

# DIVREI TORAH FOR YAMIM NORA'IM



THE JEWISH CENTER YOUTH DEPARTMENT



THE JEWISH CENTER  
THE MODERN ORTHODOX CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE AND LEARNING  
131 W. 86TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10024

# **Traditional Foods of Rosh Hashanah**

**Sarah, The Brearley School, 10th Grade &  
Daniel Wagman, The Dalton School, 8th Grade**

On Rosh Hashanah, we eat many delicious foods at each meal. In addition to their great taste, though, many of these foods are also symbols for the new year. Since Rosh Hashanah is the time where our fate will be decided for the next year, we eat these foods (which are often called simanim) to symbolize good wishes for the year ahead.

For example, we eat honey on everything from apples to challah to cake in order to symbolize a shana tova u'metuka. Since honey is filled with ooey gooey sweet deliciousness, we hope that it will also make the year ahead sweet for us too.

Another traditional Rosh Hashanah food is round challahs. Even though we eat challah at every Shabbos and Yom Tov meal, there is something special about the challah we eat on Rosh Hashanah: it is round! Rosh Hashanah is a holiday that shows us that life is cyclical. When a year comes to an end, a new one immediately starts. So, a round challah depicts this circle of life for us at our Yom Tov meals.

On the second night of Rosh Hashanah, we eat exotic, new fruits, such as dragonfruit, gooseberries, or kumquats. (Can you think of any others that your family eats?) Since this is the first time that we are eating these fruits in a year, we make a shehecheyanu blessing, which thanks God for enabling us to try new things. And, this new fruit helps us feel a sense of newness and freshness about the upcoming year.

Some other simanim are based on wordplay or puns. Some fruits and vegetables have names in Hebrew that kind of sound similar to other words, like beet (silka), which sounds like the word for 'will go away' (yistalku). So, we say a prayer for our enemies and haters to go away and then eat the beets. Another example of this is the date, or tamar, which sounds like the word for 'will end', or yitamu. Just like with the beets, we say a prayer, this time for an end to be put to our enemies and haters, and then eat the dates.

In addition, other simanim have attributes that we want our new year to have as well. For instance, the pomegranate has many seeds so we eat it on Rosh Hashanah and recite a prayer to have as many blessings as the pomegranate has seeds. We also have a tradition of eating fish (especially the head, which represents the head of a new year), so that we will multiply and be fruitful like fish.

Rosh Hashanah is certainly a time for festive and yummy meals, and it is very fun to include special foods and symbols in your meal to wish for an exceptionally blessed and wonderful new year. At your next meal, try thinking about how you can connect some of your foods to blessings and wishes for the new year - there are many more symbolic foods than the ones that we listed. The upcoming holiday is a great time to incorporate your faith into your meals in new and exciting ways and we hope that you have a great holiday and a shana tova!

