



Exalted Entourage: Sukkot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

There is a well-known custom of inviting one of the *ushpizin* (seven shepherds of our nation) into our *sukka*, on each night of the holiday of *Sukkot*. What is this custom based on? The Torah commands, "You shall dwell in booths for a seven day period; every native in Israel shall dwell in booths." The Otzar Hatorah explains the seeming redundancy with the idea that first the great *tzadikim* are commanded to sit in the *sukkot*, and then they are to be joined by all of Israel. The Zohar adds a different, somewhat cryptic, interpretation. The subject of the first 'sit' is seven days – the seven days shall sit and then be joined by all of Bnei Yisroel. Each day of the holiday is dedicated to one of the shepherds and all of Israel then joins them.

The Chida suggests that one light an extra candle, or perhaps seven candles, in honor of the special guest of each night. Rabbi Yaakov Hillel quoting the Chida suggests preparing a special chair for the *ushpizin*, similar to the chair designated for Eliyahu Hanavi at a *brit*. In fact, notes Nitei Gavriel, there is an allusion to Eliyahu Hanavi in the verse, *Basukkot teshvu shivat yamim*, whose initials are an acronym for Tishbi. Some have a custom to decorate the chair while others put *sifrei kodesh* on it.

Naturally, with such exalted guests, writes the Otzrot Hatorah citing the Shlah Hakodosh, we must behave accordingly in the *sukkah*, and speak only about Torah ideas so our guests feel comfortable. The Belzer Rebbe adds that the great wives of these leaders accompany them as well. The Netivot Shalom writes that

they come from *Gan Eden*, a place of total spirituality, which is why they can only come to a temporary abode like the *sukkah*. While the walls of our permanent homes may absorb all the improper speech and untoward behavior of the entire year, writes the Minchat Michoel, the *s'chach* of the *sukka* is the shade of the protection of Hashem and the walls are inherently holy.

Rabbi Leff reminds us that the *sukkah* represent the clouds of glory that surrounded us at Sinai and then descended on the *Mishkan*. As such, they signify the bond between the physical and the spiritual. The clouds, like the *sukkah*, are a temporary manifestation of God's presence. The ultimate bond, however, is achieved in the World to Come from where our guests have come to visit us. When we sit in the *sukkah*, we are basking in the joy of being in God's presence.

The Netivot Shalom notes that while the covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael was originally forged at Sinai and the Clouds of Glory surrounded us at that time, that covenant is renewed every year when the world is recreated on Rosh Hashanah. Then we can again draw His presence down to us as we try to repair the world anew. Each of these leaders renewed something in the world. Avraham brought back monotheism and Yitzchak purified the world. Each year on *Sukkot*, after the world is recreated, we draw upon these characteristics to help us repair the world, and we ask that these seven come down and impart their energies to us so that we can accomplish our mission.

Rabbi Gamliel in Tiv Hamoadim points out that the word *nisayon* can mean a test, a banner of victory, or flight. These ancient leaders of our nation point the way to the proper response to the challenges we face in our lives, and we can draw on their strength. As Rabbi Pincus says, the *ushpizin* help us jump start into the new realm of the year.

On Sukkot, we invite our seven spiritual ancestors to join us in our joy. But these guests don't eat. How can we then acknowledge their presence? By inviting the poor to our *sukkah* or giving them financial, spiritual, or emotional support we are taking what we would otherwise offer these guests and giving it to others. If you keep your celebration focused only on yourself, the *ushpizin* want no part of it and leave. Your spiritual high must be grounded in reality and must include those less fortunate. It is, after all, *Chag Ha'asif*, the holiday of gathering the wheat, but the gathering should not be limited to produce, but should include gathering people together in joy.

So let us make our special guests feel welcome. Make each one the center of the conversation of the night dedicated to him, suggests *Halekach Vehalebuv*. The point of *Sukkot* is to give hope to people, for just as the Clouds of Glory, surrounded us in the desert, so does Hashem's presence surround us throughout our lives.

Kohelet: Perek 1, Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

"That which was, is what will be. That which was done, will be done in the future. There is nothing new under the sun." Rashi explains that if you study the natural sciences you won't find anything that wasn't there since creation. Technological advances reveal more and more of what was already there. But when a person learns Torah he or she can create a new insight, a living reality that no one ever saw before. This insight is developed through the prism of his or her unique understanding and personal struggle

to get at the truth. Through learning, a person touches every part of his soul, even the parts that are unknowable. In that sense, *chiddush* comes down from Hashem's reality channeling through parts of us that we don't even know are being touched.

