

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

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DEDICATION LeRefuah Shelemah for Elisheva Bat Esther

In memory of Phillip Deutsch

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The Kansas Sukkah Doctor

In the office or the hospital right after morning minyan and working extended hours, radiation oncologist Dr. Jay Robinow has saved hundreds of lives. That's his day job.

Late into the night, Robinow has also saved hundreds of lives, but spiritually rather than physically. Since 2007, he has built and/or expanded more than 150 sukkot for people across the state of Kansas.

Profit isn't the motive of this sukkah venture. That's because any proceeds from Robinow sukkah projects go to the local kollel (institute for advanced Talmud study), and he also donates at least half of the sukkot and sukkah parts he has worked with.

For example, Robinow often provides young couples with a sukkah during their first year living in his community of Overland Park, Kan. He buys and builds sukkot as wedding gifts and lends a hand to those who cannot afford a sukkah, such as single mothers or large Orthodox families. He also makes a habit of donating and building a few sukkot each year for less-observant families interested in exploring this Jewish ritual. More often than not, the sukkah leads the latter families to greater engagement with Judaism, and sometimes even a transformation of their observance.

Robinow created the design for the sukkot he builds. He orders corner pieces from an online canopy store -he says "they know me by now and all about Sukkot"- and gets the rest of the sukkah parts fashioned at the local Home Depot. Because of his day job, he works late into the evening, often as late as midnight, to get the sukkot built each year.

Over the years, Robinow has roped his five children into the "business." His son David, a senior at the local Jewish high school, says many times his father loads the car with the sukkah gear and drives him and his brother to a home in the area. Robinow unloads the materials and tells them to get to work, and returns in a couple of hours. While the boys build one sukkah, Robinow reloads the car and takes off to build another.

"For me, I'm like the shoemaker's wife," says wife Margie Robinow with a chuckle. "I had to beg for years to get my sukkah expanded. Finally, two years ago, he did it."

Single mother Michal Luger says she is still in awe every time she pictures the night that Robinow drove up to her modest apartment and built her a sukkah-the first she ever had. Her son, Shai-El, was born the day before Sukkot and she had always envisioned the household celebrating the holiday in its own sukkah. But financial circumstances and the inability to erect one on her own had kept that dream from becoming a reality. Last year, the day before Shai-El's 10th birthday, at 10 p.m., Robinow surprised her with a sukkah.

"It was really, really exciting and most amazing," reports Luger, who took dozens of pictures of her son in the sukkah that night and every night of the holiday (other than Yom Tov) thereafter. Robinow was "as tired as anyone could be," but he built the sukkah "with the biggest smile on his face." And Shai-El was so happy that, according to his mother, he ate every meal in that sukkah during the holiday and invited all of his friends over for a suk-kah party.

For Marsha Johnston, Robinow was her first introduction to the Kansas City-area Orthodox Jewish community. "We just couldn't believe Jay was so kind," she says, noting that when he put the sukkah up seven years ago her son was dabbling with observance through the Orthodox youth group NCSY. Today, her then 14-year-old is a 22-year-old yeshiva student. But whenever he is in town, he still drags out his mattress and sleeps in Robinow's sukkah.

Todd Natenberg and his wife received their sukkah from Robinow three years ago, just after the birth of their twin sons. Natenberg says he grew up with some Jewish traditions, such as celebrating Passover, but he had always wondered about Sukkot. Robinow came to Natenberg's Leawood, Kansas, home and the two built the Natenberg sukkah together. Now, Natenberg builds the sukkah on his own every year.

"Jay is so concerned about the Jewish community," says Natenberg. "Whether it's by being a radiologist or helping to build sukkahs in a place like Kansas, he's helping the world. He's a model of Judaism, a model of what it's all about."

Robinow, however, is humble. "People need sukkahs," he says, surprised that anyone would be interested in his story.

Yet Robinow admits that it's kind of fun to see his neighborhood, smack in the middle of a Kansas suburb, decked out with sukkahs. While he can't take credit for all of them, the community knows he has played a pivotal role in its "sukkah-fication."

"When we first moved here, there were maybe five or six [sukkahs]," says Robinow. "Now there are probably 30 or 40. It's real simple."

