mitzvah of sukkah also has aspects of seven in it, the duration of the mitzvah being seven days and the sukkah itself being at least seven tefach measures wide. These recurring sevens allude to the seven groups of righteous people and the seven cloud-pillars of glory that escorted the Jewish people in the Desert.

This is all in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Elazar that the sukkos referred to in the Torah were the cloud-pillars of glory. Rabbi Akiva, however, is of the opinion that these were actual booth-dwellings.

The question arises: Since these booth-dwellings were made immediately upon leaving Egypt in the spring month of Nissan, why is the festival of Sukkos celebrated in the autumn month of Tishrei?

This is because during the warm weather season people normally sit in booths outdoors to watch over their fields and vineyards. If someone should sit in the sukkah during this time it would not be obvious that he is doing so because of the mitzvah. Therefore, Hashem commanded that we sit in the Sukkah during the beginning of the rainy season after the harvest. During this time people normally leave their outdoor booths and withdraw to their houses. When we do the reverse, leaving our homes and entering the sukkah, it is perfectly clear that we are doing so to fulfill the mitzvah of Hashem.

Others conclude, because of the aforementioned question, that the Jewish people made booth-dwellings in the early wintertime to protect them from the cold. This is a common practice for itinerant encampments. In the summertime they live in tents, and in the wintertime they live in the slightly more protective booths.

Since, according to this view, there was nothing extraordinary about these booths why then do they require remembrance for posterity?

Because future generations should be reminded that for the entire forty years that the Jewish people were in the desert they never stepped into a house or entered a settlement. But since Hashem was always with them they wanted for nothing. The Word of Hashem and His Will were their protection from the heat of the day and the cold of the night, their shelter and refuge from the rains and the storms. This then is the essence of the mitzvah of sukkah; it is a rejuvenation of trust in Hashem and reliance on Him alone.

The prophet makes a connection between Sukkos and rains in that which is written, And it will be that whoever of the clans of the land will not go up to Yerushalayim to bow down to the King, God of Hosts, then the rain shall not be upon them (Zechariah

14:17). The prophet is discussing those who fail to join in the celebration of Sukkos in Yerushalayim, and the punishment he mentions is a lack of rain. We find a similar connection between Sukkos and rain in the Talmud, which tells us that the level of rainfall for the entire year is decided on Sukkos (Rash Hashanah 16a).

The significance of the sukkah as the symbol of rejuvenation of trust in Hashem offers a ready explanation for this connection. Among all things that people need to survive, the rains are totally beyond their control. Only trust in Hashem can bring the rains. Therefore, those who neglect the festival of Sukkos and do not try to renew their trust in Hashem are not deemed worthy of receiving rain.

Thus, if the Jewish people celebrate the festival of Sukkos properly, thinking into its significance and strengthening their trust in Hashem, they will surely be rewarded. Hashem will bring plentiful rains, and their crops will flourish.

There is another explanation of the connection between Sukkos and rain. Sukkos is celebrated at harvest time, it is a time when the storehouses are full of grain, a time to thank Hashem for the good things He has taken from His treasuries and given to the world. Hence, if a person is not thankful on Sukkos he is not worthy of receiving the bounty of Hashem, and the rains are held back from him.

According to this view then, the Torah has directed us to sit in the Sukkah as a reminder of the goodness of Hashem and the importance of being thankful to him. A person should think into the deeds of Hashem. He should thank Hashem for providing him with provisions for the winter, and he should devote the long winter nights to the study of the Torah. If he does so he will merit coming into the courtyard of Hashem, into the shelter of the Almighty, to live in His House in the world to come.

Chapter Ten

The Sukkah as a Symbol of Holiness

Without going into the halachic details of the sukkah, let us mention here that the sukkah must be no lower than ten tefach measures high. It would appear to me that our Sages hinted at the hidden significance of this rule. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 5a)

%%It was taught: Rabbi Yosi says: "The Divine Presence never descended to the lower world, nor did Moshe and Eliyahu ever ascend to the upper world. For it is written, The heavens are the heaven of God, and the earth He has given to people (Tehillim 115:16). "

How can it be said that the Divine Presence never descended to the lower world? Is it not written, And God came down onto Mount Sinai (Shemos 19:20)?

The Divine Presence hovered ten tefach measures above the mountaintop.

Is it not written, And His Feet will stand on that day upon the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4)?

That too means ten tefach measures above the mountaintop.

How can it be said that Moshe and Eliyahu never ascended to the upper world? Is it not written, And Moshe went up to the Lord (Shemos 19:3)?

This means that he stayed within the lowest ten tefach measures of the heavens.

And is it not written, And Eliyahu went up in a storm wind to the heavens (Melachim II 2:11)?

He too stayed within the lowest ten tefach measures of the heavens.

&&This cryptic passage of the Talmud is actually affording us a glimpse at some of the fundamental truths of the world.

As we have previously explained,³² the world is divided into three parts: the upper world, the middle world, and the lower world.

The lower world is the world of dynamic materialism, a world bursting with physical vitality. This is the world that exists upon the surface of the earth. Unintelligent but voracious physical life-forces dominate this world. These physical life-forces have identities and personalities of their own. They have wants and desires and a basic kind of low intelligence that enables them to pursue the fulfillment of these unintelligent drives. Beings of higher intelligence and spirituality that exist in this world are actually hybrid beings, consisting of purely intellectual spirits, or souls, and physical bodies.

The middle world covers the nine rotating spheres of the cosmos—the solar system and the galaxies. This is a more neutral world. It is a world of empty spaces, of physical bodies that have no life-force of their own, no biological drives, no desires. It is a world in which spiritual beings can exist without being influenced by material entities.

The upper world is the world of total spirituality; it is a world inhabited by souls and by angels, a world illuminated by the dazzling radiance of the Divine Presence. This world is also called "the intelligent world". The spiritual beings in this world consist of pure intellect. They are not encumbered by physical bodies; they have no material drives to affect and corrupt their perceptions and judgment.

Total holiness exists in the upper world, the world that is above the *nine* rotating spheres of the universe, the world of pure intellect. A person, inhabitant of the lower world that he is, cannot enter completely into the upper world. As long as the person is alive his spiritual self is intertwined with his physical being and cannot exist in the purely spiritual world. Only after his death, when the soul is severed from its physical connection, can he

³² See *The Light of Mitzvos*, Section III, Chapter 38.

enter the upper world. Until then, he must remain only on the threshold of the upper world--with the lowest ten tefach measures, so to speak. Therefore, Moshe and Eliyahu, who went up to heaven even as they were alive, could not go higher than ten tefach measures into the upper world.