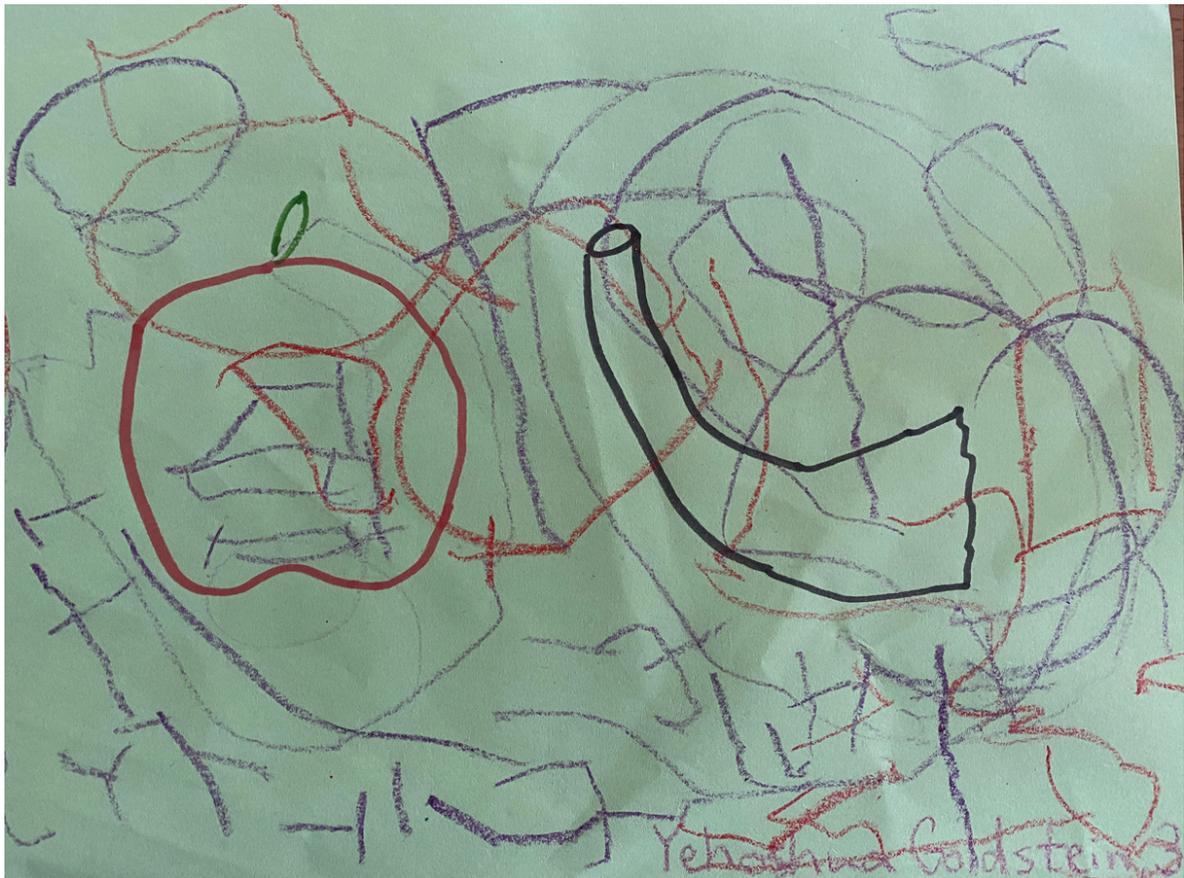
# Caleb's sweet challah recipe for RH (adapted from chabad of the west side recipe)

Caleb Friedman, Shefa, 1st grade

- 1 packet yeast
- 1 1/3 cup warm water
- 1/3 cup + 1 t sugar
- 1/3 cup oil
- 1 egg
- 4-5 cups flour
- 2 t salt
- Lots of pareve chocolate chips (enjoy life brand is a good one)

Preheat oven to 350

Put the yeast in a bowl with the warm water and 1 t sugar. Wait for bubbles. Then add all the other ingredients (make sure to use lots of chocolate chips). And knead well. Let the dough rise for about 2 hours. Shape into a round circles like a snail shell and bake about 35 Min. This recipe makes about 3-4 rounds.

