

From:

Educator's Guide to A Day Apart: Shabbat At Home

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Sukkot - Brachot for the Sukkah

Introduction

After Sukkot Candle Lighting and Sukkot Kiddush on Yom Tov (see a Siddur) and after Havdalah when the first day of Sukkot falls on Saturday night, then if one is sitting in the Sukkah, one we adds a special blessing for residing in the Sukkah.

Here I am ready to perform the mitzvah of my Creator who commanded: "Every member of Israel to reside in sukkot in order for us to know for generations that God caused us to dwell in sukkot when we were taken out of Egypt" (Leviticus 23).

Blessed are You our God and God of our Ancestors who commanded us to reside in the sukkah.

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam ahser kidhshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu leisheiv BaSukkah.¹

¹ *Baruch... leisheiv BaSukkah* applies to residing in the Sukkah and since eating at one's table is a central activity of living in a home, we recite this blessing just before eating. This is the dominant view of Rabeinu Tam and Rosh, however Maimonides and the Gaon of Vilna hold that we should say the blessing over residing in the Sukkah everytime we enter it even just to sit down. On Sh'mini Atzeret and Simchat Torah [8th day in Israel and 8th and 9th day in Diaspora] one does not sit in the Sukkah, and there is no Ushpizin, because Shemini Atzeret is not officially part of Sukkot even though its name means literally the 8th day of Sukkot. As new holiday we recite along with Kiddush the blessing over new things –*Shehechyanu*. (Nevertheless some Jews in the Diaspora do recite Kiddush in the Sukkah on Shemini Atzeret)

Then on the first day In Eretz Yisrael, and on the first two days in Diaspora add: Shehe-chiyanu and then drink the wine, which is considered to be a concrete act of "residing in a Sukkah."

Guidelines from Tradition for Candle Lighting, Kiddush and Eating in the Sukkah

1. Candles are to be lit before sundown in the Sukkah itself (as long as there is no fire hazard). For our Sukkah becomes our official domicile for the seven days of Sukkot, so the light of the Yom Tov candles (which are designed to illuminate the festive meals) need to be near the table in the Sukkah.
2. Unlike Shabbat, one recites the blessing before lighting the candles and there is no reason to cover one's eyes, since on Festivals one may light fires even after inaugurating the holiday.
3. On the first day in Eretz Yisrael, and on the first two days in Diaspora we recite Kiddush to inaugurate the holiday. On the first night of Sukkot the Kiddush should, if possible, not begin until it is fully dark.
4. The Sukkah is our home for seven days. When eating, drinking, entertaining guests, reading and sleeping we try to use the Sukkah as if it were our permanent residence (*Di-rat Keva*). Many people place their nicest silver cups and dishes in the Sukkah as well as their lulav and etrog. All sit down meals - at least when they involve bread or foods from the five grains - should be in the Sukkah, though snacks in small amounts or fruit and drinks may be eaten outside the Sukkah.
5. However since one would not stay at home if it were very uncomfortable, so too one is exempt from eating and sleeping in the Sukkah when it becomes too uncomfortable. If it rains, smells bad, suffers from meddlesome flies and bees or it is simply too cold, too hot or too windy, then one is exempt. In general, Sukkot is a time of joy, so when sitting in the Sukkah becomes unpleasant, one is automatically exempt. Sick people (as well as those attending them) are also exempt for the same reason since they are particularly sensitive to discomfort. When traveling away from home one is exempt (at least during the day). Still on the first night of Sukkot one must make every effort to say Kiddush and eat something in the Sukkah. (Aruch HaShulchan O.H. Sukkah 639-640)
6. **Decorating** our Temporary Home.

The Sukkah as our home and the place where we host our guests is traditionally decorated not only with drawings and pictures, hanging fruits and gourds, but also with the best of silver and most lovely dishes. While paper dishes may be more convenient, using silver creates a sense of permanence as well as of aesthetics called *Noy Sukkah*.

7. Extra meditations have been written for entering and leaving the Sukkah.²

Parent-Child Corner for Sukkot

1. Building a Sukkah with your children's help is a wonderful way to build a relationship. If you are also privileged to sleep in the Sukkah with your children even for a few hours - like a sleepout in the backyard, then you have created a special memory.
2. Decorating the Sukkah can involve many art themes: put up Rosh HaShana cards on the walls; draw and hang up pictures of the seven Ushpizin, the celestial guests (Abraham and Sarah through David); hang vegetables and fruits from a string and so on.
3. For young children, build a model Sukkah out of Lego or a cardboard box and decorate it. Bring it to the table each day.