Similarly, the totally spiritual cannot exist in the lower world amidst the material life-forces. It can only descend into the middle world and hover above the lower world. Therefore, when the Divine Presence was revealed to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai it hovered ten tefach measures above the mountaintop not descending fully to the lower world. Only the emanation and aura of the Divine Presence enters entirely into the lower world.

These concepts gives us a new insight into the strong significance of the numeral ten throughout. the Torah. We have seen that there are ten parts to the world, the nine rotating spheres of the middle world and the totally spiritual upper world, the lower world being merely the floor of the middle world. Holiness is achieved only on the tenth level. Thus, the numeral ten becomes the symbol for holiness, This is implicit in the fact that Hasher created the world through ten utterances, the tenth utterance accomplishing the completion of the holy task.

The Torah, therefore, uses the numeral ten in connection with matters of supreme holiness, This is to underscore that the nine material spheres of the universe are not divine in nature; mastery of the world resides in the tenth world, the world of pure intellect and spirituality. The Holy Ark of the Torah and its covering together measured ten tefach measures high. The tithes were one part in ten, Ten verses are read on Rosh Hashanah prior to each set of shofar blowings. The Days of Teshuvah, from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, number ten. The recital of the kaddish and the kedushah requires the presence of a quorum of at least ten Jewish men.

Furthermore, to emphasize that the tenth level of the world, being of a purely spiritual nature, is higher than the nine material spheres. The Torah has made most holy the tenth unit of these

sets of ten. When tithing sheep they are counted one by one, and each tenth sheep becomes sanctified (Vayikra 27:32). The measurement of the covering of the Holy Ark of the Torah is not mentioned in the Torah to stress that it is a symbol for pure spirituality that cannot be physically measured. Of the Ten Days of Teshuvah, the holiest is Yom Kippur, the tenth. Of the ten verses accompanying the shofar blowing, the tenth is the sublimely holy, Hear O Yisrael...(Devarim 6:4).

When dealing with matters of less supreme holiness, however, the Torah does not use the numeral ten as a symbol. Rather, it uses the lower numeral seven. Thus, the shemittah cycle of fallow years is a seven-year cycle, and the festivals are seven days long.

The sukkah contains both the symbol of the numeral ten and the symbol of the numeral seven. The width of the sukkah is designed to accommodate people sitting in it, a material symbol; therefore, the sukkah must be seven tefach measures wide. The height of the sukkah rises above the people's heads, signifying that it is sanctified for Hashem; therefore, the sukkah must be ten tefach measures high.

Certainly, the requirements of the sukkah reflect many profound and mystical significances. Some of the requirements, though, have quite a simple explanation. It is not the intention of the Creator that the performance of His mitzvot be painful. Rather, it is His Will that we rejoice in their fulfillment. Therefore, the sukkah is required to have more shade than sun (Sukkah 2a). Sick people and other people who would find it uncomfortable to do so are not required to sit in the sukkah. Travelers and municipal guards on active duty are also exempt, as are people preoccupied by the performance of a mitzvah and the groom and his party during the wedding week.

There are other requirements that are designed for the adornment of the mitzvah of sukkah. The Talmud often mentions that a mitzvah should be performed as beautifully as possible (Sukkah 116, Shabbos 133b, Nazir 2b). Therefore, our Sages

directed that the roof of the sukkah be thatched in such a way that it will not resemble a house. They found an inference for this in that which is written, When you have gathered from your threshing-floor and your wine-press (Devarim 16:13), the verse intimating that the roof of the sukkah be thatched with the by-products of the threshing-floor and wine-press (Sukkah 12a). This is considered an adornment for the sukkah because it sets it apart from ordinary dwellings, characterizing it as a consecrated entity. In addition, it is also customary to decorate the sukkah walls with fresh fruits and other beautiful objects. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 10a):

%%It was taught: If a sukkah has been properly thatched, decked with cover hangings and tapestries, hung with walnuts, almonds, pomegranates, bunches of grapes, wreaths of wheat stalks, wines, oils, and flours, it is forbidden to derive benefit from any of these things until after the final day of the festival. But if these things were only hung in the sukkah on the condition that they be taken down and used during the festival, they may be used according to the details of the conditions.

Chapter Eleven

The Mitzvah of the Four Species

During the festival of Sukkos it is also a mitzvah to grasp four species in unison. These are: the esrog (citron), the lulav (palm-branch), the hadasim (three myrtle-twigs), and the aravos (two willow-twigs). There are many rules regarding the specifications of these specimens of the four species. This volume, however, is not the proper place for a detailed discussion of these rules. Suffice it to say that the general rule is that the specimens be of premium quality, the detailed specifications being criteria for determining premium quality in each respective species. Instead, we will discuss the significance of the four species and what they symbolize.

The Talmud tells us that the purpose of the four species is to incur the favor of Hashem in the matter of granting sufficient rainfall (Taanis 2b). The festival of Sukkos comes in the early autumn just at the beginning of the first rainy period when the earth thirsts for water. It is at this time that we collect premium specimens from these four species representing the wide variety of the earth's vegetation. With these four species in hand we sing the praises of the Blessed Lord who has caused these plants to grow, and we implore Him for bountiful rain that will make the earth produce what we need for survival. The Midrash tells us (Vayikra Rabah 30:4-6):

It is written, And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, twigs of myrtle trees, and willows of the brook (Vayikra 23:40).

These four species are symbols for that which is written, Let the field rejoice, and all that are in it, then shall all the trees of the forest sing merrily, before God, for He has come, He has come to judge the earth, He will judge the world with righteousness, and peoples with His Truth (Tehillim 96:12-13).

Otherwise: It is written, And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees... (Vayikra 23:40).

Rabbi Chiya taught: "This verse is telling us that this is not a collective mitzvah; every individual is required to fulfill the mitzvah of taking the four species. It is also telling us that the four species must be of our own property, not of stolen property."

Rabbi Levi said: "If someone comes to fulfill the mitzvah with stolen specimens of the four species to what can he be compared?"

"He is comparable to the robber who lurked at the crossroads preying on the passersby. One day, one of the emperor's legionnaires who was collecting taxes in that province passed by the crossroads where this robber was lurking. The robber pounced on the legionnaire and took all the money that he had in his possession. The following day the robber was caught and locked in prison. When the legionnaire heard of the robber's arrest he came to the prison to talk with him.

"The Legionnaire said: 'Give me back everything that you stole from me, and I will speak to the emperor on your behalf.'

"The robber replied: 'I have nothing left from all that I have stolen or bought besides this one small coin that I took from you.'