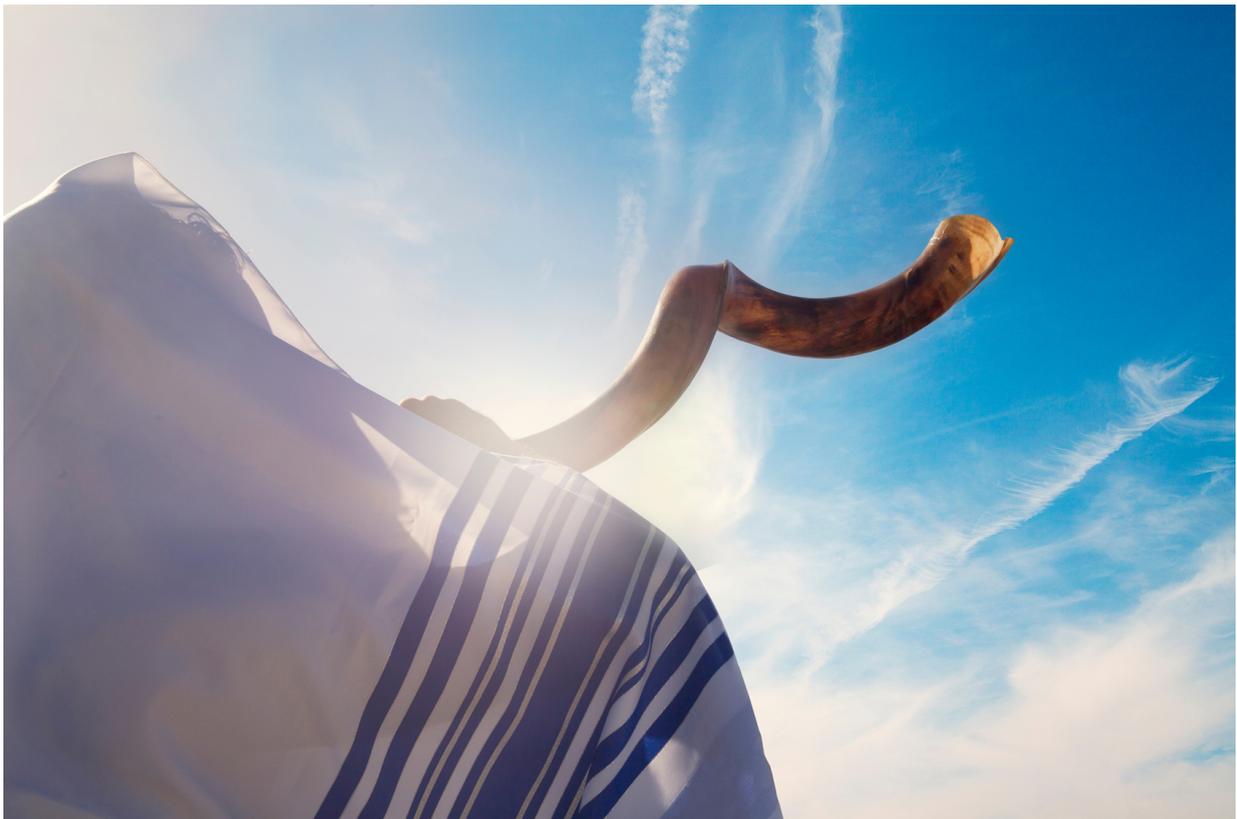


Yehoshua Goldstein  
3 years old

# Yom Kippur, A Day of Atonement

Aaron Solomons, Group Leader, Freshman at FIT

What is the Day of Atonement? Why do we need Yom Kippur and where does it come from? Yom Kippur comes right after Rosh Hashanah because the Jewish people need a fresh start for the new year. We need to atone for all of our wrongdoings of the past year and focus on all of the good things we plan to do in the upcoming year. When the Israelites received the Torah from Mount Sinai they made a mistake; they did not trust Hashem and sinned by building a golden calf idol. Humans are imperfect beings and that is why we have Hashem to look up to in order to perfect ourselves as much as possible. After the Israelites first major sin, a permanent day of atonement was established so that all future members of the Jewish nation would be able to take responsibility for their actions. And that is paramount; Hashem gives us a chance to say we're sorry and that we'll try our best from now on.



# Tashlich

## Orli Segall, Group Leader

The ritual of Tashlich is done by a body of flowing water, usually on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. (This year it will be performed on the second day, as the first day of Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbat.) We recite special tefillot before Rosh Hashanah and until Yom Kippur because the words of these prayers help us to focus on what we have done wrong to Hashem and our fellow man in the past year and we want to do teshuvah and ask for forgiveness from Hashem (and of course, any person who we have wronged). Tashlich is one of those special group of tefillot.

In commenting on the Tashlich ritual, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks cites Rabbi Moellin, who tells us that one reason behind Tashlich is that it is tied to the story of the akedat Yitzchak. On Rosh Hashanah we blow the shofar, and the horn of the animal we use is a ram, which reminds us of the ram that Avraham sacrificed instead of sacrificing Yitzchak. The forgiveness we ask Hashem in front of the flowing body of water is supposed to remind us of the river that Avraham had to cross with Yitzchak on the way to the Akedah: nothing would get in the way of Avraham carrying out the will of God. This idea is also cited by Eliyahu Kitov in "The Book of Our Heritage".

Another interpretation of the reason for Tashlich is that the ritual offers us a physical representation of our sins, which we "cast" upon the fish in the water. (That is why some people have a custom to throw bread into the water. They are throwing their sins into the river for the fish to eat and carry with them.) This custom can be seen as a way to recall the annual ritual of the Seir HaMishtaleach, the "scapegoat" that was thrown off a cliff to its death by the Kohen in the time of the Bet HaMikdash. As described in the Torah in the book of Vayikra, on Yom Kippur there were two goats, one would be slaughtered as a korban, and the other would be taken to the Judean desert "L'Azazel" just beyond the temple in Jerusalem. A Kohen would push the goat over a cliff where it would fall to its death, symbolically carrying the sins of the Jewish people with him. Seeing the goat tumble to its death had a very strong visceral impact on the nation and helped them physically feel themselves unburdened from their sins. Tashlich, therefore, is a modern-day way to commemorate the Temple service and still give us a physical way to feel our sins cast off from us.