² **Kavanah – Meditation upon entering the Sukkah**

Harei-ni Mu-chan u-m'zuman.....

I am now ready to perform the mitzvah of residing in the Sukkah as God commanded: " You shall reside in sukkot for seven days; every citizen of Israel shall reside in sukkot, so that for generations you will [remember and] know that when I took the children of Israel out of Egypt, I settled them in sukkot [in the desert before reaching Eretz Yisrael]. I am Adonai your God." (Leviticus 23:22-23).

Y'hi Ratzon [without the kabbalist stuff]

May it be your will, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors, that your Divine presence, Shechina, will dwell among us and spread your Sukkat Shalom over us by virtue of the mitzvah of Sukkah which we are celebrating..

Kavanah – A Departing Wish when exiting the Sukkah

Y'hi ratzon.

May it be your will, Adonai, our God and God of our ancestors, that just as I observed the mitzvah to reside in *this* Sukkah, so may I merit next year the opportunity to reside in the messianic Sukkah made from the skin of the monster Leviathan.

L'Shanah Habaa B'Yerushalayim! Next year in Jerusalem!

Inviting the *Ushpizin*: Welcoming the Great Spiritual Ancestors of the Jewish People to Dine in our Sukkah for each of the Seven Nights of Sukkot

תיבּו תיבּו אוּשְפִיזִין עֵילָאִין, תיבּו תיבּו אוּשְפִיזִין קַדִישִין, תיבּו תיבּו אוּשְפִיזִין דְמַהִמְנוּתָא, זְכָאָה חוּלְקִיהוּן דִישְרָאֵל דְכְתִיב פִי חֵלֶק יְהוָה עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבְלֵי נַחֲלָתוֹ:

Some Jews add the names of Biblical women to the Ushpizin.

אַזְמִין לְסְעוּדַתִּי אוּשְפִיזִין עֵילָאִין אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד:

ביום הראשון אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ אַבְרָהָם אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום השני אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ יַצְחָק אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום השלישי אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ יַעֲקֹב אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום הרביעי אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ מִשָּׂה אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום החמישי אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ אֶהְרֹן אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום הששי אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ יוֹסֵף אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

ביום השביעי אומר

בְּמַטֵּי מִינֶךָ דָוִד אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי דְנִתְבִי עִמִּי וְעַמְךָ כָּל אוּשְפִיזִי עֵילָאִי אַבְרָהָם יַצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׂה אֶהְרֹן יוֹסֵף וְדָוִד

תפלה כשיוצאין מן הסוכה

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַל תִּהְיֶה אָבוֹתֵינוּ כְּשֵׁם שְׁקִימָתִי וְיִשְׁבְּתִי בְּסוּכָה זוּ כֵּן אֲזַכֶּה לְשֹׁנֵה הַבָּאָה לִישָׁב

בְּסוּכָה שְׁלֵל לְוַתָּן

בספר יסוד כתב להתפלל אז תפלה זו:

I [we] now invite the *Ushpizin*, the guests from on high to join my [our] festival meal. For tonight I [we] want to honor especially _____

[insert the name of the spiritual ancestor designated for that night and perhaps the female complement that Biblical personage, for those interested in a more inclusive egalitarian approach to the traditional Kabbalaist Ushpizin]

along with _____

[list the other names deleting the invitee of that night who has already been mentioned first]:

(*First night*-1) Abraham [and Sarah]; (2) Isaac [and Rebecca]; (3) Jacob, [Rachel and Leah]; (4) Moshe [and Tziporah]; (5) Aaron [and Miriam]; (6) Joseph [and Asnat] and (7) David [and Abigail, Michal and Batsheba or perhaps David's Great-Grandmother Ruth and Great-great adoptive grandmother Naomi].

Introduction: *Ushpizin* - A Mystical Meeting

The Ushpizin brings into our homes not just symbolic representations of our earthly ancestors. This Kabbalist invention first appears in print in the 13th century Zohar written in Castile in Spain. These ancestors are each identified with a particular personality trait - whether *Hesed*, love and kindness, or *Din*, justice and self-limitation. Yet they are also at the same time aspects of the Divine personality. Each human being is not only created in the general image of God but also each of us embodies particular characteristics. The ceremony of Ushpizin gives us a window into this increasingly popular Kabbalist religious sensibility which also has deep psychological significance..