"The legionnaire said: 'Then give me this small coin, and I will speak to the emperor on your behalf.'

"The robber extended the coin and said: 'Take it then. '

"The legionnaire took it and said: 'Be advised that you are scheduled to be brought to trial before the emperor tomorrow. He will ask you if there is anyone that can speak on your behalf. You are to reply that I can speak on your behalf. He will then summon me, and I will speak on your behalf.'

"And so it was that the next day the robber was brought to trial before the emperor.

"The emperor asked him: 'Is there anyone that can speak well of you?'

"The robber replied: 'There is such and such a legionnaire who can speak well of me. '

"The emperor summoned the legionnaire and asked him: 'Do you know anything favorable about this person?'

"The legionnaire replied: 'I know that when you sent me to collect taxes in that province this person waylaid me and stole everything I had. This small coin of mine that I took from him yesterday bears witness to my words. '

"The startled audience in the courtroom cried out: 'Woe to the man whose advocate has become his accuser!'

"So too, if a person brings stolen specimens of the four species to incur the favor of the Holy Blessed One the specimens cry out: 'We are stolen! We are stolen!'

"And the angels of service gathered about say: 'Woe to the man whose advocates have become his accusers.' "

&&The mitzvah of the four species has brought the Jewish people benefit over the years and will bring them great benefit in the future. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 5a):

%%It was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: For fulfillment of the three mitzvos that the Torah associated with the word "first" - the sanctification of the Pesach and

Sukkos festivals and the taking of the four species³³—the Jewish people will be granted three rewards that are also associated with the word "first" - the destruction of the descendants of Eisav, the building of the Bais Hamikdash, and the coming of Mashiach.

Eisav is called "first", as it is written, And the first one emerged, entirely red (Beraishis 25:25).

The Bais Hamikdash is called "first", as it is written, A throne of glory exalted from the first (Yirmiyahu 17:12).

Mashiach is called "first", as it is written, The first appointed to Zion will say, Behold they are there (Yeshayahu 41:27).

&&The Midrash brings a broader version of this passage (Vayikra Rabah 30:16):

%%Rabbi Berachiah said in the name of Rabbi Aba the son of Kehana: "The Holy Blessed says to the Jewish people: 'Because you fulfilled that which is written, And you shall take for yourselves on the first day (Vayikra 23:40) I who am called 'First', as it is written, From the beginning I am God the First (Yeshayahu 41:4), will reveal My Divine Presence to you.

"And I will wreak vengeance for you on the villain Eisav who is called 'first', as it is written, And the first one emerged, entirely red (Beraishis 25:25).

"And I will rebuild the Bais Hamikdash which is called 'first', as it is written, A throne of glory exalted from the first (Yirmiyahu 17:12).

³³ [Translator's note: Of the Pesach festival it is written, In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month (Shemos 12:18). Of the Sukkos festival it is written, On the first day shall be a rest, and on the eighth day shall be a rest (Vayikra 23:39). Of the taking of the four species it is written, And you shall take for yourselves on the first day...(Vayikra 23:40).]

"And I will bring you Mashiach who is called 'first', as it is written, The first appointed to Zion (Yeshayahu 41:27). "

Chapter Twelve

The Four Species as Universal Symbols

&&We have previously explained³⁴ that the Torah is multifaceted; every point in it is subject to seventy different interpretations, all of them entirely valid. These other facets of the Torah hold the fundamental secrets of the existence of the world and the significance of all matters, both material and spiritual. The One who knows all secret wisdom, however, has concealed these secrets within the Torah, writing the Torah in a language that conveys the simple information about the rules governing the performance of the mitzvos. The meanings of the mitzvos are concealed beneath the surface, their presence in the Torah indicated only by allusions in the surface form.

The mitzvah of taking specimens of the four species has many profound meanings concealed within it. A careful study of these meanings will provide a deeper understanding of the mitzvah and how it is supposed to bring a person closer to his Creator.

It is well known that the world consists of four elements: fire, air, water, and earth³⁵. Every creature in the world is a blend of these four elements. If even one of these four elements is removed the creature ceases to exist. For instance, a person's flesh represents the element of earth; his body fluids represent the

³⁴ See *The Light of Expression*, Section I, Chapter 3.

³⁵ [Translator's note: These four elements correspond to the four forms of matter—energy, gas, liquid, and solid.]

element of water; the air he breathes into his body represents the element of air; his body temperature represents the element of fire.

The continuing existence of these four elements of the world depends only on the Will of their Creator. Therefore, during the festival of Sukkos, which is called "a festival for God" (Vayikra 23:40), the Torah has directed that we praise Hashem for the creation of the four elements by taking specimens of four species that symbolize the four elements.

The first species mentioned in the Torah is the esrog (citron) whose rind has a yellow shine that resembles fire.

The second species mentioned in the Torah is the lulav (palm-branch). The branches of the palm tree reach up to the open skies and, thus, represent the element of air. Although, all tree branches also reach out to the air, the branches of the palm-tree reach straight up and are a better symbol for the element of air.³⁶

The third species mentioned in the Torah is the hadas (myrtle twig). The myrtle is the shortest of trees, its closeness to the earth making it the symbol for the element of earth. Moreover, like the earth, the myrtle is cold and brittle by nature.

The fourth species mentioned in the Torah is the aravah (the willow twig). The willow grows near the water, its branches drooping towards the water. The Torah even calls it "the willows of the brook". Therefore, the willow represents the element of water.

³⁶ This connection between the palm tree and the element of air also offers new insight into that which is written, And Devorah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidos, she would judge Yisrael in that time, and she would sit under the palm tree of Devorah (Shoftim 4:4-5). The Torah is telling of her sitting under the palm tree to demonstrate her virtuousness. Since she had to confer with men during her deliberations as a judge she chose to sit under a palm tree under which there is less seclusion than under the branches of other trees. This is implied in the use here of an unusual Hebrew word for palm tree, which also means a column of smoke. The inference is that the palm tree was chosen because of its resemblance to air, air being represented here as smoke.

A further confirmation of the connection between the palm tree and air lies in the fruit of the palm tree, the date. Dates are invigorating and are beneficial when taken in small amounts, both of these properties also being peculiar to air.

To be sure, according to their properties, the element of water stands higher than the element of earth. The Torah, however, mentions the hadas before the aravah, because in a different sense, the element of earth is higher. The emergence of dry land came about when the surface waters of the earth were gathered together down into the oceans, leaving the high ground dry and habitable by human beings. Thus, as concerns civilization the element of earth is closer to the element of air than is the element of water.