Whether Tashlich is a way to remember the scapegoat or akedat Yitzchak, we should never assume that simply by throwing bread into a body of water and by saying a few chapters from Tanach, we are free from our sins. As the Rambam teaches us, the most important responsibility each of us has at this time of year is to truly do teshuvah for our misdeeds and to commit to be better people to our family and friends, and to Hashem in the new year. If Tashlich can help us visualize our repentance and our commitment to be better people, all the better!

# What is the Reasoning Behind Tekiah Shofar Being The Mitzvah for Rosh Hashanah?

Gavriel Harmetz, Ramaz, 8th grade

Chag sameach everyone!

Every Jewish holiday has one main Mitzvah that represents it. Passover has eating matzah, Sukkot has shaking the lulav, Chanukah has lighting the chanukiah, and so on. When it comes down to the main mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah, it's hearing shofar. The Torah does not even use the name Rosh Hashana ; it simply refers to it as Yom Teruah, "day of horn-blowing". It commands this mitzvah very quickly, in half a pasuk - on the other hand, this is such an important mitzvah that chachamim in the talmud and many kabbalists discuss it at length. In particular, they have given many explanations for the meaning and order of sounds. One of the most interesting interpretations comes from Rav Nachman of Breslov, who compares the sounds to stages in spiritual development. At the lowest level, one worships God in a mechanical way because they lack self-awareness, as if they were sleepwalking. Therefore the first Tekiah is meant to wake us up, (as written by the Rambam in the Mishneh Torah). That Tekiah is just a primal sound, more similar to a scream than to words. The Teruah that follows, however, is more complex - similar to human speech, a higher level of communication. Shevarim implies an even higher level of awareness, speech plus creativity. It is this higher awareness that enables us to see the contrast between our reality and God's infinite presence, and fills us with awe - which is expressed in the final shofar sound, the Teruah.

The shape of the shofar itself, with its narrow mouthpiece and wider end opening, has been interpreted as symbolic of this progress from a narrow to an open awareness, as if it physically represented the verse from Tehillim that is recited before the shofar blowing, "From the straits I called Hashem; God answered me from the expanse".

Finally, the fact that the shofar's sound is produced by breathing into the opening mirrors the way Hashem infused life into the first man (Bereshit 2-7): what better way to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of humankind than thanking Hashem for giving us human life by breathing our love back to Him through the shofar?



# Ethan's Apple Cake Recipe

Ethan Friedman, Shefa, 4th grade

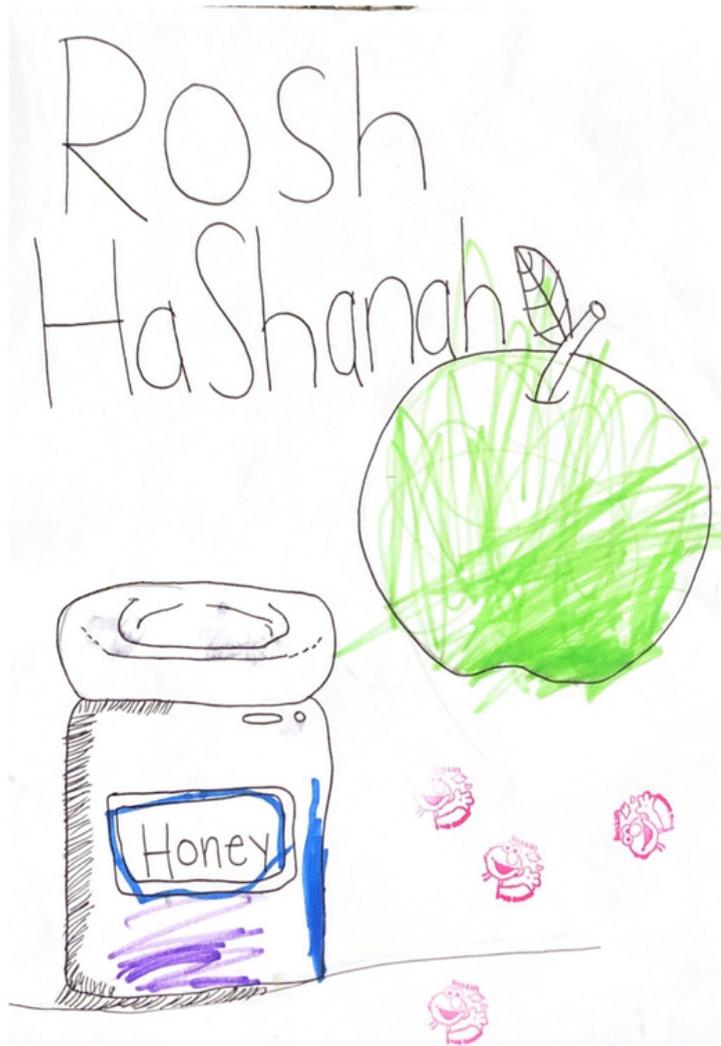
- 4 eggs
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup self rising flour
- 1 t vanilla extract
- 7 apples sliced or chopped (ask a grown up if you need help)