Activity: *Ushpizin* Table Talk

Review briefly the life of the Ushpizin character such as King David on the seventh and last night. Then ask each guest to pick a moment in his life, a characteristic to which you are drawn and share it. In our Sukkah David's life drew the following responses: (1) David and Goliath - fearless and ingenious fighter for the underdog; (2) David and Jonathan - Loyal friend without regard to self-interest; (3) Shepherd with his flute - poet of the soul composing Psalms; (4) David and Saul - great musical therapist for manic -depressive King Saul and afterwards a nimble escape artist on the run in the desert caves of Ein Gedi hiding from a paranoid and homicidal Saul; (5) David and Nathan the prophet - honestly confessing to the prophet his terrible sin with Batsheva which entailed the murder of her husband Uriah.

Activity: Inviting a Historical Character, a Family Ancestor or a Perennial Character Trait to your Table

Each ancestor can be viewed as a special character trait, so for each Ushpizin one might come up with one extraordinary trait. Or one could pick and present one's own ancestors and their qualities worthy of revisiting in our lives and at our table on Sukkot.

For example, Abraham has special traits that arouse us to think about who we are striving to be:

Torah - "God said to Abram, ' *Lech L'cha* - Go forth, yourself, from your land, from your birthplace, from the home of your father.'" (Genesis 12:1)

Zohar - "God said to Abram, ' *Lech L'cha* - Go to your Self, fulfill your Self" (Zohar 1:78a, 13th century) . This is explained by Moshe Zacuto: "This command is addressed to every person. Search and discover the root of your soul, so that you can fulfill it and restore it to its source, its essence. The more you fulfill yourself, the closer you approach your authentic self. " (17th century) ³

Activity: Songs for Sukkot

While there are almost no Sukkot songs as such, most of the songs based on Psalms are appropriate especially those from Hallel which is recited in its entirety daily during each day of Sukkot.

Activity: Harvest Festival Table Talk

Sukkot is a time to focus on the human continuum between desert and water, between wandering and homecoming, between accumulation and cyclical loss, between joy with the present accomplishments and apprehension about the future. One appropriate topic of conversation might be to recall important turning points in one's life -such as moving from one home to another or wandering without a fixed home - and to reflect on the lessons learned from these difficult transitions.

Another topic would be based on the themes of the book traditionally read on Sukkot - *Kohelet / Ecclesiastes* -" a time to collect stones and a time to throw away stones." What have you accumulated including collections of all sorts like stamps, coins, matchboxes and how important are these objects to your sense of self?

Read four famous quotes from *Kohelet / Ecclesiastes* and ask the listeners to pick their favorite and explain why. Or ask them to rate them for truth, for personal relevance, or for the way they provoke and promote reflection about the meaning of life.

Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 - "There is nothing new under the sun;"

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - "There is a time for everything under heaven;"

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - "Two are better than one";

Ecclesiastes 9:6-10 - "It is good to eat and drink with a full heart".

³ Adapted from *The Essential Kabbalah*, Daniel Matt (HarperCollins - 1995 - SF) p. 127

Kavanot / Reflections on Ushpizin - Guests from on High in the Sukkah

Introduction

Originating in the 13th century mystical classic the Zohar ⁴ it has become customary to invite to each of our Sukkah meals seven great Biblical Jewish personalities who also represent both different human traits and the lower 7 Sefirot, out of the 10 facets of the Divine personality in the Kabbalah. However as the Zohar makes explicit, one may not seek to enhance the spiritual aspect of our Sukkah meal without also inviting human guests, the poor, for ethics and spirituality are intertwined. *Hachnasat Orchim*, hospitality is an essential part of festive meals and from the Latin term "hospice" comes the Aramaic term for guest - *ushpizin*. The order by which these seven supreme guests are invited may follow their historic order from Abraham to David or a mystical order promoted by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, HaAri [16th century, Safed] in which Moshe takes the fourth place ahead of his older brother Aaron and Joseph appears as the sixth guest just before King David the Messiah. ⁵ Often an empty chair is left to symbolize the invisible guest like Elijah's chair at the Brit Milah. (HaChida, Halamish, p. 323).