Taken together, these four species are supposed to impress upon us that we must be thankful with all four elements of which we consist to our Creator who continuously sustains us.

It is interesting to note that the first of the four species, the esrog, has within itself similarities to all four of the elements. The color of its rind makes it similar to fire, as previously mentioned; the warm, dry properties of the rind enhance its similarity to fire. The white pulp under the rind resembles air in appearance, also being warm and moist as the air. The cool, jelled moisture surrounding the pits resembles water. The cold, hard, dry pits themselves resemble the earth.

This then is why the esrog is taken separately in one hand, while all three other species are taken together in the other hand. The esrog can be taken by itself because it is in itself a symbol for all four elements. Nevertheless, the esrog is taken in the left hand, while the others are taken in the right hand. Since the esrog is only one of the four species, the other three species that are bound together are more worthy of being taken in the right hand. There is also another reason for the esrog being taken separately. As the only fruit among the four species the esrog deserves special esteem. The reason for its being taken in the left hand is again because it is, after all, only one species.

In another interpretation of this mitzvah, the four species represent the four parts of a person's body with which he gives praise to his Creator.

The first of these is the heart which is the fountainhead of his lifeblood, without which he cannot even survive for a moment. The

heart is also spoken of as the seat of intelligence with which one serves the Creator. The esrog, which the Torah calls "the fruit of a beautiful tree", resembles the heart, and because of its similarity to this, the most vital of organs, the esrog is the first-mentioned of the species.

The spine is the part of the body that gives it structure and form. A person acknowledges his Creator by bowing down before Him to the point where he stretches all of his vertebrae. The lulav, which the Torah calls "the branches of palm trees", resembles the spine in its erectness. Because of its similarity to the part of the body upon which a person's stature depends, the lulav is the second-mentioned of the species. Also, because ribs extend from the spine, the Sages have directed that the other species be attached to the lulav to maintain its similarity to the spine. The esrog, however, being the symbol for the very source of life is not attached to anything else.

The eyes are the organs through which a person perceives the wondrous deeds of Hashem and through which he studies the Torah to the best of his ability. The leaves of the hadas, which the Torah calls "twig of the myrtle-tree", resemble the eyes. This then is the third-mentioned of the species.

The last mentioned of the species is the aravah, which the Torah calls "the willow of the brook". The leaves of the aravah resemble the lips with which a person gives praise to his Creator, with which he tells everyone of the miracles He works in the world by His Will.

It would appear from the order of mention of these last two species that the eyes are more fundamental than the lips, sight before speech. This is because a person sees with his eyes and then speaks about what he has seen. Also, a person sees the words of the Torah before he reads and studies them. Furthermore, an infant sees before it learns to speak, sight coming before speech in an entirely different sense.

Thus, a person is required to take these four species that symbolize the four parts of the body with which he always thanks

the Creator and, with them in hand, to praise Him on the festival that is called "the festival for God". By doing so he will fulfill that which is written, All my bones will say O God, who is like you? (Tehillim 35:10). The Midrash tells us (Vayikra Rabah 30:14):

%%Rabbi Mani began to expound: "It is written, All my bones will say, O God, who is like you? (Tehillim 35:10).

"This verse is referring to the spine of the lulav which resembles the spine of a person, the hallo which resembles the eye, the aravah which resembles the mouth, and the esrog which resembles the heart.

"There are no other organs in the body that are more important than these four, which together are comparable to the entire body. By taking the four species that symbolize these four parts of the body one can truly say, 'All my bones will say, O God, who is like you?' "

...And if a person sins with any of these four parts of the body, and he repents, the Holy Blessed One forgives him through the merit of the four species.

&&There is also a hidden meaning in the names that the Torah uses for the four species. The Torah uses these names to tell us that this mitzvah must not be performed with frivolous merriment but with a serious appreciation of its profound significance. It should inspire one to thank the Holy Blessed One who makes plants sprout and grow. It should inspire one to trust utterly in the Holy Blessed One through whose kindness alone the world continues to exist. It should convince one not to gain a false sense of security from his own wealth and power. This aspect of the mitzvah is implicit in the names of the four species. The Midrash explains (Vayikra Rabah 30:9):

%%It is written, The fruit of beautiful trees (Vayikra 23:40). This alludes to the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, Splendor and beauty do You wear (Tehillim 104:1).

The verse continues, And branches of palm trees (Vayikra 23:40). This alludes to the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, The Righteous One shall spring up like a palm tree (92:13).

The verse continues, Twigs of myrtle trees (Vayikra 23:40). This alludes to the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, And He stands between the myrtles (Zechariah 1:8).

The verse concludes, And willows of the brook (Vayikra 23:40). This alludes to the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, Praise the One who rides on the heavens (Tehillim 68:5), the Hebrew word for willows being used here to denote the heavens.

&&This concept is also implicit in that which the Talmud tells us (Sukkah 37b):

%Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "During the shaking of the lulav it is extended and retracted in honor of the One to whom the four directions belong, and it is raised and lowered in honor of the One to whom heaven and earth belong. "

...Rabbi Yose the son of Rabbi Chanina said: "It is extended and retracted as a protection against destructive winds that come from the four directions, and it is raised and lowered to protect the crops from harmful moisture. "

&&The Talmud is telling us that the mitzvah of taking the four species is meant to inspire us to thank the Blessed Lord for what He has done in the past and to implore for His favor in the future. Let no one think that there is any benefit in the world that does not derive from His Word.

The Rambam, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, offers yet another insight into this mitzvah. He writes that it is meant to remind us that Hashem brought us out of the uninhabitable, barren Desert into a land of brooks, a land flowing with milk and honey.

By taking these four premium specimens that represent the varied vegetation of the land we are reminded of this.

In this sense, the mitzvah of the four species holds a special significance for us, and for the many generations of Jews before us, who have been exiled from our homeland. It should inspire us to thank Him for the wonders and the miracles He has shown in sustaining us and helping us prosper even as we live in exile among the gentile nations.

The pious people of our early times held this mitzvah in great esteem. From the early morning until they sat down to study the Torah in the house of study they did not let go of the four species. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 41b):

*%%It was taught: Rabbi Elazar the son of Tsadok said:
"The custom of the people of Yerushalayim was as follows:
"When a person left his house in the morning he had his lulav in his hand. When he came to the synagogue he kept his lulav in his hand. When he recited the Shema he held the lulav in his hand. When he read that day's portion of the Torah or, if he was a kohen, when he raised his hands to bless the people he would lay the lulav down. When he went to visit the sick or console mourners he would again take the lulav in his hand.*

But when he entered the study hall to study the Torah he would send the lulav home with his son, his servant, or his messenger."

