



Mah Tovu -

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob!

מַה־טֹבֵי אֹהֶלְיֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!
- Numbers 24:5

The *Mah Tovu* is a mixture of verses from different places in the Tanakh: Numbers 24:5 and Psalms 5:8, 26:8, 95:6 and 69:14. The custom is to recite *Mah Tovu* as you enter the synagogue (or shortly thereafter). The theme of *Mah Tovu* is expressing our appreciation for being able to come together and worship in a *makom kadosh* (holy place).



מַה טֹבֵי אֹהֶלְיֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.
וְאֲנִי בָרַב חַסְדֶּיךָ אָבוֹא בֵיתֶךָ,
אֲשַׁתְּחֶה אֶל הַיְכָל קִדְשֶׁךָ בִּירְאָתֶךָ.*
יְהוָה, אֶהְבְּתִי מְעוֹן בֵּיתֶךָ, וּמְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ.
וְאֲנִי אֲשַׁתְּחֶה וְאֶכְרַעָה, אֲבָרְכָה לְפָנַי יְהוָה עֹשֵׂי.
וְאֲנִי, תִפְלְתִי לָךְ יְהוָה, עֵת רְצוֹן,
אֱלֹהִים בָּרַב חַסְדֶּיךָ, עֲנֵנִי בְאֱמַת יִשְׁעֶךָ.

How goodly are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! As for me, through Your abundant kindness I will enter Your house; I will prostrate myself toward Your Holy Sanctuary in awe of You.* O LORD, I love the House where You dwell, and the place where Your glory tabernacles. I shall prostrate myself and bow; I shall kneel before the LORD my Maker. As for me, may my prayer to You, LORD, be at a favorable time; O God, in Your abundant kindness, answer me with the truth of Your salvation!

* Bow here.

Mah tovu ohaleykha Ya'akov, mishkenoteykha Yisrael. Va'ani berov chasdekha avo veytekha, eshtachaveh el heikhal kodeshekha beyiratekha. Adonai, ahavti me'on beytekha umekom mishkan kevodekha. Va'ani eshtachaveh ve'echra'ah, evrekhah lifnei Adonai osi. Va'ani tefillati lekha Adonai, eit ratson, elohim berov chasdekha, aneni be'emet yish'ekha.



Transliterated:

מַה טֹבֹו אֵתְּלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

yis-ra'el mish-keno-te-y-kha ya-'a-kov 'o-ha-leykha to-vu mah
O Israel your dwellings O Jacob your tents goodly How

וְאֲנִי בְּרַב חַסְדֶּיךָ אָבוֹא בֵיתְךָ,

vey-te-kha 'a-vo chas-de-kha be-rov va'ani
into your house I will come your favor in the multitude As for me

אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֵל הַיְכָל קֹדֶשְׁךָ בִּירְאֹתֶיךָ*.

be-yir-a-te-kha kod-she-kha hei-khal 'el eshta-cha-veh
in awe of You the sanctuary of Your holiness unto I will prostrate myself

יְהוָה, אֶהְבֵּתִי מְעוֹן בֵּיתְךָ, וּמְקוֹם מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ.

ke-vo-de-kha mish-kan u-me-kom bey-te-kha me'on a-hav-ti Adonai
of Your glory tabernacle and place Your house shelter I love Lord

וְאֲנִי אֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְאֶכְרַעָה, אֶבְרַכָּה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה עֲשֵׂי.

'o-si Adonai lifnei 'ev-re-khah ve-'ech-ra'ah 'esh-ta-cha-veh va'ani
my Maker the Lord before I will kneel and bow will prostrate myself and I

וְאֲנִי תְּפִלַּתִּי לְךָ יְהוָה, עֵת רַצוֹן.

rat-son 'eit Adonai le-kha te-fil-lati va'ani
favorable a time Lord to You may my prayer and I

אֱלֹהִים בְּרַב חַסְדֶּיךָ, עֲנֵנִי בְּאֵמֶת יִשְׁעֶיךָ.

yish'e-kha be'e-met 'a-neini chas-de-kha be-rov 'e-lo-him
of Your salvation in the truth answer me of your favor in the multitude O God

* Bow here.



Kavanah: Preparing to “Cross Over”

The *Mah Tov* helps us get our attitude readied before we go in to worship at the synagogue. We pause, attune ourselves to new surroundings, and leave our “baggage” behind us. We should feel as if we are passing over a bridge into a new country. The *Mah Tov* was first uttered by Balaam, an outsider of Israel, who nevertheless was awestruck with the glory of the God of Israel (Numbers 22-24). In the same way, we seek to apprehend and behold the glory of God as we make our way to worship before Him.