While the Ushpizin are usually represented by male figures in the Biblical world, as early as the 16th century Kabbalist Menahem Azaria de Fano identified the female counterparts of these Biblical characters as perfectly matched to their partners and to the corresponding seven Sefirot of the cosmic-divine structure envisioned by the mystics. He wrote: "*God remembered Sarah* in Genesis 21:1 means God hinted to this *Eishet Hayil*, this accomplished woman, that she had earned the right to build up the house of Israel and that she would be the first of seven women prophets. Each of these would in time be perfectly matched in order to the seven supreme qualities of leadership [*midot hahanhaga* that guide the world, the seven lower sefirot]. Sarah matches Abraham in *Hesed* - goodness, grace and generosity. Miriam [matches Moshe, her brother] in *Gevurah* - strength, pursuit of justice and heroism. Devorah represents *Tiferet* - majesty of rule with a feminine tendency toward strict justice. Hannah whose son Samuel

⁴ The Zohar is a collection of mystical conversations in Aramaic about the Torah which are attributed literarily to a group of friends around Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (2nd century, Eretz Yisrael) but actually written by Moshe de Leon (late 13th century Spain)

⁵ See the order of Ushpizin in Moshe Halamish, Hakabbalah etc p. 324 and Daniel Sperber Vol III p. 215.

was a prophet represents *Netzach* and Avigail, David's wise and beautiful wife, represents *Hod*. *Esther* is the seventh woman, she represents *Malchut*, the sefirah of the queen, who rules this world.⁶

The Kabbalists recommended that every time we pray we seek "to connect to the spirit of our ancestors who founded the prayers" (HaAri, Haim Vital, *Shaar HaKavanot* 3c, Halamish, p. 314). So at least on Sukkot we may be asked to make a special effort to get in touch with their spirit. To help bring these characters alive along with their wives or sisters, we suggest one read a short Biblical story about each character on their special night. In addition, ask someone to play the role of the character and invite others to ask personal questions as if it were a "Meet the Press" conference with journalists. Guests who bear the same names as the Biblical personalities may also be honored. You may wish to discuss special moments in your life in which you received or offered hospitality. For Biblical stories consider the following selections:

Abraham and Sarah - The Hospitality for the Three Angels and Sarah's Laughter (Genesis 18: 1-16)

Isaac and Rebecca - Rebecca's Hospitality to Eliezer at the Well and Isaac's first meeting with his wife (Genesis 24: 1-4; 10-11, 15-33, 49-51, 57-58, 61-66)

Jacob and Rachel- Love at First Sight: Jacob's First Kiss to Rachel at the Well (Genesis 29: 1-11)

Moshe and Tziporah - Rescuing Seven Damsels in Distress at the Well (Exodus 2: 11-22)

Aharon and Miriam - Sibling Jealousy and Forgiveness (Numbers 12: 1-13)

Joseph - Interpreting Dreams and Pharaoh's Birthday (Genesis 40: 1-23)

David and Abigail (I Samuel 25) or **Michal** (II Samuel 6: 12-23) or **Bathsheba** (II Samuel 12: 1-10, 13, 24-25)

Mystical and Human Hospitality

"Come and see! When people sit at home [in their sukkah], that is in the shade of Faith, then the Divine Shechina spreads her wings over them from above. Abraham and five righteous persons along with King David come to reside there with them as it says: "In sukkot you shall reside seven days" (Leviticus 23:42) which can also be read "In sukkot seven will reside [with you]." So we should be very happy everyday with a shining face for such guests are staying among us. ..

⁶ Menachem Azaria de Fano, *Eim Kol Chai*, Part B section 1-2 (Thank you to Elliot Ginsberg for this reference)

However we must also make the poor happy since the portion of food prepared for the guests on the high actually belongs to the poor. If we invite these guests of faith from on high but do not give them their portions via the needy guests, then they will all get up and leave saying: "Don't break bread with such stingy, selfish (*ayin hara*) people".... Abraham who spent his whole life standing at crossroads to invite guests to his table, will get up and say: "Stay away from the tents of these evil people." [Zohar, Emor 23]

Every God-fearing person should make sure to invite a needy person every day of Sukkot and treat them as if they were one of the great ancestors and give them the very best portion of meal just as Maimonides explained: "Whatever we give to our good God, should be the best and the most beautiful... so when feeding the hungry, give them the tastiest and sweetest dishes on your table." (Mishne Torah, Hilchot Isurei Mizbeiach) [Hemdat Yamim, 16th century, Safed]

"You are strangers (*gerim*) and residents (*toshavim*) with Me" (Leviticus 25:23)

How, asks the Hassidic Maggid of Dubnov, can God refer to us simultaneously as "*stranger*" and as "*resident*"?

Perhaps God is saying:

If you feel too comfortable in this world, too much like residents. I will be as a stranger to you. But if you do not feel entirely at home in this world, if you feel a bit like strangers yourself, I will be a resident - "*I will dwell among you*" (Exodus 25:8).