Preheat oven to 350

Mix eggs, sugar, and oil.

Add flour and vanilla. Mix.

Put the apples in a baking dish and pour the other mix on top. Bake 1 hr



Shiri Berger, 4 years old

# Why Bother?

## Amanda Dryer, Group Leader

Most people are ready to say goodbye to 5781, atone for their sins and with God's help, start the new year with a fresh start. After enduring such a difficult year, why bother with kapparot? There is no question that kapparot is a controversial custom. In fact, The Mechaber, who codified the Shulchan Aruch in the 16th century, believed that kapparot was "foolish" and should have been abolished. It is not far-fetched to say that a ritual that involves a live chicken being waved around a person's head could appear to look strange or foolish. To make matters worse, it could appear that this person is talking to him or herself when stating the kapparot recitation, "this exchange, this substitute, this atonement; this hen shall go to its death, but I shall go to a good, long life, and to peace." So why bother with this ancient practice? Will transferring all of our baggage, sins, and grief to a chicken, suddenly change our circumstances? Will the pandemic disappear? Will we forget about all our mistakes/ all of our shortcomings?

I do not think so but there is something that I cannot quite put my finger on that will make the process of kapparot meaningful for me this year. Our nation faces civil distress, a pandemic, and isolation; yet, there are still so many elements of our lives to be grateful for. My hope is that by engaging in kapparot this year it will inspire me to go into Rosh Hashanah with a growth mindset. Sometimes, in order to grow we have to put the past behind us. Essentially, transferring our mistakes/ our shortcomings to a chicken sounds ridiculous; however, I truly believe that sometimes we need a physical action to promote change within ourselves. This action has the potential to remind us that we are always capable of moving forward. We are always capable of recognizing our aveiyot and trying our best to improve.

There is no question that kapparot is a controversial custom, but I challenge you to change your mindset. As you wave a chicken or money in the air, engage in the process: allow yourself to not only transfer your sins, but commit yourself to doing better. May we all enter Rosh Hashana with a growth mindset and ultimately, grow closer to Hakodesh Baruch Hu. Gmar Chasima Tova!



Joseph Stokar, Anshei Lubavitch

# The Book of Yonah

Avi Flatto-Katz, Ramaz, 8th grade

If we look at the book of Yonah, the narrative is perplexing. It appears that its purpose is to teach us: "look, Nineveh was given a chance and was able to repent, and therefore so can you." But, if that were true, why would we need to hear Yonah's journey? That part of the story seems superfluous. The inescapable conclusion is that the book of Yonah is, actually, trying to teach us something entirely different.

To understand its real message, I would like to look at a Rashi in Parshat Ki Tisa. In Parshat Ki Tisa, Hashem commands Moshe to make the Ketoret, the Incense, giving him the ingredients. One of the ingredients mentioned is Chelbana, a spice that has a really bad smell. Rashi tries to understand, if the Ketoret is supposed to emit a heavenly smell, then why include a bad smelling spice? Rashi offers a beautiful explanation: he says that just like in the Ketoret, an unpleasant spice is included among the pleasant smelling spices, so too, we should welcome the sinners in our Tefilot and fasts.