Chapter Thirteen

The Four Species as Reminders of the Past

The Torah reveals another dimension to the four species. They also serve as reminders of the history of the Jewish people. They symbolize the patriarchs and matriarchs and the illustrious leaders who guided them for many generations. The Midrash tells us (Vayikra Rabah 30:10):

It is written, The fruit of beautiful trees (Vayikra 23:40).

This refers to our forefather Avraham whom the Holy Blessed One adorned with a ripe old age, as it is written, And Avraham grew old (Beraishis 24:1). The Hebrew usage in this verse is similar to that of the verse, And you shall adorn the face of the old (Vayikra 19:32).

The verse continues, Branches of palm trees (Vayikra 23:40).

The Hebrew word used here for branches, in a variant form, also means tied. This is a reference to our forefather Yitzchak who was tied and fettered and offered up as a sacrifice on the Akeida by his father Avraham.

The verse continues, And twigs of myrtle trees (Ibid.).

This refers to our forefather Yaakov who was closely involved with his many children, just as the stalk of the hadas is tightly wrapped in its leaves.

The verse concludes, And willows of the brook (Ibid.).

This refers to Yosef. Just as the aravah is the least durable of the four species, shriveling up before the others, so too did Yosef die before the rest of his brothers.

Otherwise: It is written, The fruit of beautiful trees (Vayikra 23:40).

This refers to our matriarch Sarah whom the Holy Blessed One adorned with a ripe old age, as it is written, And Avraham and Sarah grew old (Beraishis 18:11).

The verse continues, Branches of palm trees (Vayikra 23:40).

This refers to our matriarch Rivkah. Just as the palm tree produces edible growths and thorny growths, so too did Rivkah produce a righteous son and an evil son, Yaakov and Eisay.

The verse continues, And twigs of myrtle trees (Ibid.).

This refers to our matriarch Leah who had many children, just as the hadas has many leaves.

The verse concludes, And willows of the brook (Ibid.).

This refers to our matriarch Rachel. Just as the Aravah is less durable than the other species, being the first to shrivel up, so too did Rachel die before her sister Leah.

&&It is particularly appropriate to recall the great men and women of our history on the festival of Sukkos, which is called "the festival for God" (Vayikra 23:41). This is the festival during which we acknowledge that we must thank Hashem for all we possess, during which we reaffirm our total faith and trust in Him. We must also realize that we ourselves are very often unworthy of the good that Hashem gives to us but that we are nevertheless granted these blessings because of the merit of our illustrious ancestors. We must, therefore, be doubly grateful to Hashem for letting us benefit from the merit of our ancestors, even if we ourselves are undeserving.

Indeed, we should thank Him for this kindness every day, but at least during the festival commemorating our indebtedness to Him we must not neglect to do so.

Chapter Fourteen

The Four Species Represent the Jewish People

In yet another dimension, the four species represent a cross section of the Jewish people:

The esrog has both taste and fragrance. As such it resembles those Jewish people who are both righteous in deeds and Torah scholars. Good deeds are considered fragrance because people enjoy the aroma of the presence of the righteous. Wisdom is considered taste because people can gain concrete benefit for themselves by learning from Torah scholars. Thus, the esrog, which is first-mentioned in the Torah, and is taken in a separate hand from the other three species, symbolizes the ideal Jew who is first among his people.

The lulav branch stands for the palm tree which produces edible fruit but no fragrance. Thus, it symbolizes those Jewish people who are Torah Scholars but are not especially righteous. Their wisdom provides taste for other people, but there is no delightful aroma in their presence.

The hadas twig stands for the myrtle tree which has a fragrant aroma but produces no fruit. Thus, it symbolizes those Jewish people who are righteous but not proficient Torah scholars. These people give off a wonderful fragrance, but they do not provide concrete taste.

Finally, the aravah twig stands for the willow tree which has neither fragrant aroma nor fruit. Thus, it symbolizes those Jewish people who are neither righteous in their deeds nor Torah scholars.

By gathering all four of these species together we are showing that if all of the Jewish people will unite in prayer the Holy

Blessed One will surely listen to their prayers. The Midrash tells us (Vayikra Rabah 30:11):

%It is written, The fruit of beautiful trees (Vayikra 23:40).

This refers to some of the Jewish people. Just as the esrog provides fragrance and food, so too are there some Jewish people who possess Torah and good deeds.

The verse goes on, Branches of palm trees (Ibid.).

This refers to some of the Jewish people. Just as the palm tree provides food but no fragrance, so too are there some Jewish people who possess Torah but not many good deeds.

The verse continues, And twigs of myrtle trees (Ibid.).

This refers to some of the Jewish people. Just as the myrtle tree provides fragrance but no food, so too are there some Jewish people who possess good deeds but not much Torah.

The verse concludes, And willows of the brook (Ibid.).

This refers to some of the Jewish people. Just as the willow tree provides neither fragrance nor food, so too are there some Jewish people who possess nothing, neither many good deeds nor much Torah.

The Holy Blessed One said: "I do not wish to destroy this final group. Therefore, let all the groups join together, and they will atone for each other.

"And if you do so I will Myself ascend, as it is written, That builds His steps in the heavens and He has established His union on the earth (Amos 9:6)."

Therefore, Moshe directed the Jewish people, And you shall take for yourselves the fruit of beautiful trees...(Vayikra 23:40).

&&The Talmud phrases this aspect of the four species in slightly different terms. It tells us that the four species vary according to taste and fragrance, signifying that Torah scholars are

obliged to pray that the householders be protected from all forms of calamity (Menachos 27a).

Elsewhere, the Talmud expands on the interdependence of the different groups of Jewish people (Chulin 92a):

%%Rabbi Shimeon the son of Lakish said: "The Jewish nation is compared to a grapevine. Its householders are the branches; its Torah scholars are the clusters of grapes; its ignorant folk are the leaves; its worthless are the tendrils.

"This explains the message that was sent from the land of Yisrael to us here in Bavel: 'Let the grape-clusters pray for the leaves, for without the leaves the grape-clusters could not survive.' "

&&In other words, let the Torah scholars pray for the ignorant folk, for it is the ignorant folk who provide them with their material needs and enable them to study the Torah.

Clearly, the multiple meanings and symbols within the mitzvah of taking the four species, as discussed in these last few chapters, make it a very important mitzvah. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that if we fulfill these mitzvos properly it is as if we had brought a sacrifice to Hashem in its appointed time (Sukkah 45a):

%%Rabbi Abahu said: "Whoever fulfills the mitzvah of the lulav in its binding with the hadasim tied alongside is considered to have built an altar and to have sacrificed a burnt offering upon it, as it is written, Bind up the festival with cords up to the corners of the altar (Tehillim 118:27)."