(cited in Temple Emanuel New Minyan Siddur)

Sukkot - A Healing Return to the Wilderness

For forty years we lived in Sukkot in the desert which is better translated today as the wilderness. Annually we left our homes for a pilgrimage to camp out in the mountains around Jerusalem. That physical trip also became spiritual voyage. Even today a devoted backpacker knows the spiritual transformation of a trek in the wilderness. Ellen Bernstein, co-founder of *Shomrei Adamah* - Keepers of the Earth, reflects:

I recognized that my [wilderness] adventuring resembled a religious quest. It was my chance to encounter life's mystery. It would usually take several days on the trail to leave behind the weight of my ego, my self-consciousness and all that is familiar and routine, and free my mind. In these moments, the world opened up to me; I felt the intimacy with the earth, I was more aware of the plants' special habits, I laughed easily and

was eager to chat with strangers. I felt a profound generosity toward the world that comes too infrequently in my daily life....⁷

There are of course challenges, fears, conquests of self and of the terrain as well as failures and the need to accept our limitations. These too were the mixed experiences of our ancestors in the desert. They lived with dependence on God's gifts and radical vulnerability not just to a downpour in a suburban Sukkah but to attacks by marauders and the danger of being lost. The uncertainty of survival made everyday a profound voyage into self-knowledge. As Ellen Bernstein puts it:

The heart of the journey was a voyage toward the soul. ... In the city, I am aware of myself and my individuality...In the wilderness, my self-consciousness and inhibitions dissolve, and I am more conscious of the whole. In the city, I hurry through my chores joylessly so I can engage in more *important* things, like work. In the wilderness, I find the greatest pleasure in fixing dinner, fetching wood, and bathing in an alpine lake. In the city, I always need *something*. My pleasure seems to derive in part from the goods I have acquired. In the wilderness, I am content with what I have: the company of friends, the beauty of the place, the pleasure of walking. I am not aware of wanting anything. Being resourceful and making do with what I have are part of the adventure...

Ellen Bernstein understands and commends the three Jewish pilgrimage holidays as a time to integrate the wilderness into our lives not just as individuals but as a community. In a camping site as in the desert, everyone needs one another and so we are required to learn to live together. That community-in-the-wilderness experience is essential to Sukkot as a pilgrimage holiday.

⁷ *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*, (Jewish Lights)

Kavanot / Reflections on the Existential Meaning of Sukkot

Harvesting Our Potential: The Joy of Achievement

Sukkot is the epitome of all Jewish festivity according to the Torah because of the generosity of the harvest: Deuteronomy 16:15 - "Seven days you will celebrate before Adonai in the place that God will choose [the Temple in Jerusalem] for Adonai blessed all your produce and all that you have made with your own hands, so be very happy." Along with Shavuot, it is the only Jewish holiday that makes material success and personal productivity, the central focus of life. It is not wealth per se that we honor but achievement - *maasei yadai* - "all that you have made with your own hands." Yes, we thank God who gave us the land, the health, the rain, the intelligence - in short, the economic means of production. But the source of joy is our sense of our own ability to bring forth bread from the land, to bring forth and fulfill our potential for creativity. The harvest aspect of Sukkot is not about receiving manna from heaven but growing our own food and the pleasure of ownership and self-sufficiency. That is the reason that a lulav and etrog must be the personal property of one who blesses them and shakes them in joy before God. Of course, living in a Sukkah with a porous roof outside of our house reminds us of our vulnerability and reading Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*) about the vain cycles of accumulation and loss counterbalances the pure joy of economic success.

Even when reading Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*) dampens our joy, the core of *simcha* on Sukkot remains our celebration of our own success, of our actualization of our productive potential. For those of us who are no longer farmers we need to recall our own achievements in other areas and review with our family and friends around the table in the Sukkah our harvest of personal products each year - houses built, books written, businesses made to flourish, patients cured etc. For our justified pride in what we have done with the resources God has granted us is the springboard for the unique joy of *Chag HaAsif* - the Festival of Harvesting the Work of our Hands.

Sukkah Consciousness: Living with Vulnerability

The Sukkah, even in the Torah, seems to straddle two different ecosystems - the desert and the settled agricultural land. Both are alien to our urban life but they still offer metaphors for life.

What does the Sukkah represent: Eretz Yisrael or the desert? An agricultural structure for the harvest in the field or a nomadic shelter in the desert? The era when Jews were farmers celebrating the end of the harvest season or when Jews were refugees from Egypt during the Exodus and wandering? The achievement of material prosperity or the perennial exposure to the vicissitudes of dependence?