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Source: Condensed and edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article written by Maayan Jaffe (maayanjaffe@icloud.com) and posted on JNS.org on Sept. 10, 2014.

### **The Secret of the Four Plants Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

"And you shall take on the first day [Sukkot] a fruit of a citrus tree (etrog), branch of palm trees (lulab), branch of myrtle (hadasim) and willows of streams ('araba). And you shall rejoice before HaShem your God for seven days "(Lev 23).

#### **WHAT DO THESE PLANTS REPRESENT?**

What's so special about these four plants? Why were these four species chosen to celebrate the festival of Sukkot?

The Tora does not explain why it specifically mentions these four plants. One possible reason, following the thought of Maimonides, is that in the time of the Tora the reason for this precept was so evident that it need not be explained.

The Rabbis of the Talmud offered some insights on this matter, focusing on 1. What these plants represent visually. Namely: four organs of the body (spine, heart, eyes, mouth) all united to serve HaShem. And 2. What the symbol of their other two characteristics, aroma and taste, represent: namely, four individuals of the people of Israel, from the perfect Yehudi, who studies and observes the Tora, to the Yehudi who does not know or want to know it. In a way, after Yom Kippur is over, we were all forgiven and equal, and we share the same intention of approaching HaShem in happiness.

#### **WHY THESE PLANTS?**

My teacher, Ribbí Sa'adia Benzaquén, z'l, used to say that these plants represent vegetation in general, because the four are perennials plants, that is, they do not die or lose their leaves when winter arrives. This is particularly noticeable in the etrog, a citrus fruit, which as the Gemara explains, remains in its

tree throughout the year (haddar beilano mishana leshana). It is also possible that these four plants represent the realm of plants and vegetation, from which we obtain directly or indirectly all our food and sun's energy, because they grow in four completely different geographical areas. The etrog grows in the valleys, the lulab (palm trees) in the desert, the myrtle (hadasim) in the mountains, and the araba (willow) on the banks of lakes and rivers.

#### **ANOTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATION**

A couple of years ago I noticed something else, a detail I had never noticed before. While I was explaining to the members of my community how to preserve the four species to last for the entire week of Sukkot, I realized that each of these plants dried and withered at a different pace.

The fastest to dry is the 'araba. Willow branches, once cut from their tree, dry in a matter of days. In many cases, the branches of 'araba do not survive even the seven days of Sukkot.

Then we have the myrtle leaves, hadasin, which would wither in a matter of weeks.

The lulab, the palm branch, dries very slowly. It does not take weeks but months to dry completely. There is a custom, which some Yehudim still follow, and which comes from the times when the matsot were baked in wood-burning ovens, to keep the dry branch of the lulab for using it along with the wood for baking the Matsot in Pesah, 6 months after Sukkot.

And finally we have the etrog. There are several elements that make etrog a special fruit, but perhaps most special characteristic of the etrog is that it is a fruit that does not decompose, and can last for years. If one leaves, for example, a lemon (the citrus fruit most similar to the etrog) for some days outdoors, or even in a refrigerator, it will decompose in a matter of days. The etrog, however, does not get rotten or decompose. And if you leave an etrog in a box, or even outdoors, although it shrinks and loses its color, it lasts and even preserves its aroma, not for months but for years!.

Will these characteristics be a coincidence?

I do not think they are. Why?

#### **RAIN AND THE ORDER OF THE WORDS**

First, because the most fundamental element of the Sukkot Holiday is water / rain (מימה לע מינודן גחב). During Sukkot we begin to thank HaShem for the rain (mashib haruah, morid hagueshem) and we also pray for a year of generous rainfall, and rain in its due

time. These four plants represent a different relationship of dependence — or in the case of etrog and 'araba, an opposite relationship— toward the water / moisture they retain or lose inside.

But the main reason why I do not think this is a coincidence, is the order in which these plants are presented by the Tora. If you look closely at the pasuq (verse) mentioned above, you will see that the Tora first mentions the etrog, then the lulab (palm branch), then the hadasim (myrtle), and then the 'araba. That is, the plants are mentioned in the order they dry: The Tora mentions first, the plants that dry slower.

Perhaps all this symbolizes that HaShem created plants, creatures and people, with very different needs. And that we should learn to accept our innate differences.

