

א ביסל תורה!

October 6, 2025

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

י"ד תשרי תשפ"ו · סוכות

Are Women Really Exempt in Sitting in the סוכה?

By Becca Gold '26

It is a well known fact that women are not obligated to fulfill the מצוה of dwelling in a סוכה. We see this in the גמרא in (כח.) סוכה. People state it simply: it is a time bound, positive מצוה, so why should women be חייב? In פרשת אמר, where we get the description of סוכות, it says בַּסֵּכֶת תֵּשְׁבֶּן שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל "שִׁבְּתֶם בַּסֵּכֶת: וִיקְרָא" (סוכות) "You should dwell in סוכות for seven days; all the citizens of Israel should dwell in סוכות" (כג:מב). This would seem to imply that everyone is included in the obligation, including women. There are also other time-bound positive מצוות that women are included in, such as eating מצה on פסח, so why isn't this one of them?

There are three מצוות (מגילה, נירות חנוכה) that both fall into this category and may be applicable to this case, in which the reason that women are included in the מצוה is because "אף הן היו" "they too were part of the miracle." How does this make a difference? In גמרא on רש"י (סוכה.) says that women being part of the miracle means they played an active and important role in the miracle: "righteous women" on פסח, אסתר, פורים, and חנוכה on יהודית. Therefore, this could not apply to סוכות, since the ענני הכבוד were for אהרן's merit - this was the נס of Hashem's protection in the מדבר that we celebrate on סוכות. תוספות disagrees, and says that it has to do with women being involved in the danger,

so they are obligated to show gratitude. So, why would dwelling in a סוכה not be included through "אף הן"? תוספות seems to say that the three examples cited are clearly rabbinic מצוות. If we try expanding this rule so much more, including to biblical level מצוות, we encounter many more problems. Since our case is biblical, we cannot include women. Rav Soloveitchik on this topic seems to completely ignore the "אף הן" argument and says that the reason for these three is because publicizing the miracle is part of the מצוה, which is also why there is a specific ברכה for each; however, other מצוות, where commemoration is the main part of the מצוה and not publicizing it (קידוש, מצה) are not included in this, yet might have a separate reason to require women. The Rav would put סוכה in this category.

However, this still does not seem to really answer the question of why women are not included in "כָּל־הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל." Interestingly, the גמרא does not go straight to the answer of time-bound positive מצוה even though סוכות is one of the examples cited for it in (לג:). קדושין. The גמרא first tries to explain the reason for the "ה" in "הָאֶזְרָח" is to exempt women, because it is unclear if "אזרח" refers to men and women or just men. However, this is unclear and can be interpreted many ways and the גמרא does not seem satisfied with the answer. The גמרא continues to say that this is a tradition passed down from משה at סיני, and really that is how we know women should be exempt. The reason to explore these reasons first may have been a worry about "אף הן," as well as some other reasons we see later in the גמרא. The גמרא continues

This month's issue is sponsored by Biblical Proportions, who are launching a 10-cubit measuring tape, a 1-log measuring cup, a kezayit/kebeitza jigger, and a book of Biblical cocktails. Scan the QR code to support their Kickstarter.



To read past issues or sponsor future visit
ABISITORAH.ORG

further to ask about this; why do we need to derive this from the פסוק or saying it is a tradition משה received from סיני - why can't we just say its a time bound positive מצוה and move on? The גמרא gives examples for how we might try to derive that women are obligated anyway, for example, since by פסח, in which women are obligated it is on the 15th and so is סוכות, women should be obligated. Therefore, we cannot just rely upon the time bound מצוה, and must also say it was a למשה מסיני.

Simply put, when one actually looks into this issue it is not as straightforward as one makes it out to be. The first instinct is to merely excuse this as a normal time bound positive מצוה, which is still true and a factor in why women are exempt, however, we cannot just rely on this. Once we look into the issue in greater detail, we come across many more problems: the wording of the מצוה, women being included in miracles, tradition passed down from משה at סיני, and so much more. This is not to say that women are obligated, because despite the difficulty in actually finding the one reason they are not, there is no standing question to the fact that they are exempt. However, the process and rulings are not always as clear as they seem and can often be convoluted.