The Torah weighs in on the side of desert consciousness, reliving transitions, being on the move and hence feeling how exposed we are to the shifts in autumn weather and how much we rely on Divine grace. "You shall reside in sukkot for seven days; every citizen of Israel shall reside in sukkot, so that for generations you will [remember and] know that when I took the children of Israel out of Egypt, I settled them in *sukkot* [in the desert before reaching Eretz Yisrael]. I am Adonai your God." (Leviticus 23:22-23). Eating and sleeping in a sukkah without the special consciousness it is designed to provoke misses the point.

What exactly do we need to remember? RaSHBaM, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, grandson of Rashi (12th c. France, on Leviticus 23:22) says we must remember what Moshe told us before entering the land of Israel and becoming land owners and farmers. "Remember the whole trip that God took us on through the desert ... with all its suffering and hunger when we were dependent on manna [from heaven]... so that we should know that human life does not depend on bread [that we grow ourselves] alone, but on God's word does human life depend." (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). That is the reason, explains Rashbam, that God set the holiday of Sukkot during the season when we gather the produce of the grain and the grapes, so that we would have to leave our homes which are overflowing with everything good, and sit in the desert dwellings of landless refugees. Otherwise we may forget that the land itself is God's gift and we might think that "my power and the strength of my hands produced for me this great prosperity" (Deuteronomy 8:17).

The Spanish commentator Yitzchak Arame (Leviticus 23:23) transcends the historical memory to find in the sukkah a symbol of universal human transience in this world. The sukkah is a temporary residence to remind us that we are all temporary residents on this earth. We go out of our secure houses, precisely during the season when the weather turns cold and rainy, and move into a cramped little sukkah, with just enough food for one day, furnished with but a table, a lamp and a chair. Thus we turn ourselves away from concerns with money, possessions and trading in produce and learn to live with minimal needs. If we learn to live with less, without luxuries, then we will not feel want.

A new message of the sukkah emerges in the light of the expanding world terrorism in our era, and especially the tragic destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City. Every house no matter how solid becomes a mere sukkah exposed to the storms of human evil. Life is ephemeral and yet every moment becomes precious. Accumulating material wealth loses its point but whatever moments of meaning we experience are a mark of Divine grace.

Sukkot: Only the Momentary is Momentous by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman

"It just isn't worth it," goes the prevailing American wisdom, "it" being anything that has no lasting value, anything (that is) that exists only for the moment or, at least, for the relative moment. We should think big, build for the future, invest long-term, shouldn't we?

By that standard, constructing a sukkah is absurd, pure folly, even idiocy. Fresh upon the heels of Yom Kippur, "holidayed out" and appropriately anxious to return to the regularized schedule of daily life, we suspend normalcy yet again to build a structure that must look to outsiders like a massive architectural mistake. Worse, we apparently "waste" money on a lulav and etrog that we will use for just one week and toward no evident end.

The absurdity only seems to increase with the halakhah that insists on buying a lulav and etrog that are perfect specimens of their species. You don't just go to the nearest grocery store and pick up something on sale ("It's good enough," we ought to say. "We'll just wave it a few times after all"). Jews who are serious about keeping the mitzvah emulate the Vilna Gaon who is said to have insisted on "*m'hudar shebim'hudarim*," "the best of the best," regardless of the cost. Market mechanisms of classic economics get skewed in this ideal sellers market. No one would quarrel with this degree of punctiliousness in such clearly global matters as world health or even homeland security. But an etrog? ⁸

What the sukkah is to space, individual tiny moments are to time. Like the sukkah, they, too, are impermanent, fleeting and fragile, but deserving, nonetheless, of "*m'hudar shebim'hudarim*," "the best of the best" that we

⁸ The whole point of the sukkah is "to dwell in it," and the word for "dwell" is "*leishev*." The *b'rakhah* says: "Blessed is God who commands us to dwell [*leishev*] in the sukkah." But as a people regularly on the move, we Jews have developed a specialized vocabulary to differentiate degrees of settlement, so "*leishev*" comes with its own interpretive baggage. The varieties of "*leishev*" fill up 15 columns in the classic history of Hebrew written by Eliezer ben Yehudah, the founder of the modern Hebrew language. More than just "to sit," it has the connotation of permanent dwelling -- as in "to form a settlement." So the commandment is to treat the most temporary of structures as if you are settling into it permanently.