Or perhaps the Tora wants to teach us a lesson about the differences between the ephemeral and the enduring. So we chose the latter.

Or maybe to teach the difference between the righteous and the wicked. The etrog, identified by the Sages identified with the ideal Jew who dedicates himself to the study and practice of the Tora, does not "wither" fast. As David HaMelekh says in Tehilim 1: 3: "The righteous shall be" like a tree planted on the side of a river, giving its fruit in due season, and its leaves will never wither". While the wicked, identified by the sages with the 'araba will be, "like the dry shell, dragged [against his will] by the wind. "

Something to think about during Sukkot...

### **Rav Kook on the Perasha**

The Talmud in Sukkah 27b makes a remarkable claim regarding the holiday of Succoth:

"For seven days ... all who belong to the people of Israel will live in sukkot [thatched huts]' (Lev. 23:42). This teaches that it is fitting for all of Israel to sit in one sukkah."

Obviously, no sukkah is large enough to hold the entire Jewish people. What is the meaning of this utopian vision — all of Israel sitting together in a single sukkah?

The Unity of Succoth

As long as we are plagued by pettiness and other character flaws, we cannot attain true collective unity. But after experiencing the unique holiness of Yom

Kippur, this unfortunate state is repaired. After our lives have been illuminated by the light of teshuvah and the entire Jewish nation has been purified from the negative influences of sin and moral weakness, the soul's inner purity becomes our predominant quality. With this regained integrity, we merit an ever-increasing harmony among the diverse sectors of the nation.

During the holiday of Succoth we absorb the light of Torah and a love for truth. Conflicting views become integrated and unified. Through the spiritual ascent of the Days of Awe, we attain a comprehensive unity, a unity that extends its holy light over all parts of the Jewish people. During this special time, it is as if the entire nation is sitting together, sharing the holy experience of the same sukkah.

According to the Hasidic master Rabbi Nathan (1780-1844, chief disciple and scribe of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov), this sense of unity is the very essence of the mitzvah of sukkah. He wrote in Likutei Halachot that one should fulfill the mitzvah of sukkah with the following kavanah:

"One should concentrate on being part of the entire people of Israel, with intense love and peace, until it may be considered as if all of Israel dwells together in one sukkah."

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah p. 96)

### **Succoth – Celebrating the 2nd ananey ha'kavod Nathan Dweck**

I heard a nice class idea from Rabbi Diamond that I wanted to share. There is a mahcloket in the Gemara as to why we sit in the Succah. One Rabbi says to commemorate the Succoth (huts) that we stayed in in the midbar. The other says the Succah commemorates the ananey ha'kavod, the miraculous "clouds of glory" which encircled and protected Benel Yisrael during their travels in the wilderness. And so according to the opinion that the Succah commemorates the ananey ha'kavod, considering we first received the ananey ha'kavod when we left Mitsrayim in Nissan, the question arises as to why we celebrate Succoth in Tishrey (6months later). And the most well known answer is that it is warm in Nissan and we want it to be recognizable that we are sitting outside not because it is nice out but rather to commemorate the ananey ha'kavod. Thus we sit outside when the weather is getting colder and most people move inside.

The Gaon Me'vilna however brings a different answer as to why we celebrate in Tishrey. He notes that after the sin of the egel Hashem removed the ananey ha'kavod that provided protection and comfort for Benei Israel. Moshe then went up to Har Sinai for 40 days to ask for forgiveness. He then went up for another 40 days to receive the 2nd set of luchot coming down on Yom Kippur. After Moshe came down he began collecting materials from Benei Israel for the mishkan. They collected materials on the 11th, 12th and 13th of Tishri – and on the 14th, they brought all the materials to Besalel who was in charge of building the mishkan. The next day they began the building of the mishkan and the ananey ha'kavod came back. And this day was the 15th of Tishrey which is the first day of Succoth. And so the hidoosh of the Gaon Me'vilna is that on Succoth we are not celebrating the original ananey ha'kavod that Benei Israel had when leaving Mitsrayim (in Nissan) but rather the 2nd ananey ha'kavod which we in fact received in Tishrey. The ananey ha'kavod that came back even after we did this horrible sin of the egel. The ananey ha'kavod that show that even after what we did Hashem still loves us. And this is the happiness of Succoth!

