

Z'man Simchateinu

Today we often send people virtual hugs, we have virtual assistants and of course virtual reality.

But way before there was an Internet our rabbis imagined what it would be like to invite virtual guests into our Sukkah. The Zohar – our primary mystical text of Kabbalah– speaks of a strange and unique custom – the *Ushpizin*.

Ushpizin means “guests” in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud.

Who are these guests? They are some of our greatest leaders who lived long ago: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and King David. Each night, one of these seven becomes our virtual guest of honor and is invited into our Sukkah to rejoice with us.

The Zohar explains: “A person must rejoice each day and greet these guests who reside with him with a joyous countenance.”

The Zohar teaches us that each of the *Ushpizin* empowers us with a particular quality, mirroring Gd’s own qualities:

Avraham: lovingkindness

Yitzchak: restraint and personal strength

Yaakov: beauty and truth

Moshe: eternity of the Torah

Aharon: empathy and divine splendor

Yosef: holiness and spirituality

David: sovereignty of Gd’s kingdom on Earth

Well – that sounds great. Aha – but there’s a catch:

The Zohar continues:

“One must also gladden the poor, and the portion that we would have set aside for the *Ushpizin* should go to the poor. One should not say “I will first satisfy myself with food and drink and I shall give the leftovers to the poor”. Rather, the first of everything must be for one’s guests. If one gladdens his guests and satisfies them, Gd rejoices over him and all the *Ushpizin* will shower him as well”

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It is even said that the *Ushpizin* – our spiritual guests - would refuse to enter a sukkah where the poor are not welcome.

On Succot, we step out of our homes and transcend our grounded, everyday reality by inviting these illustrious guests into our sukkah and feeling their presence. There is even a Sephardic custom to set aside a special chair in the Sukkah with a fine cloth and laden with holy books for the *Ushpizin* of that day.

I would like to suggest an additional way to enhance our Simcha – our joy - on Sukkot. We have just spent these past weeks immersed in prayer and introspection where Gd invited us to join Him in His realm.

- In Elul: *בשדה המלך* the King is in the field; Gd was accessible to us
- On Rosh Hashana we crowned Gd as our heavenly King and felt in awe of Gd
- On Yom Kippur we stood before Gd as angels, without material needs

Now it is our turn. It is our turn to invite Gd into our realm.

I once heard a talk entitled: “What if we set a place for Gd at our dinner table? What would the meal feel like?”

I wonder – what would our Sukkah feel like if we invited Gd in?

The Kotzker Rebbe famously said:

“Where is Gd? Gd is only where you let Him in!”

The *S'chach* that covers the sukkah, reminding us of the *ענני הכבוד* – the Clouds of Glory - offers us both shade and light, cracks and openings; allowing Gd to come in and fill our Sukkah with His presence.

Let us each make our *sukka* a spiritual home; inviting the *Ushpizin* together with Gd to come in and celebrate Sukkot with us.