can muster. Therein lies the wisdom of Sukkot: the enormous truth that, like the sukkah, each moment of passing time, though entirely transitory, is as permanent a thing as we are likely to know, and demanding also that we stop "*leishev bah*." "to dwell within it," as if it were the only moment of our lives. It is human nature to plan big projects, picture grand accomplishments, and muse on eternity, but when all is said and done, only the momentary is momentous. Lose life's moments and you lose life itself. (Wexner Heritage Foundation Electronic Beit Midrash 9.17.02)

The Joy of Excess: *Simchat Beit Hasho-eiva* and King David's Wild Dancing

Rabbi Eliezer used to say: "I praise the lazy people who never leave home on a pilgrimage holiday for the Torah says: 'Be happy with your household.'" (TB Sukkah 27b). However that tame home festivity expressed in sitting with family and friends in the Sukkah in one's backyard is a very far cry from the wild communal dancing in the Second Temple period that characterized Sukkot alone among the pilgrimage holidays. It is still recaptured in Hassidic shuls especially in Jerusalem today where bands blare and men dance until late every night of Hol HaMoed Sukkot. Having nothing to do with the harvest, this joy emerges from our special closeness to God in the Temple (Leviticus 23:40) and it coincides with the anniversary of its being built by King Solomon (I Kings 8). It is a kind of childlike playing before our loving and attentive Divine parent in the intimacy of God's home.

The closest Biblical parallel to this mass happening is the amazing abandon demonstrated by King David when he first brought up the ark to Jerusalem even before the Temple was built by his son. Then David swirled and danced and shook without regard to the dignity of his status as the king or the possible derision of the common people that looked on. "David and all of Israel played before Adonai holding all sorts of cypress branches [perhaps instruments made from this wood] and playing harps, navels, drums, rattles, and chimes." (II Samuel 6:5). His royal wife, Michal daughter of King Saul, despised David for his vulgar touch that in her mind debased his office. "Gazing from her window Michal daughter of Saul saw David gyrating and shaking [or perhaps leaping and whirling] before God and she despised him in her heart....Michal, daughter of Saul, went forth to greet David [at the conclusion of his triumphant procession before the ark] and she said [sarcastically] to David: 'Look how *honorable* the king of Israel appeared today, uncovered before the servant girls of his subjects like riffraff who expose themselves in public" (II Samuel 6: 15,20). Yet David believed that his willingness to give all for God, to release all his passions in public, to "play before Adonai" with spontaneity and innocence would only endear him to the common people and to the God who enjoys that kind of free expression of joy.

That onetime historical moment became the paradigm for Maimonides who commends exactly that kind of celebration every Sukkot. In fact, in the days of the Second Temple a popular festival called *Simchat Beit Hasho-eiva* (literally the celebration of the House for Drawing Water for Temple use, the pump room) involved five to six nights of all-night dancing in the Temple courtyard no less. These happenings were characterized by a giant musical jamboree with all sorts of instruments, sleepless nights, acrobatic performances with flaming torches and handstands led by the most august rabbis. As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah used to say: "when we were celebrating *Simchat Beit Hashoeiva*, our eyes never saw sleep. When Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, head of the Sanhedrin, was really reveling ...he would take up eight wicks (or lit torches) and toss up one after the other without their touching one another. Then he would balance himself on his thumbs and do pushups like no other human being can. Rabbi Levi performed an acrobatic somersault before his teacher Rabbi and ended up with a dislocated thigh and a permanent limp. In short, anyone who has never seen the festivities of *Simchat Beit HaShoeiva*, has really never seen a festival in his/her lifetime" (TB Sukkah 51 ff)

Maimonides captures the spirit of this excess and rules that we must follow David's example:

"Even though it is a mitzvah to celebrate on all the holidays, on the Sukkot in the Temple there was a greater *simcha*...How did they celebrate? ...Everyone played whatever musical instruments they knew or whoever knew how to sing sang. There was dancing, ringing chimes, clapping, gyrating and swirling (like King David) everyone according to his talents...The greatest persons of wisdom in Israel, heads of yeshivot, of the Sanhedrin, persons of piety, elders and community leaders of practical achievement (*anshei maaseh*)- were dancing, clapping, making music and celebrating in the Temple during Sukkot. ... This expression of the joy of the mitzvah and the love of God who commanded it constitute a great form of worshipping the Divine. So people who refrain from participating in these celebrations ...and think themselves above it all, too dignified and honorable in their own eyes, are sinners and fools. ..While those who humble themselves and move their bodies lightly (rather than walking in a weighty manner) are the most honorable worshippers of God out of pure love. That is what King David said and did..." (Mishne Torah, Festivals, Laws of Lulav, Chapter 8:12-15)

Simcha - Everyone's Special Treats for Yom Tov?