Ve'Zot Ha'beracha- Moshe blesses Benei Israel before his death

- 1- The blessing for the tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Shimon
- 2- The blessing of Levi and Binyamin
- 3- The blessing of Yosef
- 4- The blessing of Yisachar, Zevulun and Gad
- 5- The blessing of Dan, Naftali, and Asher
- 6- Moshe praises Benei Israel
- 7- Moshe ascends up to har Nebo, sees the land of Israel, and dies

Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Commemorating the Clouds of Glory  
The Misva to reside in a Succa for seven days and nights serves to commemorate the Ananeh Ha'kabod, the "clouds of glory" that encircled Beneh Yisrael as they traveled through the wilderness and provided miraculous protection from the harsh elements. (This follows the view of Rabbi Eliezer; Rabbi Akiba maintained that the Succa commemorates actual huts in which Beneh Yisrael dwelled during their sojourn through the wilderness.)

The question is asked, why is specifically the miracle of the Ananeh Ha'kabod deemed worthy of commemoration? During the period of desert travel,

God sustained Beneh Yisrael with manna that fell from the heavens each morning, and with a supernatural well that accompanied them throughout their journeys and supplied water. Curiously, there is no Misva commemorating the miracles of the Manna and the well. Out of all the miracles that God performed for our ancestors in the desert, only the Ananeh Ha'kabod are commemorated through a special Misva. Why was this miracle singled out for commemoration?

One answer is that there is no Misva to commemorate the manna or the well because these miracles were the cause of sins. At various points during their travels, Beneh Yisrael complained about the manna and also about the shortage of water. It would not be appropriate to observe Misvot that bring to mind these unfortunate incidents when Beneh Yisrael acted improperly, as the Sages teach, "En Katorog Na'aseh Sanegor" – "A prosecutor cannot become an advocate." Just as we do not blow on Rosh Hashanah the horn of a cow, which would bring to mind the sin of the golden calf, similarly, we do not have Misvot to commemorate the manna or the well, which would bring to mind our ancestors' inappropriate complaints against God in the desert.

Secondly, we do not have a Misva to commemorate the manna and well because these were the basic necessities that God was obliged, as it were, to provide our ancestors. Parents have certain basic obligations to their children, which include providing food and water, and thus it was to be expected that God, our Father, would provide our ancestors with food and water. The clouds of glory, by contrast, were a "luxury," something special and beyond God's strict "obligations" toward us, and thus they in particular are worthy of a special commemoration.

Finally, the manna and the well sustained not only Beneh Yisrael, but also the Ereb Rab – the people from other nations that joined Beneh Yisrael when they left Egypt. The Ananeh Ha'hakabod, however, were given as a special gift to Beneh Yisrael, and not to the Ereb Rab, and we thus commemorate this special expression of love through the Misva of Succa.

Another question that arises is why this commemoration is held in Tishri. Seemingly, if the Succot commemorate the miracle of the Ananeh Ha'kabod, this Misva should be observed in Nissan, the time when we left Egypt into the desert, whereupon we received the miraculous clouds.

One well-known answer is that in ancient times, it was customary for people to construct outdoor huts

and spend time in them during the spring and summer. As such, if we would live in Succot in Nissan, it would not be evident that we do so for the purpose of commemorating the miracle God performed for our ancestors. We are therefore commanded to observe this Misva in Tishri, the time when the rainy season begins and people start bringing their outdoor furniture inside. By moving into the Succa specifically now, when it was customary to do just the opposite, we demonstrate that we reside in the Succa not for leisure, but rather for the sake of the Misva.

The Zohar refers to the Succa as “the shade of faith.” The Succa has the capacity to inspire us with its sanctity and bolster our faith in the Almighty. May we all be blessed with the privilege of experiencing the special Kedusha of the Succa and being inspired to rise to greater levels of Emuna.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein**

All of us sense a feeling of spiritual deflation immediately after the exalted atmosphere of Yom Kippur. To have to plunge immediately and directly into the icy waters of everyday life is much too challenging a task. We have just been given an entire day to nurture our souls and to exist as angels without the necessity of fulfilling the requirements of our bodies. So the Lord, so to speak, allows us a more gradual descent into our physical, everyday lives. We are asked to forego the comforts and solidness of our homes for a period of time, to dwell in a succah, exposed to the heavens and to the natural world.

