

THE MYSTERY OF THE LULAV – THE FOUR SPECIES

Our Father in heaven, for this wonderful festival time, we give you thanks! We have come to be together to celebrate and rejoice before you at your appointed time of the Feast of Sukkot –the time of the fullness of our joy. We love your law, commandments, statutes and judgments. Praise your holy name for yours is the greatness, and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor. Everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. As we worship together in one mind, one spirit, and one faith and one baptism we are seeking, asking and knocking for your wisdom and discernment that we might be faithful servants furnished in every good work. We desire to humbly walk with you and produce the fruits of your Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control bringing every thought in subjection to your will. This service is committed into your hands and we give you thanks for all the good and perfect gifts –physical, mental and spiritual that you have given to us including our trials and tests that help create in us your very character. We ask these things in the name of your Son, Yeshua, the Messiah. Amen!

Hach Samaech! This is the day that the Lord has made. I appreciate all those who willingly help with the technical support, patience, kind words and helpful deeds that help make it possible to share the knowledge of God's word. Hallelujah! The blowing of of the ram's horn in my hand is a joyful sound and part of making a joyful sound to the Lord. **Psalm 118** is the conclusion of the Hallel Psalms which were generally sung by the Levitical priests every day in the temple of old during the Feast of Sukkoth. Psalms is a title derived from the Greek word *psalmos* which denotes a poem sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. These Psalms arise from a consideration of what God has done in the past, what He will do in the future, and the need for God in the immediate present, with a recognition of His sovereignty and goodness.

Psalm 118:1-29—“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; because his mercy endures forever. ⁵⁻⁶—I called on the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do to me? ⁷The Lord takes my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. ⁸⁻⁹It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man, and princes. ¹⁰All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. ¹³⁻¹⁴The Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and, and is become my salvation. ¹⁵⁻¹⁶the right hand of the Lord does valiantly and is exalted. ¹⁷I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. ¹⁸The Lord has chastened me sore: but he has not given me over to death. ¹⁹⁻²²Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: this gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise you: for you have heard me, and are become my salvation. The stone (Christ) which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. ²³This is the Lord's doing [*literally*—this is from the Lord]. It is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴*This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in*

it. ²⁵Save now O Lord, send now prosperity. ²⁶Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. ²⁷This is the Lord, which has shown us light: ²⁸You are my God and I will praise and exalt you. ²⁹O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endures forever.”

Romans 8:37-39—“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” *The Song of Moses* tells of God’s intervention in behalf of Israel and how He destroyed Pharaoh of Egypt and his entire army in the Red Sea. **Exodus 15:1-7** —“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.² The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.³ The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.⁴ Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea.⁵ The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.⁶ Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.⁷ And in the greatness of your Excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sent forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.” We can understand that God means exactly what he says.

Psalms 103:1-22—“**Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name.** ²**Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:** ³who forgives all your iniquities; Who heals all your diseases.⁴ Who redeems thy life from destruction; who crowns thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;⁵ Who satisfies thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.⁶ The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. ⁷He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and plenteous (abounding) in mercy. ⁹He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. ¹⁰He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. ¹²As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him. ¹⁴For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. ¹⁶For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. ¹⁷But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;¹⁸ To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.¹⁹ The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all.²⁰ Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.²¹ Bless you the LORD, all you his hosts; you ministers of his that do his pleasure.²² Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.” **Psalms 103** is a Psalm of unmixed praises to God who forgives all our iniquities.

We are going to dance a circle around the sukkah this afternoon with music, (we also enjoy the Jewish horah folk dance) shouting our praise to the Lord, and spending time sitting in the sukkah to rejoice together in celebrating this wonderful, bounteous, super supreme festival that finishes up this year's appointed holy days of God. We also ask for and depend upon God's blessings on his people for water for the coming year's harvest and spiritual strength.