...Rabbi Yochanan from Mechuza said in the name of Rabbi Yosi from Mechuza: "Whoever binds the festival together with food and drink³⁷ is considered to have built an

³⁷ [Translator's note: Rashi explains that this refers to the festival itself being bound up and focused on celebration. Rashi also brings another view that this refers to the extension of the festivities for an additional day.]

altar and to have sacrificed a burnt-offering upon it, as it is written, Bind up the festival... (Ibid.). "

Chapter Fifteen

The Intermediate Days of the Festivals

&&The days of Chol Hamo'ed, the common or intermediate days of the festival, are the days in between the first and seventh days of Pesach and the first and eighth days of Sukkos. Although the Torah does not specifically prohibit the thirty-nine forbidden labors of Shabbos on these days our Sages did place restrictions upon the types of labor permitted on these days. The Talmud tells us (Chagigah 18a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: It is written, You shall observe the Festival of Matzos, seven days... (Shemos 23:15). This teaches that labor is forbidden during the intermediate days of the festival³⁸, " so said Rabbi Yoshiah.

Rabbi Yonasan says: "The rules for the greater can be inferred from the rules for the lesser. If during the first and seventh days of the festival, which do not have holiness both before and after them, labor is forbidden, the intermediate days of the festival, which do have holiness both before and after them, should certainly carry a prohibition against labor.

"The six ordinary weekdays, however, refute this reasoning, for they have holiness both in the Shabbos before them and in the Shabbos after them but do not carry a prohibition against labor.

³⁸ [Translator's note: Rashi explains the use of the Hebrew word used here for "observe", which also can mean 'guard', indicates a prohibition. In other words, guard the festival from forbidden labors.]

"On the other hand, the intermediate days of the festival are not really comparable to ordinary weekdays, for there is a special mussaf sacrifice brought on each of the intermediate days but not on ordinary weekdays.

"Still, the Rosh Chodesh at the beginning of each month refutes this logic, for although a mussaf sacrifice is brought on Rosh Chodesh it does not carry a prohibition against labor.

"Rosh Chodesh is not really comparable to the intermediate days of the festival, for Rosh Chodesh is not designated a 'holy gathering' while the intermediate days are.

"Since the intermediate days of the festival are designated a 'holy gathering' it stands to reason that they should carry a prohibition against labor. "

It was also taught: "It is written, Seven days shall you bring a fire-offering to God... you shall not do any laborious work (Vayikra 23:36). This teaches that labor is forbidden during the seven intermediate days," so said Rabbi Yosi of Gallilee.

Rabbi Akiva says: "This derivation is not necessary.

"For the Scripture states, These are the festivals of God, the holy gatherings (Vayikra 23:4). To which days does this verse refer? It cannot be the first, for it is already written, A rest day (Vayikra 23:39). It cannot be the eighth, for it is already written, A rest day (Ibid.).

"Only, this verse is clearly referring to the intermediate days of the festival, telling us that they carry a prohibition against labor. "

It was also taught: It is written, For six days shall you eat matzos, and on the seventh day shall be a restraint (Devarim 16:8).

Just as the seventh day is restrained from labor, so too is the sixth day restrained from labor.

If so, it would follow that just as the seventh day is restrained from all labors, so too is the sixth restrained from all labors. Therefore, it is written, And on the seventh day shall be a restraint (Ibid). The seventh day is completely restrained from labor, but the sixth day is not completely restrained from labor.

The Torah has turned this matter over to the discretion of the Sages to decide which day carries a prohibition against labor and which does not, which particular labor is forbidden and which is not.

&&This work is not the proper place for a broad, detailed discussion of the prohibition against labor on the intermediate days of the festival. The proper place for this discussion is in *Aaron Ha'edus*.³⁹ The general rule, however, is as follows.⁴⁰

Since the prohibition against labor on the intermediate days is of Rabbinic origin, it is permitted to perform labors that serve community needs or that are necessary to avoid a loss, even a private loss. Labors that do not require craftsman's skills and labor that are necessary to fulfill festival needs are also permitted. Someone who needs to work to support himself during the festival period is also permitted to do so. All of these are permitted provided they are done discreetly and not in the common workday manner.

Although some forms of labor are permitted a person should not let himself fall into the trap of taking these days lightly. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 118a, Makos 23a):

³⁹ [Translator's note: *Aron Ha'edus* is a halachic work written by the author. It is part of a trilogy that also includes *Menoras Hamaor* and *Shulchan Hapanim*. The only work of this trilogy extant is *Menoras Hamaor*.(The Light of Contentment, Translator's Foreword and Appendix A: Ode to the Menorah.)]

⁴⁰ [Translator's note: *Menoras Hamaor* is not a practical guide to Halacha and should not be used as such. For authoritative halachic opinion a Rav should be consulted.]

%%Rav Shashess said: "Whoever scorns the festivals is compared to one who worships idols, as it is written, You shall not make for yourselves molten deities (Shemos 34:17), followed by, You shall observe the Festival of Matzos for seven days (Shemos 34:18).

&&The final day of the intermediate days of the festival of Sukkos is called Hoshana Rabah. The night before Hoshana Rabah is called "the Night of the Seal". Some say that this is because the rainfall for the year is decreed on the festival of Sukkos, the judgment being sealed on the final day of the festival. Others say that this day marks the final sealing of the judgment on people. The Ramban finds an intimation to this view in that which is written, Their protection is removed from them (Bamidbar 14:9). The Hebrew word for shade is used here to express protection, indicating that the shade of the sukkah is protective. Thus, the end of the festival of Sukkos makes way for the final execution of the judgment. This is the prevalent view.

On Hoshana Rabah there is a heightened sense of the festival. Houses are brightly lit and meals are large and sumptuous, as on the festival itself. There are additional songs and prayers for this day. And on this day we take a separate aravah as a remembrance of the Bais Hamikdash. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 44a):

%%It was said: Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi had a difference of opinion.

One said: "The taking of the aravah on Hoshana Rabah was a law enacted by the later prophets. "

The other said: "The taking of the aravah on Hoshana Rabah was a custom of the later prophets. "

...Ayyu said: "I was standing before Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Tsadok, and someone brought him an aravah. He took it and beat it on the ground, but he did not recite a blessing over it. "

Apparently, Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Tsadok held that it was a custom rather than a law and, therefore, it did not require a blessing.