It is again, like Yom Kippur itself, a place of the soul and not of the body. For the succah, no matter how elaborate and luxurious we attempt to make it, remains a temporary and exposed environment. The body is aware of this situation and is somewhat discomforted by it. The soul revels in it. Thus the soul hangs on to the last vestiges of Yom Kippur through Hoshana Rabbah, before our bodies return to complete dominion over our lives.

Perhaps that is also one of the reasons that the day of Hoshana Rabbah is considered as being a High Holy Day and not only as an intermediate day of Succot. Though none of the restrictions of Yom

Kippur are present on that festival day or throughout any of the joyous days of Succot, the spiritual atmosphere of Yom Kippur is still present, for we are living amongst holy clouds and not in physically strong structures.

Jews the world over are willing to spend sizeable amounts of money in the fulfillment of the commandments of the holiday of Succot. We are all aware that the price of a lemon or of an orange or any citrus fruit at the local green grocer is rather negligible. Not so the price of an Etrog! It is not the fruit itself that makes it so valuable to so many. It is the ability to fulfill the will of God through an etrog – itself a gift of God’s bounty – that makes it so valuable... as to be almost priceless.

All of the physical instruments that we use throughout our lives are the means through which our souls remain connected to our Creator. Just as the value of an etrog lies in what lies behind the etrog – in what it represents and Who ordained its use on the holiday of Succot, would that we would view everything in life, all of our goods and possessions, friends and families and our society generally, with such a perspective.

In essence that is the basis of Jewish thought and the moral code of the Torah. On Yom Kippur it is realized and confirmed for us on Succot. And it is that spirit of understanding our role in this world of eternal values that truly occasions within us the joy and happiness that radiates from the holiday of Succot.

**Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

Of all the festivals, Sukkot is surely the one that speaks most powerfully to our time. Kohelet could almost have been written in the twenty first century. Here is the ultimate success, the man who has it all – the houses, the cars, the clothes, the adoring women, the envy of all men – who has pursued everything this world can offer from pleasure to possessions to power to wisdom and yet who, surveying the totality of his life, can only say, in effect, “Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.”

Kohelet’s failure to find meaning is directly related to his obsession with the “I” and the “Me”: “I built for myself. I gathered for myself. I acquired for myself.” The more he pursues his desires, the emptier his life becomes. There is no more powerful critique of the consumer society, whose idol is the self, whose icon is the “selfie” and whose moral code is “Whatever works for you.” This is the society that achieved unprecedented affluence, giving people more choices than they have ever known, and yet at same time

saw an unprecedented rise in alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, stress related syndromes, depression, attempted suicide and actual suicide. A society of tourists, not pilgrims, is not one that will yield the sense of a life worth living. Of all things people have chosen to worship, the self is the least fulfilling. A culture of narcissism quickly gives way to loneliness and despair.

Kohelet was also, of course, a cosmopolitan: a man at home everywhere and therefore nowhere. This is the man who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines but in the end could only say, "More bitter than death is the woman." It should be clear to anyone who reads this in the context of the life of Solomon, that Kohelet is not really talking about women but about himself.

In the end Kohelet finds meaning in simple things. Sweet is the sleep of a labouring man. Enjoy life with the woman you love. Eat, drink and enjoy the sun. That ultimately is the meaning of Sukkot as a whole. It is a festival of simple things. It is, Jewishly, the time we come closer to nature than any other, sitting in a hut with only leaves for a roof, and taking in our hands the unprocessed fruits and foliage of the palm branch, the citron, twigs of myrtle and leaves of willow. It is a time when we briefly liberate ourselves from the sophisticated pleasures of the city and the processed artefacts of a technological age and recapture some of the innocence we had when we were young, when the world still had the radiance of wonder.

The power of Sukkot is that it takes us back to the most elemental roots of our being. You don't need to live in a palace to be surrounded by clouds of glory. You don't need to be rich to buy yourself the same leaves and fruit that a billionaire uses in worshipping God. Living in the sukkah and inviting guests to your meal, you discover – such is the premise of Ushpizin, the mystical guests – that the people who have come to visit you are none other than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives. What makes a hut more beautiful than a home is that when it comes to Sukkot there is no difference between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor. We are all strangers on earth, temporary residents in God's almost eternal universe. And whether or not we are capable of pleasure, whether or not we have found happiness, nonetheless we can all feel joy.

