

Happy Simchat Beit Hashoavah!

"With joy shall you draw waters out of the wells of salvation (Ha-Yeshua)!" (Isa. 12:3)

{A Little background}. The Eight days of Sukkot are known collectively as *the days of our rejoicing / gladness*. Major events have taken place during this festival throughout Scripture. Today's festival is known as *Shemini Atzeret*: the eight-day of assembly in Scripture. It is also referred to as *Simchat Beit Hashoavah*: *Rejoicing in the place of the Water Drawing*. This is the name of the water libation ceremony. We don't know exactly when the water libation ceremony was actually instituted, but it predates the second temple based on Jewish Writings. It can be easy to dismiss many of the traditions found in the oral law, however, *Yeshua* participated in many of them, which should cause us to evaluate those in greater detail.

Simchat Beit Hashoavah

"He who has not seen the Water-Drawing Celebration has never seen joy in his life (Talmud)."

Every Jewish festival is celebrated with joy. Often there are additional emotions added to the mix: *awe* on *Yom Teruah*, *regret* on *Yom Kippur*, and *freedom from oppression* on *Passover*. But for the holiday of *Sukkot* it is *pure joy*. In High Holiday prayers, it is simply called *the season of our rejoicing* or *Simchat Simchateinu*

One of *Sukkot's* most joyous observances was known as *Simchat Beit Hashoavah*, the *Celebration of the Water-Drawing*. When the Holy Temple stood, every sacrifice included wine libations poured over the altar (*1/4 Hin up to a full Hin = 6 liters*). On *Sukkot*, water was also poured over the altar in a special ceremony. This ritual engendered such joy that it was celebrated with music, dancing and singing all night long. Every morning of *Sukkot* at daybreak, a group of Levites and priests went down to the *Shiloach* stream (*Pool of Siloam*), which ran south of the Temple Mount, and drew three log (a *Talmudic* liquid measurement) of fresh water to be poured on the altar after the daily morning sacrifice. Their arrival at the Temple with the water was accompanied by trumpet blasts. (For *Shabbat*, the water was collected before the onset of *Shabbat* and stored in a golden vessel in the Temple.)

There were two holes in the altar into which liquid was poured. One hole was for the wine that accompanied every sacrifice, and a second, smaller one was reserved for the *Sukkot* water. The holes were different sizes to allow the wine and water, which have different consistencies, to drain at the same speed. The nights of *Sukkot* were spent celebrating this once-a-year offering. The *Talmud* describe the celebrations of *Simchat Beit Hashoavah* in detail: Priests kindled fires on great candelabra, lighting up Jerusalem as if it were the middle of the day. Throughout the night pious men danced holding torches, scholars juggled and Levites played music while the lay people watched with excitement. The Temple courtyard was specially furnished to accommodate this event, and a balcony was erected for women so they could observe the revelry.

At dawn, as the rejoicing subsided, the priests enacted what some have identified as the transformation of another folk rite, one to rekindle a diminishing sun approaching the autumnal equinox. With trumpet blasts, the *Kohanim* (priests) descended the steps to the Women's Court, marched to the Eastern Gate, turned their faces west to the Temple, and proclaimed, *"Our fathers who were in this place stood with their backs to the Temple and their faces eastward and worshipped the sun, but our eyes are unto the Adonai"* (based on *Ezekiel 8:16*).

Even today many communities still celebrate *Simchat Beit Hashoavah* with music and dancing during the nights of *Sukkot*, in keeping with the *Torah's* directive, *"You shall rejoice on your holiday"*. Why was this event accompanied by such fanfare and celebration? Part of the answer is that Jews of old were happy to demonstrate

their fidelity to tradition, even those traditions not specified in the *Torah*. In addition, the water-drawing was said to be accompanied by a great awareness of *Godliness*, to the degree that it is said that, along with water, people would *draw* prophetic revelation. The Chassidic masters explain that the water celebration signifies a joy caused by a connection to God so deep and so true that, like water, it has no describable taste. And like water, it sustains all life.

The Bible records an event during the Feast of Tabernacles that merits our attention. During the water libation ritual *Yeshua* stood up and cried out declaring that He was *living water* (*Mayim Chaim*). Imagine the festivities, right after the morning (*Shaharit*) service... *Yeshua* was present but not everyone knew He was certainly going to *Sukkot*. He apparently had spent several days at the Temple teaching people. Night after night and day after day, they would rehearse the water libation ceremony and ask the Almighty to bring the rain that the land of Israel desperately needs annually. So, here they are praying for the living rain that creates rivers to come, and the answer to the prayer is standing there, literally!

"²Now the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) was near. ³Therefore His brothers said to Him 'Leave here and go to Judea, so Your disciples also may see the works You are doing'...¹⁴About halfway through the Feast, Yeshua went up to the Temple and began teaching...³⁷On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Yeshua stood up and cried out loudly, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture says, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' ³⁹Now He said this about the Ruach, whom those who trusted in Him were going to receive; for the Ruach was not yet given, since Yeshua was not yet glorified. ⁴⁰When they heard these words, some of the crowd said, 'This man really is the Prophet.' ⁴¹Others were saying, 'This is the Messiah.' Still others were saying, 'The Messiah doesn't come from the Galilee, does He? ⁴²Didn't the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, David's town?'" (John 7:2-3, 14, 37-42)

Happy *Simchat Beit Hashoavah!* and *Shabbat Shalom!* in *Yeshua!*