Chapter Sixteen

Shemini Atzeres

&&The eighth day of the festival of Sukkos is called 'Shemini Atzeres' - the eighth, the day of restraint.

The Midrash tells us that this is because the Holy Blessed One said to the people of Yisrael: "I have held you back with Me, just as a king who invites his children to join him in a feast for a prearranged number of days. When the time comes for them to go he tells them: 'I ask you to please linger with me for but one more day. Your departure is difficult for me.'"

The Pesikta tells us (Piska 30):

%%Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "It would have been appropriate for the Atzeres day of the festival of Sukkos to be fifty days after Sukkos, just as the festival of Shavuos, which is also called Atzeres⁴¹, comes fifty days after the festival of Pesach.

"There is an analogy to this. A king was celebrating a joyous occasion. He had some married daughters who lived close by and others who lived far away. Those who lived close by were able to leave and come back at will, but those who lived far away could not come and go so easily.

"The king said to those who lived far away: 'Stay over, and you and I will celebrate for yet one more day.'

⁴¹ [Translator's note: See Chapter Six.]

Since the Pesach festivals comes when winter is turning to summer, it comes at a time when the people of Yisrael find it easy to come and go. Therefore, the Atzeres day can be fifty days removed from the festival.

"The Sukkos festival, however, comes when the summer is turning to winter. It is a time when it is difficult to travel the roads, a time of hardship. It is a time when the people of Yisrael do not find it easy to come and go.

"Therefore, the Holy Blessed One said: 'Stay over, and you and I will celebrate for yet one more day. '

"And indeed, we find that the Atzeres is for Hashem and for the people of Yisrael together. For it is written, You shall have a restraint (Bamidbar 29:35), and it is written, A restraint for God your Lord (Devarim 16:8).

"And it is also written, This is the day that God made, we will exult and rejoice on it (Tehillim 118:24)."

&The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 55b):

%%Rabbi Levi said: "During the seven days of Sukkos a total of seventy oxen are brought as sacrifices. What is the significance of this number?"

"It represents the seventy gentile nations of the world.

"And the single ox brought on Shemini Atzeres?"

"It represents the Jewish nation which has been singled out from among them.

"There is an analogy to this. The servants of a mortal king of flesh and blood prepared a feast for him. On the final day of the festivities the king said to his favorite servant:

'Make me a small meal so that I can have enjoyment from you alone. ' "'

Rabbi Yochanan said: "Woe is to the gentile nations, for they have suffered a loss and are not even aware of it. While the Bais Hamikdash was still standing there were sacrifices

brought on the altar that atoned for them. Now, what is there to atone for them?"

&&There are some communities where it is customary to read the Book of Koheles on Shemini Atzeres. The Midrash finds mention of Shemini Atzeres in that which is written, Give a portion to seven, and also to eight (Koheles 11:2). This is taken as a reference to the seven days of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres (Koheles Rabah 11:2). Shlomo Hamelech, however read the Book of Koheles at the assembly during the festival of Sukkos.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to read it on Sukkos itself.

The pious people of our early times used to rejoice in the Bais Hamikdash on this festival, because it was especially set aside for the Jewish people to celebrate with the Lord of their fathers. This joy was a holy joy for the sake of heaven, and it was very great. The Talmud tells us (Sukkah 51a):

%%[The Mishnah says:] The pious people and men of deeds used to dance with lighted torches in their hands, singing songs and hymns of praise. And the Leviim played violins, harps, drums, cymbals, and countless instruments of every sort on the fifteen steps between the men's section and the women's section. These were the fifteen steps upon which the Leviim sang their daily songs. They corresponded to the fifteen Songs of the Steps from the Book of Tehillim.

&&The Talmud goes on (Sukkah 53a):

%%[The Gemara says:] Our rabbis have taught: Some of the celebrants would call out: "How fortunate is our youth, for it has not embarrassed our old age!"

These were the pious people and men of deeds who had always lived righteous lives.

Others would call out: "How fortunate is our old age, for it has atoned for our youth!"

These were the baalei teshuvah who had sinned and repented.

Both groups would call out: "Fortunate is the one who has not sinned! But let the Holy Blessed One forgive the one who has sinned. "

It was taught: It was said of Hillel the Elder that when he rejoiced at the water-drawing festivities on Sukkos he would say: "If the Divine Presence is here everyone is here, but if the Divine Presence is removed who will be here?"

"And the Holy Blessed One also says: 'If you will come to My house I will also come to your house, as it is written, In every place where I shall make My Name be mentioned I will come to you, and I will bless you (Shemos 20:24).' "

...It was taught: It was said of Rabban Shimeon the son of Gamaliel that when he rejoiced at the water-drawing festivities on Sukkos he would juggle eight flaming torches in the air, and they would not touch each other. He would drive both thumbs into the ground and bend over until he kissed the ground. No other part of his body touched the ground. This was something no one else could do. This was the keedah bow mentioned in the Scriptures.

...Our rabbis have taught: Whoever did not witness the celebration at the water-drawing festivities in the Bais Hamikdash on Sukkos never saw a true celebration.

Chapter Seventeen

Festival Celebration

&&Laborious work is forbidden during the festivals, just as it is forbidden on Shabbos. The only difference between the festivals and Shabbos is that labors are permitted on the festivals if they are needed for holiday use. Carrying and lighting a fire are permitted even if the holiday use is very slight.⁴²

The laws of the festivals are less stringent in order to heighten our enjoyment of them. The punishment for violation of festival laws is also less severe than the punishment for violation of Shabbos laws. However, as regards the rules of muktzah and telling a gentile to perform a labor the laws of the festival are more stringent than the laws of Shabbos. The details of these laws are discussed at length in *Aron Ha'edus*.⁴³

When the Bais Hamikdash was still standing the people used to come together from all over the Holy Land to celebrate in Yerushalayim. The Talmud tells us that the Holy Blessed One found these celebrations beautiful (Sukkah 49b, Chagigah 3a). And since their joyous gathering was to honor the Name of Heaven they were protected from the perils of the road, and no damage befell the unprotected homes they left behind. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 8b):

%%Rabbi Elazar said: "Harm does not befall people travelling to perform a mitzvah, neither on the way there, nor on the return trip."

⁴² See Footnote 43.

⁴³ See Footnote 42.

Whose opinion does this follow?

It follows that which was taught: Isi the son of Yeliudah says: "It is written, And no man shall lust after your land when you go up to appear before God your Lord three times during the year (Shemos 34:24).

"This teaches us that when you go up to Yerushalayim to celebrate the festivals you will leave your cow grazing in the pasture and no wild beast will attack it, your rooster foraging in the rubbish and no cat will attack it.