God brings us to the point of total self-abnegation by Yom Kippur. We go through the month of Elul searching our heart and mind. Then we go through the Ten Days of Awe where we tremble before God as we examine and prepare for Yom Kippur (Atonement: at one with God) bringing us to the very depth of our being with total cleansing and the final Day of Judgment. Five days later we arrive at the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) transformed and renewed (re-energized) from the depth of humiliation, sorrow, and internal pain to the heights of exhilarating JOY and rejoicing—out of the mud and up toward the stars to a time of focusing on rejoicing and vibrant life. Our outlook is now a positive progression from self-absorption and “*woe-is-me-ism*” to one of a genuine change to outgoing joy as we enter the sukkah filled with God's love and the time God gives us a big hug. Why? Because we love him and do what he says to do, and willingly search out our errors, repent and have been forgiven and been accepted by God. In essence, God says: “Good to see you here. I'm glad you made it. You have had a dangerous journey. You've come a long way. Here you are, now in my presence—at home with me. Thank you for coming. Here's a big hug.” God loves his people. He wants us to understand that great love and compassion that he has for us. The sukkah is a symbol of his presence and love—“a mountain top experience.” This should be the “Super-Bowl of Feasts”. God gives us the best and “ever increasing” joy—everlasting. True joy comes in unity. The world's way ends in death.

Those who believe in and follow Christ, obedient to his law and follow his commands are blessed with hope, faith, love and have the protection of the heavenly Father and his angels. The world news reports are ominous. 1) A highly contagious and deadly Ebola outbreak spreading to other nations from South Africa with little known knowledge of prevention and treatment available, 2) growing ISIS terrorist forces in Iraq are beheading Christians and killing everything in its way, 3) natural disasters, 3) water shortages and famine, 5) increasing frequencies of earthquakes worldwide, increasingly people are without jobs, homes and food. People worry, and many have become downcast and fearful as they look for positive answers without success. America has embraced the lie and is no longer blessed as a nation at home and abroad.

Psalms 103:6-14—“The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

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⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous (abounding) in mercy.

⁹ He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”

How far is the east from the west? If you were standing here in Omak with Jerusalem to the east and west toward Hawaii and you headed toward Jerusalem, as long as you kept going toward Jerusalem you would be going east. The world is turning but you would always be going east further away from the west, because the earth spins on its axis, so east is always east. If you head west you would always be going west because the earth is spinning on its axis. Going North or South is a different matter. Once you reach the North Pole, if you continue going, you will be going toward the south.

During the festival week, we took an afternoon road trip excursion to Leavenworth located at the base of the eastern slope of the Cascade Mountains rising 5,000-8,000 feet nearby (compared by some to the Swiss Alps). This small picturesque tourist town successfully revitalized its economy by adopting a Bavarian town theme in 1962, after the headquarters of the Great Northern Railroad relocated in Wenatchee in the 1920's. It offers an array of year-around outdoor activities, hanging baskets of flowers, strolling musicians, restaurants featuring German foods, and an impressive lineup of festival events, endless variety of shops, or to just restfully sit on a bench with an ice-cream cone watching people and dogs pass along on the sidewalk. Walter and I definitely took the opportunity to find an ice-cream cone and a bench.

On the return trip home, we stopped in Chelan. This turned out to be fortuitous as our next to youngest grandson would be seven on October 31st. He had asked for a baseball glove which we had not found in Omak and time was running out. We parked in front of a sporting goods store, so while the rest of the group stopped in the health food market, I went to the sporting goods store. No mitts! However, their clerk suggested checking Ace Hardware a couple of doors down. It just so happened they had two baseball mitts left, one adult and one juvenile right-hander! We had been praying for God's guidance during the feast and on this trip. Since baseball season had ended, it was a joy to find a mitt the right size). The clerk even gift wrapped it so I could put it in the mail the next day with assurance that it would reach our grandson by the 31st. What kind of miracle is that? "Divine" said Walter. Later that evening, Cappy mentioned to the boys' mother that she had also picked up a wooden bear puzzle in Leavenworth for his younger brother who turns three years in June 2015. She suggested that she would be happy if we send both gifts at the same time as Feast gifts so that the boys will learn about the holy days which we celebrate. We were delighted that it was her suggestion, so we did just that.

Reference: CELEBRATE! the Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook, by Lesli Koppelman Ross, page 218. "The building blocks to redemption, acts of kindness such as bringing happiness to others by sharing what God gives us, materially and spiritually, is what Torah means by 'rejoicing.' These are acts that bring us close to God, the standard of our potential. That is why Sukkot, during which we give others the benefit of our wealth (our crops, our money, the teachings of Torah) and approach reaching the goal of Godliness, is the holiday most defined by joy (Simkhah). Joy reflects a feeling of optimism about the future. The rabbis said that in the world to come, we will be rewarded for the joy we felt in performing good deeds (mitzvot) of love and giving." Indication of motivation is seen as more important than going through the motions—a matter of the heart. **Luke 6:38** –"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

2 Corinthians 8:6—“But this I say, He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully.⁷ Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” The Greek word for cheerful is “*hilaros*” whence English *hilarious*. In **2 Corinthians** chapters **8—9** the apostle Paul epitomizes the example of Christ in giving and encourages that no man can out-give God. God wants us to be hilarious givers.