Sukkot is the time we ask the most profound question of what makes a life worth living. Having prayed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to be written in the Book of Life, Kohelet forces us to remember how brief life actually is, and how vulnerable. "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." What matters is not how long we live, but how intensely we feel that life is a gift we repay by giving to others. Joy, the overwhelming theme of the

festival, is what we feel when we know that it is a privilege simply to be alive, inhaling the intoxicating beauty of this moment amidst the profusion of nature, the teeming diversity of life and the sense of communion with those many others with whom we share a history and a hope.

Most majestically of all, Sukkot is the festival of insecurity. It is the candid acknowledgment that there is no life without risk, yet we can face the future without fear when we know we are not alone. God is with us, in the rain that brings blessings to the earth, in the love that brought the universe and us into being, and in the resilience of spirit that allowed a small and vulnerable people to outlive the greatest empires the world has ever known. Sukkot reminds us that God's glory was present in the small, portable Tabernacle Moses and the Israelites built in the desert even more emphatically than in Solomon's Temple with all its grandeur. A Temple can be destroyed. But a sukkah, broken, can be rebuilt tomorrow. Security is not something we can achieve physically but it is something we can acquire mentally, psychologically, spiritually. All it needs is the courage and willingness to sit under the shadow of God's sheltering wings.

### **Sukkot: From Fear to Festivities Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Fear and trembling.

Those have been our primary religious emotions during the past several weeks.

Although Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are referred to nowadays as the High Holidays, traditionally they were known as the Days of Awe, Yamim Noraim. Frightful days, fearful days.

During this recent time none of us escaped a sense of insecurity. Recognizing that these days are days of divine judgment, we could not help but wonder as to how we were being judged. We felt vulnerable, insecure, and anxious about what the coming year has in store for us.

And this was as it should be. After all, the central theme of the prayers has been fear and trembling. We actually have asked of the Almighty that he "cast His fear over all of His handiwork, and His awe over all of His creatures."

The great Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard entitled his book about Abraham's binding of Isaac Fear and Trembling. With his great spiritual acumen, he was able to discern that the central theme of the passage in Genesis which Jews read on Rosh

Hashanah was man's vulnerability in the face of God's demands.

But now we have emerged from this literally awesome period. Judaism does not want us to remain stuck in these overwhelming emotions of anxiety and uncertainty. And so, our Torah has provided us with the festival of Sukkot, a time not for fear and trembling, not even for a contemplation and soul-searching, but a time for serenity and joy.

We emerge from what mystics have termed the "dark night of the soul" into the bright light of simcha, of happiness.

But this happiness is not necessarily one of song and dance, and gala celebration. It is a deeper happiness, a feeling of contentment. It is a happiness which derives from a sense of safety and security, a basic sense of trust.

The central symbol of the holiday of Sukkot is the sukkah, the makeshift and often ramshackle hut in which we dwell, or at least take our meals during the holiday.

What is the meaning of this simple symbol? And how does it inspire this spiritual attitude of trust?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch said it best when he wrote:

"The building of the sukkah teaches you trust in God. You know that whether men live in huts or in palaces, it is only as pilgrims that they dwell. You know that in this pilgrimage God is our protection. The sukkah is a transitory hut that one day will leave us or we will leave it. The walls may fall, the leafy covering may wither in this storm, but the sheltering love of God is everywhere. You dwell in the most fleeting and transitory dwelling as calmly and securely as if it were your house forever."

And so this week, we undergo what scientists call a paradigm shift. We experience a different set of religious emotions, emerging from a deeply felt solemnity into a sense of calm security.

And we also redirect our orientation to God. He is no longer the harsh and exacting judge. He is not even the forgiving and compassionate judge. He is now our shelter and protector, the permanent "Rock of Israel", in the transitory experience we call life.

We are able to effect this shift, and this redirection, by using the symbols that the holiday provides us, chief among them the sukkah.

What is the secret of the sukkah? How does it work its wonders?

The secret is to enter it respectfully and reflectively, spend as much time as possible enveloped in its shade, and invite into it two types of guests.