"If the Torah tells us that your property will be protected even from common hazards, certainly it will be protected from all other hazards as well.

"It has been established that your property will be protected while you are on your way to Yerushalayim. How do we know that this protection extends even to your return trip?

"For it is written, And you shall turn about in the morning and return to your tents (Devarim 16:7). This comes to teach that you will find your tents at peace."

&&Although the Bais Hamikdash, by our sins, has been destroyed and we can no longer gather to celebrate in Yerushalayim, we are still obliged to celebrate the festivals joyously to honor the Name of Heaven. Each person, according to his means, is required to go to extra expense to make these festivals joyous occasions. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 109a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: A person is required to cheer up his household during the festivals, as it is written, And you shall rejoice during the festival, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your bondsman, and your bondswoman, and the Levi, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, that are within your gates (Devarim 16:14).

And with what does one cheer them up?

Rabbi Yehudah says: "Men are cheered up with things appropriate for men, and women with things appropriate for women."

It is understood that things appropriate for men means wine; what are things appropriate for women?

Rav Yosef said: "In Bavel this would be colored garments, in the land of Yisrael pressed linen garments. "

It was taught: Rabbi Yehudah the son of Besaira says: 'During the time when the Bais Hamikdash was standing celebration meant eating the meat of the shelamim sacrifice, as it is written, And you shall slaughter shelamim sacrifices, and you shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before God your Lord (Devarim 27:7).

"But now that the Bais Hamikdash is no longer standing celebration means wine, as it is written, And wine will gladden the heart of people (Tehillim 104:15)."

&Not the entire time, however, should be devoted to feasting. The Talmud tells us that part of the time should be set aside for studying the Torah (Pesachim 68b).

It was the custom in the times of our Sages to spend the first half of the day studying the laws pertaining to the festival and the rest of the day celebrating at home with family and guests to honor the Name of Heaven. The Talmud tells us that those who left the house of study early were considered drunkards (Beitsah 15b):

Our rabbis have taught: It happened that Rabbi Eliezer was sitting and expounding the laws of the festivals.

When the first group got up and left he said: "This group must leave early because it has obviously prepared large barrels of wine."

When the second group got up and left he said: "This group has prepared casks of wine. "

When the third group got up and left he said: "This group has prepared jugs of wine."

When the fourth group got up and left he said: "This group has prepared flasks of wine. "

When the fifth group got up and left he said: "This group has prepared cups of wine. "

When the sixth group got up to leave he said: "This group is cursed, because they have nothing prepared and still they leave the house of study.

"How long will all of these people stay away from the house of study?"

He turned his scowling look upon his disciples. When his disciples saw his frightening expression their faces turned color.

He said to them: "My children, I was not speaking of you but of those people who forsake everlasting life and occupy themselves with the fleeting concerns of the moment. "

When the time came for them to leave he quoted to them: "My children, Go eat delicacies, and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to one for whom nothing has been prepared, for this day is holy for our Lord, and be not saddened, for the joy of God, that is your fortress (Nechemiah 8:10)."

What is the meaning of "to one for whom nothing has been prepared"?

Rav Chisda said: "This means someone who did not leave an Eruv Tavshilin.⁴⁴"

What is the meaning of "for the joy of God, that is your fortress"?

Rabbi Yochanan said: "The Holy Blessed One said to the Jewish people: 'My children, borrow on My account if you need, and sanctify the day, and trust Me that I will repay you.'"

⁴⁴ [Translator's note: This refers to a Rabbinic enactment that applies when Shabbos falls on the second day of the festival. A special dish is prepared before the festival and allowed to stand over until after Shabbos. This permits one to prepare for Shabbos even on the holiday itself.]

&&The Talmud goes on to explain that the expenditures of Shabbos and the festivals do not affect a person's income (Beitsah 16a):

%%It was taught: A person's annual income is decreed on every Rosh Hashanah. Not included, however, are the expenditures for Shabbos, the expenditures for the festivals, and the expense of teaching children the Torah. If a person skimps on these expenses his income is accordingly diminished; if he spends lavishly his income is accordingly increased.

&&Indeed, the joy of the festivals is especially great for all Jews because they are not accustomed to celebrating during the ordinary days of the year. It is especially great, however, for those Jews who do not live in the land of Yisrael. The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 145b):

%%Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba and Rav Asi were sitting before Rabbi Yochanan, and Rabbi Yochanan was dozing off as he was sitting.

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba asked Rav Asi: "Why are the birds of Bavel fatter than the birds of the land of Yisrael?"

Rav Asi replied: "Go to the Azah Desert in Yisrael, and you will see birds that are even fatter."

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba asked: "Why are the festival celebrations in Bavel more joyous than in the land of Yisrael?"

Rav Asi replied: "Because the people are poor and do not have many occasions to celebrate."

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba asked: "Why are the Torah scholars in Bavel so well dressed?"

Rav Asi replied: "Because they are not sufficiently immersed in the Torah, and they must seek honor by their impressive appearance. "

Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba asked: "Why are the gentile nations polluted?"

Rav Asi replied: "Because they eat insects and reptiles."

Though half asleep, Rabbi Yochanan had overheard this conversation, and upon awakening, he said: "Haven't I taught you that which is written, Say to wisdom, You are my sister (Mishlei 7:4)? If you are sure of what you are saying as you are sure that your sister is forbidden to you then say it. Otherwise do not say it."

They asked him: "Would the master then tell us the answers to these questions..."

"Why are the festival celebrations in Bavel so joyous?"

He replied: "Because only people living in Yisrael are subject to the curse of that which is written, And I will remove all her gladness, her festival... (Hoshaya 2:13)."

&&The Pesikta tells us that we should share our festival celebration with those less fortunate than ourselves, and we will be properly rewarded (Piska 100:1):

%%Rabbi Luliani of Rome said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah the son of Seemon: "The Holy Blessed One said to the people of Yisrael: 'You have four kinds of household members—your sons, your daughters, your bondsmen, and your bondswomen. And I have four kinds of household members—the Levi, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.'

"All of these different people are included in the same verse, And you shall rejoice during the festival, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your bondsman, and your bondswoman, and the Levi, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, that are within your gates (Devarim 16:14).

"The Holy Blessed One said: 'I told you to include both my household members as well as yours in the celebration

of the festivals I have given you. In the future I will include your household members as well as mine in celebration.

"Where will I make them rejoice?"

"In the Bais Hamikdash, as it is written, And I will bring them to My holy mountain, and I will make them joyful in My House of prayer (Yeshayahu 56:7).'"