The world was created to match the blueprint of the Torah. Hashem wants man to rise to the challenge of Torah and *mitzvot*. For example, He created a world in which goods are unevenly distributed. There are hundreds of

thousands of soul roots, each of which have branches and leaves. There are so many different personality types. Everyone experiences the prohibition of *Lo Tignov* ("You shall not steal") in a different way. New *nisyonot* (tests) are the same old challenges dressed in new clothes.

"I saw all the actions that were done under the sun and they are all vanity. That which is spoiled cannot be rectified and that which is lacking cannot be counted." When the *yetzer*

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hara comes to us, it presents itself as our best friend. He won't tell us to do things that are wrong because the answer will almost inevitably be no. But it's very easy to listen when it comes to missing out on opportunities to do good deeds. The *yetzer hara* will say, "Don't do this *mitzvah* today, you can do it tomorrow."

Still, Hashem's attribute of mercy gives us the chance to repent. If you miss a *shema* and then do *teshuva*, you could gain what you lost through *teshuva*. Hashem will uplift and validate the missing place that the sin left open. With *teshuva*, a person can end up in a higher place than he was before he sinned. He could become a completely different

person to the point that if he were confronted with the same challenge, he would never falter again.

"I said in my heart, let us go and I will examine happiness and I will see things that people regard as good. Behold that sort of joy is also vanity." Having a good time or losing oneself in physical pleasure is merely escaping from oneself. This kind of pleasure doesn't last. The sefer *Orchot Tzadikim* examines many fundamental traits that a Jew should develop. Surprisingly, there is no chapter called *bitachon*. Instead the chapter is called *Shar Hasimcha*, the chapter on happiness. Authentic *simcha* stems from trusting that whatever Hashem does is meant to take one to a better

place. Whatever a person has is what he needs. This even applies to difficulties, because they can serve as a catalyst for growth. True *simcha* comes from going through life mindfully, examining the possibilities that every moment holds, and treasuring the challenge and the inspiration.

"I searched in my heart to arouse my body with wine, and my heart was drawn to wisdom." There has to be balance between physical reality and spiritual joy. You can enjoy this world but it must be with a constant awareness of Hashem. When you keep this in mind, the world can be a place of enormous physical and spiritual pleasure without either one outshouting the other.

Rebbetzin's Perspective Q&A Class #3

Based on a Naaleh.com Q&A by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Question:

What is the Torah perspective on spending money? I've heard ideas about limiting materialism and not glorifying it. But if one has more money than his friend, can he spend more? Where would the Torah say "spending less is better," and on the flip side when is it appropriate to say no to something even if it's free?

Answer:

The word for money in Hebrew is *keseif* related to the word *koseif*, to yearn. People desire money because it gives them status, a certain kind of empowerment, and freedom from worry. The Torah recognizes the power of money. Chazal say, "Din prutah k'din meah." A judge must judge a case in which the amount involved is relatively small just as though he's judging a case involving a large amount of money. There are whole *sugyas* in Gemara about who is financially obligated and who is exempt, sometimes over material things that seem insignificant. The idea is that

material assets hold a certain power and people tend to make mistakes in this area. Trivializing money is not a good idea. The Torah wants us to use it right.

You only have a certain amount of emotional energy. Don't waste it on new outfits, food, or nonsensical luxuries. Save it for things that are enduring such as Am Yisrael, Torah, yourself. This doesn't mean you shouldn't spend money. Just keep your emotions out of it to the degree you can. Emotions follow the mind which means you have to train it to think straight. The Rambam says to ask yourself two questions before purchasing something: The first is, "Why am I buying this? Do I really need it?" You're allowed to spend. But do it purposefully. Buy what you think you need. The second question is, "What am I paying for it?" This includes not only dollars but time, energy, and mindset.

It's certainly valid for a person with more money to spend more than a person who doesn't have that much.

Rav Soloveitchik would say that in Brisk it was understandable that poor people bought their shoes at the shoemaker and the wealthier people went to a big store in the city. If Hashem hasn't give you wealth, there's no reason why you should feel any pressure to pretend to be the millionaire you're not. The terrible plague of our generation is that everyone thinks they must keep with a certain standard, whether it's weddings, clothes, expensive sheitels or vacations. Hashem wants you to rejoice with what you have. Certainly if you have the money you can spend it on service, comfort, and quality. But if you don't, borrowing money, being envious of those who have more, and needing to always buy the 'in brand,' is all bad for you.

So if it involves you in an emotional way the Torah would say spending less is better. On the flip side, if you don't need or want it, and it takes up space, saying no to something even if it's free would be the sensible thing to do.