The Jewish holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot involve a spiritual celebration of the God of History's redemption - as in the giving of the Torah or the Exodus from Egypt - and a profound appreciation for the God of Nature who gives us first fruits and generous harvests. However they also involve the down to earth pleasures of family life in which each one merits their own particular treats. Maimonides explains: originally the *simcha* - the joy of the festivals - was epitomized in the special sacrifices shared by the family and friends at the Temple. However even without a Temple there is a mitzvah "to make all the members of your household happy."

Maimonides gave very concrete suggestions on making one's family happy that begins by sensing how different they are in age and gender as well as in personality.

"How [do we make them happy]?"

For children, give them roasted grains (like popcorn), nuts or sweet cakes.

For women, purchase beautiful clothes and jewelry according to your means.

For men, eating meat and drinking fine wine, for there is no celebration without meat and wine." (*Mishne Torah, Festivals, Laws of Yom Tov, Chapter 6: 17-18*).

One could imagine different preferences. The point is that members of the household should be concerned to get one another special gifts before the holiday that will give them pleasure both in receiving the gift and in enjoying it. Could you name what special gifts would make each person at your table light up with joy?

However, one's joy must also include others beyond the family circle. "When eating and drinking for your self, it is also a responsibility to feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and all other needy people who are miserable. If you, on the other hand, lock the doors to your courtyard to celebrate alone just with your family, without giving food and drink to the poor and the bitter of spirit - then your festival happiness is not the joy of a mitzvah but the joy of the belly." (*Mishne Torah, Festivals, Chapter 6: 17-18*). As Maimonides comments about giving gifts to the poor on Purim, "It is better to multiply gifts to the needy than to add more

courses to your own meals or even to send presents to one's friends. For there is no joy greater than making the hearts of the poor, orphans, widows and strangers happy. That is Godlike as Isaiah said: 'to revive the depressed and broken-hearted.'" (*Mishne Torah, Festivals, Laws of Megillah, Chapter 2: 17*).

The Best Remedy for Sadness - Be Alone with God's Creation

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside to a place where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that there will be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.

Anne Frank, *Diary*, 1944

The Yom Tov Kiddush: Who Creates Holy Time?

"*Kiddush*" is an active verb which means "making time holy." So who "makes Kiddush"? Do we "keep" God's day holy or do we ourselves transform the secular into the sacred?

That seems to be a matter of dispute as we can see by noting a small but significant difference between the wording of the Shabbat and holiday Kiddush. On Shabbat, we say: "Bless God who sanctifies Shabbat" - *M'kadeish HaShabbat*. However on Yom Tov we recite the surprising phrase: *M'kadeish Yisrael v'haZmanim* "Bless God who sanctifies the people *Israel* and its Designated Times." The blessing states that Israel is sanctified *before* its holidays. What is the secret of this textual variation?

The key lies in the date on which Shabbat falls as opposed to the date designated for a holiday. The sanctity of the festivals, like Pesach or Sukkot, are fixed by a calendar date in terms of the day of a lunar month, therefore the sanctity of a particular day depends on the setting of the first day of the month Rosh Hodesh. It is ultimately human authorities who set the calendar - not heavenly luminaries like the moon. While the cycle of the moon is directly determined by God the creator, the calendar choice of moving the New Moon, Rosh Hodesh celebration, a day earlier or later, is set by human authority. Thus the Rabbis shift the calendar of all the other holidays - except for Shabbat - even including Yom Kippur.

The story of Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua expresses that unique

feature of Rabbinic thought. Even when it comes to Yom Kippur, Rabban Gamliel, the head of the Sanhedrin determines its exact date, not the actual sighting of the new moon as Rabbi Yehoshua initially ruled. Rabbi Yehoshua reluctantly accepts the authority of Rabban Gamliel and violates the "naturally" determined calculation of Yom Kippur to publically acknowledge human authority over the calendar (Mishna Rosh Hashana).

However Shabbat is more primordial. It owes its origins to the Creation, not to historical events in Jewish history like Pesach, nor to seasonal agricultural events determined by the solar calendar in Eretz Yisrael. Every seventh day without regard to its date in the lunar or solar calendar - is Shabbat. It is not human calendar makers but God's own determination that makes the seventh day holy. Therefore in the concluding epithet of the Kiddush, God is credited with 'sanctifying Shabbat', while Israel is credited with sanctifying the calendar by which the festivals are determined - *Mikadesh Yisrael v'HaZmanim*.