The sukkah is a shelter of faith. It teaches you to leave behind all your worldly concerns and to dedicate yourself to God with total self-effacing faith (self nullification) in His mercy and compassion. The mitzvah of sukkah with its unstable walls and precarious roof expresses our complete dependence on and boundless trust in God’s protection. Under the shelter of the sukkah where we are to feel God’s sheltering hand, we realize that true happiness is found only in the eternal values of Torah and mitzvah, that material possessions offer no security, and that the shield of faith is the only protection that can be relied upon makes us aware that, like our stay in the sukkah, life on earth is unstable and transitory. Nearness to God, our one-on-one relationship is the source of our *simchah*—the *exciting gladness* that is the hallmark of Sukkot.

What are the four species?—*Arba Minim* (the Four Species). The secret of the Lulav: Symbolically, the Four Species represent all the strata that make up the unity of the Israel of God.

- the *etrog*, a tasty fruit of the hadar tree with a pleasant aroma, represents the righteous people who possess both Torah and good deeds. Represents the heart.
- the *lulav*, the branch of a date *palm*, produces a sweet fruit but has no fragrance; it stands for the scholar who is proficient in Torah but lacks good deeds. Represents the backbone. (courage).
- the *hadassim*, the sweet-smelling *myrtle*, which produces no edible fruit, symbolizes the average people who perform good deeds but are deficient in Torah scholarship. Represents the eye (window of the soul).
- the *aravot*, odorless and tasteless *willow* (grows along the stream in America and Israel), represents the person who lacks both Torah and good deeds. Represents the mouth. Can speak, pray and call upon God. **Ps. 25:52**. We can roll our burdens on the Lord who has promised to take them all.

Together the four species through their shapes express our desire to use all our vital components to worship God, and to atone for transgressions resulting from an envious eye, a malicious mouth, or lustful heart.

The taking of the four species is a Torah obligation. **Leviticus 23:40**—“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.” To fulfill God’s commandment we take the Four Species—

1-lulav (palm), **1-etrog**, **3-hadassim** (myrtle), and **2-aravot** (willow) that adds up to **seven** in hand every day of Sukkot.

The four species together comprise one unit. If one of the species is missing, the commandment has not been fulfilled. We take the *lulav* bundle in the right hand, then the *etrog* (with the *pitam* facing down) in the left. After reciting the blessing (*berachot*), “*Blessed are you our God, King of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, brought us to this season,*” we turn the *etrog* over (so that it is held in the direction that it grows) and wave the Four Species. The waving motion consists of three times up, three times down in all directions in the six directions — straight ahead (east), right (south), back (west), left (north), up and down.

Waving the *lulav* is our sign of unity and victory, having overcome and having been tested by the Lord and accepted by him and now rejoice before the Lord with the *lulav* as our symbol of being accepted. In earlier days if a litigant’s claim before the royal court was decided in his favor, he would receive a spear from the king. When he left the palace holding the king’s spear aloft all knew he had been victorious in his suit. Similarly, during the Days of Awe, all of us were on trial before the Heavenly Court. On Sukkot, *the season of joy*; we celebrate our happiness that God has accepted our repentance – a confidence symbolized by the *lulav* held aloft.

Now we have learned the components of Sukkot which enhance our fullness of joy, and know what God has said about real joy and unity to be celebrated that we never knew before.

Isaiah 55:12—“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” We are to share and draw people together into the love of God. This brings an anonymous poem to my mind, “He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic! Rebel! A thing to flout! But, love and I had the wit to win. We drew a circle that took him in.” We need to widen our circles that draw people in. Do good works, show kind words and deeds, and follow in the footsteps of Christ. Everyone should know his place.

Remember that whoever you are and whatever your place, with your talents and abilities you can become united with others. Even in adverse circumstances, we are to remain only joyful for the trait of joy is to become a permanent trait planted in our heart by the law of God. *Veha Yica Hach Sameach*, you shall only be joyful. Let’s do it! Hallelujah!