In the beginning of Yonah, we are told that he tried to run away from Hashem because: "על־כן קדמתי לברח תרשישה כי ידעתי כי אתה אל־חנן ורחום ארך אפים ורב־חסד ונחם על־הרעה"; That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment".

Here Yonah is saying outright that he thinks that Hashem shouldn't give sinners a chance to do Teshuva. Then, in the fourth chapter, Hashem shows Yonah why this isn't the case, by destroying the tree that was providing Yonah shade. Yonah gets angry, and Hashem tells him: You got angry about a tree that only lived for a day, but I should not care about tens of thousands of people, because they have sinned?

Both the book of Yonah, and with the inclusion of Chelbana in the Ketoret, teach us that just because a person sinned, does not mean they don't get a chance to repent, and that we must help and include those who try to change.



# Happiness in the Hut

Sarah Cromwell, Youth Director

There is a beautiful story given over by Rabbi Yisroel Miller, of a farmer near Pittsburgh in the mid 1800s who wanted a better life for himself, and since he heard that there was oil to be discovered in Canada he sold his farm and ventured up north. The new owner of the farm, discovered that the land actually had a flow of oil valued at the time for one hundred million dollars. The farm is now a town called Titusville in Pennsylvania.

The story's significance lies in recognizing that the joke is not just on the farmer but also on us! We look for happiness and we get frustrated by the obstacles, but when we take a step back we realize that our true sources of happiness have been present all along, but sometimes we don't take the time to discover them.

Sometimes only when we go away on vacation and then return home do we realize how much home actually has to offer. Many people have searched high and low for happiness, only to discover that it's in their backyard. Although for some of us, at this point in the course of the pandemic, the appeal of leaving our home or backyard is tempting, Sukkot is offering us an opportunity to remember and understand that true happiness can be found in the sukkah in our backyard.