Bringing Unity Through the סוכה

By Daniel Zilber '26

From the beginning of אלול until the end of סוכות, we recite the פרק of "לְדוֹד וְה' אֹרֶךְ יָיָשְׁעִי" of פרק Hashem is my light and redeemer" (תהלים כ"ז) twice a day. The

מדרש שוחר טוב explains, based on the קיצור שולחן ערוך, that "ה' אור" refers to ראש השנה, "and redeemer" (כז:א) refers to יום הכיפורים, and "סוכה" (כז:ה) refers to סוכות.

At first glance, ראש השנה and יום הכיפורים fit in naturally together - they are the ימים נוראים. But סוכות, a day of rejoicing, seems like an odd addition to the group. What is סוכה doing here?

One of the central themes of the ימים נוראים is declaring Hashem as the King of the World. We daven that all of humanity will recognize this and accept Him. The passuk in וזאת הברכה says: "וַיְהִי בִישְׁרוֹן מֶלֶךְ" "Then [Hashem] became King in ישרון. When the heads of the people assembled, the tribes of Israel were together" (ל"ג:ה). רש"י comments that only when כלל ישראל are at peace with one another does Hashem act as our King. As we know, there is no King without a nation. When כלל ישראל joins together on the ימים נוראים to accept Hashem's מלכות, His kingship is strengthened. On סוכה we gain the perspective needed to maintain that sense of unity. The גמרא in סוכה (כז:) teaches that one may fulfill the מצוה of סוכה even with a borrowed סוכה, as "כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבוֹ בְּסוּכּוֹת" (ויקרא כג:מב), implying even in someone else's סוכה. This idea from חז"ל - that the סוכה belongs to all of כלל ישראל - highlights the unity that the סוכה brings to the Jewish people.

Earlier in the מסכת (ב:) the גמרא writes that on סוכות, we leave our קבע דירת - our permanent homes - and enter a דירת ארעי - a temporary dwelling. On סוכות we get away from the physical and materialistic home

A BISL TORAH

is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Eitan Orkaby '27
Theo Fraenkel '28

EDITORS

Anna Szalat '28
Noah Levy '29
Joshua Jaffe '29

FACULTY ADVISOR

Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe

FOUNDERS

Binyamin Orkaby '24
Ephraim Fischer '24

and enter a spiritual home devoted to serving Hashem. Rav Dessler explains that this is what brings ישראל כלל together: the סוכה reminds us that our lives revolve around serving Hashem. When people focus on physical desires and materialism, we are less likely to live in peace since each one wants what the other has, leading to fighting and competition. However, when everyone's focus shifts to spirituality - how they can better serve Hashem - we come together under a unified sense of purpose. סוכות, like ראש השנה and יום כיפור, has a core aspect of separating oneself from the material world and moving closer to the spiritual.

Both סוכת ברכת המזון and ("זפרוש עלינו סכת שלמד") ערבית refer to the המקדש as a סוכה. Additionally, the בית המקדש can only stand when כלל ישראל is at peace and is united. And that unity can only happen if we are focused on spirituality and constantly working on serving Hashem.

Let us take this new understanding of the סוכה and use it not only to connect Hashem, but also to unite as a people - so that we can merit to the ultimate blessing of משיח.

The Joy of סוכות

By Nadav Lebowitz '27

סוכות is known as 'זמן שמחתנו' - a 'Time of our Joy', but why is סוכות given this name and how can we find joy during סוכות? The origin of the name "זמן שמחתנו" comes from a פסוק in ויקרא ויקרא ב' פסוק ו' וְלִקְחֶתֶם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי וְעַרְבֵי-נֶחֱל וּשְׂמֵחָתֶם לִפְנֵי ה' עַץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעַנְף עֵץ-עֵבֶת וְעַרְבֵי-נֶחֱל וּשְׂמֵחָתֶם לִפְנֵי ה' "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the tree hadar, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick leaved trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d seven days" (ויקרא כ"ג:מ). This פסוק states that once you have taken the המינים, you have to rejoice before Hashem for seven days.

One explanation for why Hashem chose this holiday for a time of joy is because in ancient Israel the harvest season would have just concluded and everyone has a great abundance of crops - therefore, everyone is especially happy that Hashem has blessed them with all these crops. Another reason why this is a time of joy is because the ימים נוראים have just concluded, and all of our sins have been forgiven; hence, the reason why we are joyous all throughout סוכות.