For starters flesh and blood friends and family, with special hospitality for those who may never have enjoyed a sukkah experience.

But we also symbolically summon the "ghost guests", the ushpizin, our ancestors going back to Abraham and Sarah, whom we invite to join us.

Like no other mitzvah, we immerse ourselves in the sukkah. As Chassidim say, we enter the sukkah with "our boots on", totally, holding nothing back. We dwell in it to the fullest extent possible, for an entire week.

And we encounter there twin blessings: the companionship of others, and the cherished memories of those who sat in other Sukkot before us, ancestors recent and long gone, who all participated as we do in that protracted pilgrimage known as Jewish history.

Chag Sameach. A happy, secure, and peaceful holiday to all!

### **The Seven Heroes of Sukkot** by [Rabbi Benjamin Blech](#)

Why Jews invite these biblical heroes to the sukkah each night.

Oprah Winfrey always seems to know just what to ask in order to really get to know her subjects. She said one of her favorite questions was this:

"If you could invite anyone from all of history for a dinner party you're giving, who would you choose?"

Jews long ago had the same idea – and offered a collective answer during the joyful holiday of Sukkot. Sukkot is a time when we leave the walls of our homes in order to sit in booths of beauty open to friends, guests and strangers. In the season of the harvest we are anxious to share with others. And to express the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* – welcoming guests – we have a ritual known as *ushpizzin*. For seven days we invite another biblical hero by name to join us as "guest of honor" in the sukkah.

So how do Jews answer Oprah's question?

I hope you take the opportunity to invite these guests recommended by Jewish tradition: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. For some, the invitation is a way of reflecting on their role in the history of our people and the meaning of their lives as keys to our spiritual identity. For those more mystically attuned, the Kabbalists teach that the souls of these invitees literally come and make contact with their descendants, reaffirming the link between past and future.

Jews do not lack for heroes. Why were these seven chosen for this unique Sukkot distinction?

Permit me to offer my personal suggestions as I address each figure. These biblical heroes speak to us in the language of the needs of 21st century Jews, showing us how to make life more meaningful and spiritual.

**Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** – please take a day each and share with us the joy you discovered when you pioneered the concept of prayer.

It was you, **Abraham**, who the Talmud tells us was the first to speak to God with the prayer of *shacharit* – the time of morning when we first open our eyes to the glories of the universe and feel the need to respond with overflowing gratitude. It is you, Abraham, who made us realize that if we don't daily take the time to count our blessings we will turn into ungrateful recipients of God's goodness keeping track only of our misfortunes. We will concentrate on what we don't have and will only be saddened because we never have enough.

It was you, **Isaac**, who first prayed when the sun began to set the afternoon prayer of *minchah*. We need to learn from you, Isaac, how to deal with the moments when life seems to turn from brightness to darkness, from success to seeming failure, from good fortune smiling on my every decision to difficult days of challenge which threaten my accomplishments and my well-being. Isaac, the man who felt so close to God that he was willing to give up his life on the altar if the Almighty so willed it, is the guest we want to inspire us when our faith begins to falter and to reassure us that a darkening day is always followed by the brightness of another.

And it was you, **Jacob**, who established *ma'ariv* – the prayer to God in the night, the moment of fear, of terror, of dread and anxiety. The nighttime prayer requires the greatest faith of all. *Ma'ariv* was the prayer of all those in these past few months who faced hurricanes and floods, tremors and earthquakes, as well as unimaginable losses. We need Jacob to share the secret of his personal

strength which sustained him from the attacks of Esau in his youth to the tribulations of the Joseph story and the first Jewish exile to Egypt in his old age.

The first three days of Sukkot, days in which we renew contact with our patriarchs, make our holiday prayers all the more meaningful. Their lives serve as best answer to the question a man once asked: "What do you gain by regularly praying to God?"

The man replied, "Well let me tell you what I lost: Anger, ego, greed, depression, insecurity and fear of death." Sometimes the answer to our prayers is not what we gain, but what we lose -- which is ultimately the gain.