Jacob Ritholtz, HAFTR

# Why do we dwell in a Sukkah?

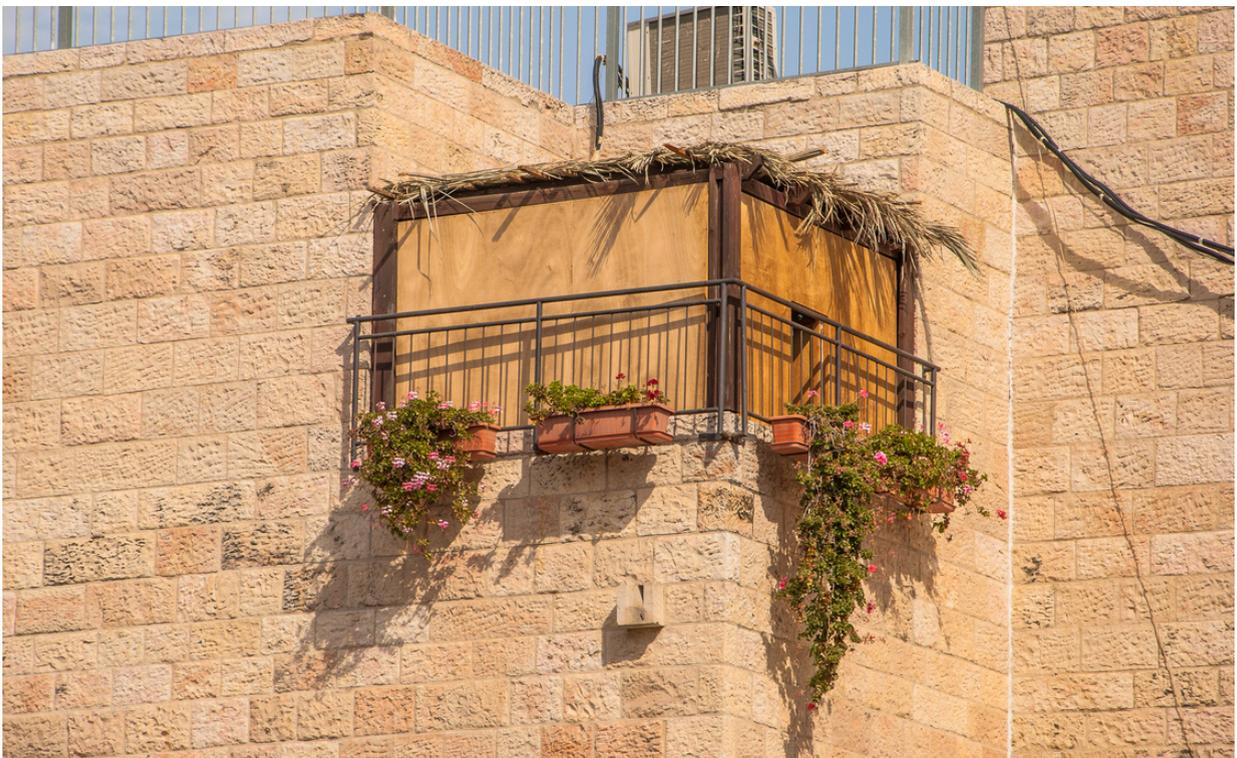
Nicole Berger, Group Leader

For a seven day period you shall live in booths.

Every resident among the Israelites shall live in booths,  
in order that your [ensuing] generations should know that  
I had the children of Israel live in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt.  
I am the Lord, your God (Vayikra 23:42-43)

There are various interpretations of why we “dwell” in the Sukkah on Sukkot. Some say it is to commemorate the actual booths we lived in while we were in the desert. Others say that the Sukkah is there to remind us of the Ananei HaKavod, the Clouds of Glory, that protected us on all sides on our way out of Mitzrayim. Rabbeinu Bachya is of the opinion that we dwell in Sukkot, actual booths, in order to remind ourselves of the miracle that Hashem performed for us: We were able to, by no means other than miracles, live in a desert and have literally all of our needs met.

Just before the Jews were living in Sukkot, they were slaves in Egypt. This is the story of Pesach: Hashem took us out of Egypt by performing miracles, namely 10 plagues and many more in order to take us out with “strong hand and an outstretched arm.” Rabbeinu Bachya reminds us that the miracles didn’t stop at the Yam Suf, the Spitting of the Sea; while the Jews traveled through the desert, a place that is not even habitable for most plants or animals, Hashem performed an incredible miracle that allowed us to travel by day and sleep in a Sukkah at night with our families – kind of like we do now. It is a miracle that we were able to dwell in Sukkot then and, given our rocky history and even present times, it is a miracle that we are able to dwell in them now – Thank You, Hashem!



# What Makes Judaism Endure?

Excerpted from a sermon delivered at  
The Jewish Center Shmini Atzeret 2019  
Rabbi Yosie Levine

The Jewish story can't go on without Jewish kids. And Jewish kids can't go on without Jewish education. And when those Jewish kids become Jewish adults, they can't go on to have families unless they meet each other. And in this area, too, the world has changed in the blink of an eye. There are so many literal and virtual platforms for singles to meet one another. The question is: What will be our contribution?

We may have the solution, but we at least we have to try to move the stone. We live at the epicenter of those who are starting out and those who are starting over. How many people do we know that would love to find companionship?

The Gemara famously tells us that after 120 years we'll be called before the heavenly tribunal and we'll be asked a series of questions. And one of them is *ורביה בפריה עסקת* ? And everyone wonders: Why would the query be formulated this way? It should say *פריה קימת ורביה* ? Either you fulfilled your obligation or you didn't? The Maharsha says that's not the question. *עסקת* – were you involved? Did you contribute to the mitzvah of perpetuating the Jewish people by bringing individuals together?

There are so many ways that we can make a difference: We can invite people to our home for Shabbat meals; We can proactively make suggestions and try to make matches; We can contribute to the wonderful programs that are in place to support matchmaking. The roadmap is so straightforward. But it only works to the extent we follow it. We have to use all the resources at our disposal to bring more Jewish children into this world; to educate those children; and to turn singles into couples.

In a few moments we're going to recite Yizkor. And it should never be lost on us that we're in a position to do so as a community because our ancestors made the perpetuation of Judaism their priority. The question of who will say will Yizkor for us shouldn't be the motivating force behind our commitment to the Jewish future. But the question is certainly a stark reminder about what's at stake. We may be davening for rain. And we take it on faith that Hashem will do His part. But we have to do ours. To the extent we do, the prospect of a Jewish horizon beyond the clouds will be well within reach.