The משנה תורה (הלכות שופר וסוכה רמב"ם explains in the (ולולב ח"י"ב that the joy mentioned here refers the joy of all of the members of בני ישראל, men and women alike - each person according to what is fitting for him.

May we all merit to true happiness and our סוכות should be filled with light and happiness.

A Rabbi Juggling Fire Torches?! What Really is the שמחת בית השואבה?

By Maayan Schwartz '28

When one thinks of סוכות, one might think of sitting in their סוכה, or walking around with your לולב and הושנעות during. What might not come to mind is a circus-like event full of dancing and partying! Yet, for Jews living in Israel during the time of בית שני, this was exactly what they looked forward to all year long! When everyone traveled to ירושלים for סוכות, it was an opportune time to come together as one nation to party. This extravaganza was called שמחת בית השואבה, literally translated as The Joy of the Place of Drawing Water. It was even said that you hadn't truly experienced joy until you had attended a שמחת בית השואבה. But what really is שמחת בית השואבה, and why was it such a joyous occasion?



The משנה סוכה is first discussed in בית השואבה, where the משנה first describes the process of lighting ornate מנורות. They would take strips of the כהנים' old clothes to use as wicks, and young boys would climb up to place them in huge amounts of oil. The Mishna adds that the light from these מנורות was so bright that there was "no courtyard in Jerusalem that wasn't lit up" by them. The משנה continues and describes how the שופר would blow while the כהנים who were getting water exited the המקדש. These כהנים would then walk to a special spring, collect the water, and walk back to the בית המקדש to the fanfare of שופרות and cheers. The כהנים would then turn to the east and proclaim their faith in Hashem. This was the opposite action that the previous generation had done, where instead of bowing to Hashem, they saw the setting sun and bowed to it instead. (יחזקאל ח:ט"ז).

The גמרא in סוכה (מח:) talks about how the כהנים would then add this special water to the regular wine libation. This seems like unnecessary extravagance to simply pour some water, but the meaning behind it is much deeper.

Throughout this entire event, the leaders of the community, such as rabbis, would show off their amazing tricks and skills (הלכות שופר וסוכה) משנה תורה, רבן שמעון בן גמליאל (ולולב, ח'). For example, it is said that רבן would toss fiery torches in the air and do a handstand only on his thumbs (סוכה נג:).

רב עינא says that the basis for the unmoderated amount of joy caused by this simple action comes from "וישאו בָּתֶּם-מַיִם בְּשִׂשְׁוֹן מִמַּעַיְנֵי הַיְּשׁוּעָה" "and joyfully

shall you draw water from the fountains of triumph" (ישעיהו י"ב:ג).

In the תלמוד ירושלמי, the Rabbis add that שמחת בית השואבה wasn't just about water, but it was also about connecting more with Hashem. According to ר' יהושע (תלמוד ירושלמי סוכה ה'א'), when the כהנים drew the water, they weren't just getting water, but they were bringing רוח הקודש into this world.

During the ימים נוראים, we connect to Hashem in an incredibly serious and disciplined way. We stay in shul all day, strictly focusing on our spiritual needs and relationships. However, סוכות is when this mindset shifts. We begin to infuse our spiritual relationships with the utmost joy and happiness. שמחת בית השואבה is the climax of this. We pour all of our joy into serving Hashem.

While the practice of שמחת בית השואבה is not entirely a universal custom, there are still many communities that will have lively parties full of singing and dancing during סוכות. Even if you do not celebrate this way, we can still learn from שמחת בית השואבה by infusing our lives with the joy of spirituality and yiddishkeit, and trying to live up to "וְשִׂמְחָהּ בְּחֶגְדָּהּ וְהָיְתָה אֵךְ שִׂמְחָה" May we have a סוכות full of peace and happiness this year!



Receive A BISL TORAH
on WhatsApp

A BISL TORAH

is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Eitan Orkaby '27
Theo Fraenkel '28

EDITORS
Anna Szalat '28
Noah Levy '29
Joshua Jaffe '29

FACULTY ADVISOR
Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe

FOUNDERS
Binyamin Orkaby '24
Ephraim Fischer '24