Let's not forget to invite **Joseph**, the only one commonly referred to in Jewish tradition as *Hatzaddik* – the righteous one. Teach us, Joseph, how you were able to withstand the seductive advances of the wife of your employer? How were you able to maintain faith not only in God but in the goodness of man after what your own brothers did to you when they sold you into slavery? Perhaps even more relevant to us in the contemporary world, how did you prevent unimaginable success to destroy your ethical character? Most amazing of all, how were you able to forgive your brothers for their horrible crime and find it in your heart to absolve them of their sin? Love your neighbor as yourself – even after they've treated you so harshly? Join us for dinner, Joseph, and let us know how you did it.

**Moses and Aaron** – at a time when we so desperately need leaders worthy of their position we can't wait to have you at our table. **Moses**, you're the only one to have spoken to God "face to face." What was it like? Can you reveal any more to us than what God taught you as his thirteen attributes of mercy? And how did you deal with a rebellious people who never appreciated you as much as you deserved? Moses, we don't even know where you are buried because God didn't want us to worship your tomb instead of your Torah. Help us now to become better Jews by getting to know you better.

And **Aaron**, remind us of how you gained the love of a people as the high priest who cared for everyone – sinners included – and who, as the Talmud tells us, was even willing to lie in order to restore friendship between fellow Jews. "I've heard the man you consider your enemy telling me how aggrieved he is and how sorry for the misunderstanding between you. He so desperately wants to apologize but is only held back because he is embarrassed." That is what Aaron would tell each one of two disputants – even though it was not true. Aaron believed that there were



times when truth could be compromised in the interest of love, when a lie could even become a mitzvah if it could turn adversaries into friends.

The holiday would not be complete if we didn't reserve a day for **King David**. David is destined to be the ancestor of the Messiah. He assuredly earned that distinction by his countless contributions to Jewish history. His royal rule was in the main exemplary. His Book of Psalms is a masterpiece of prayer and of poetry. But to my mind there is one thing that stands out above all. Confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sin with Bathsheba, David broke down and unabashedly responded with one word: *Chatati* - I have sinned. No explanations, no excuses, no assertion of power. No pitting of King versus prophet. David publicly acknowledged that God is greater than any King and that divine law supersedes any human failings.

In a time of the glorification of power, of personality cults and of celebrity worship, of self-aggrandizement and "selfies", King David's confession is perhaps the best way to bring to a close the holiday period which asks us to come closer to God for the coming year.

The number seven in Judaism stands for completion. It represents the sanctity of Shabbat. On Succot it brings together the seven giants of Jewish history whose values and life stories made us who we are and represent the key to our survival.

#### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

A Succah, if properly utilized, can be a place of very great achievement. Here are a few ideas as heard from Rabbi Miller ZT"L on how to maximize this opportunity.

1. Keep in mind that every minute you spend in the Succah, you are performing a positive commandment from the Torah. The longer you sit there and contend "I am doing the will of Hashem", you are getting more Mitzvot. The more kavanah/intent the greater the reward.

2. The Succah is a temporary dwelling which serves to remind us that this world is only temporary. It is the place we prepare, through improvement, in order to gain entry to Olam Haba.

3. The Succah is a symbol of being "in Hashem" all of our lives. "Hashem, m'aon atah h'ayitah lanu." "You are our dwelling, You are our complete protection, You are all around us always."

"Hashem Echod", there is nothing but Hashem in the world. "Yifros alenu succat shelomecha", we are in

Hashem's Succah which is all around us. This is why He is called 'Hamakom', The Place.

4. The humility of the Succah is in order to humble us. Reminding us to act with kindness and patience toward people in emulation of Hashem's patience and kindness to us.

The Abot lived in tents in order that they never forget that they are just visitors in this world.

5. The Succah means isolation from the nations of the world. "V'avdil etchem mikol ha'amim", "And I have separated you from all the nations"

6. The 'Peshat', reason for the Mitzvah of Succah, is in order that we should *know* that Hashem caused Israel to dwell in Succot and took them out of Egypt. We should look at the sechach/roof and remember, "L'maan yedeu derotechem", that we were once in the wilderness unprotected and yet more secure than any other time in our history.

The only true security is Hashem; that is the lesson of Succot. We enter the Succah and endeavor to gain more True Knowledge with sensory perception, that Hashem alone is our Succah and our sole Protection in all matters, forever and in both worlds.

To Serve Hashem B'simcha/Joy,  
this is the greatest success!