**Notes from the Cantor**

At this time of year, the holidays that tend to be most on people's minds are Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. If we can get past those days, we might also be thinking about Sukkot, and maybe even Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. But one holiday that almost never gets mentioned is Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh and final day of Sukkot.

Hoshana Rabbah is a day that exists because our God gives not only second chances, but third and fourth chances. If Rosh Hashana is the day when our fates for the upcoming year are written, and Yom Kippur is the day when they are sealed, Sukkot is our chance to put in a final good word with God before the books of life and death are put away for the year. In particular, as the holiday that concludes the harvest season and inaugurates the rainy season in the land of Israel, Sukkot historically became the time to beg God for rain in the upcoming year. It truly was a time when our fates for the coming year would be decided. Would there be rain, and food for the next year? Or would the rains fail to come, and cause a year of hardship?

This is why we march in a circle every day of Sukkot with our *lulav* and *etrog*, asking God to save us, *hoshana*. Hoshana Rabbah, or the Great Hoshana, is the climax of these fervent prayers. It is our very, very last chance to get in a good word with God for this year. In many ways, it is the true endpoint of the season of *teshuvah* that began back at the beginning of Elul. Because of this, the Hoshana Rabbah morning service includes elements of the High Holiday service, as well as the weekday-Festival service for the last day of Sukkot. Hoshana Rabbah services culminate with not one, but seven circles around the *bimah* with our *lulav* – one circle for each day of Sukkot that has led us here, a final cry to God to save us, please. At the end of these seven circles, we take the willow branches from our *lulav* and smash them on the floor, a somewhat mysterious ritual that marks the climactic conclusion to our seven days of praying with the *lulav*.

This year I will be leading a Hoshana Rabbah service here at BSBI, on Sunday morning, September 30. Hoshana Rabbah may be an obscure holiday, but when observed in the full spirit of the day, it can be a deeply spiritual and moving cry of the heart. I hope you will join me to experience this unique and meaningful day.