

Exalted Entourage

There is a well-known custom of inviting seven special guests, seven shepherds of our nation, into our *sukkot*, one on each night of Sukkot. According to the Zohar, each of these precious shepherds – Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon and David – is considered a day to which the holiday is dedicated, and all of Israel then joins them.

Do these shepherds actually come to grace our *sukkot* as guests? How do we incorporate that concept to impact our celebration? And why do we invite these special guests on Sukkot rather than on Pesach, the other seven-day holiday?

The Oztrot HaTorah, citing the Shelah HaKadosh, writes that with such exalted guests, we must practice decorum in the *sukkah*, and keep our speech Torah-based so our guests will feel comfortable. The Belzer Rebbe adds that the great wives of these leaders accompany them too. The Netivot Shalom notes they have come from Gan Eden, a place of total spirituality, to visit us on this physical earth. That is one of the reasons why they can only come to a temporary abode like the *sukkah*. While the walls of our permanent homes absorb all the improper speech and untoward behavior of the entire year (says the Minchat Michael), the walls of the *sukkah* are inherently holy, and the *schach* is the shade of G-d's protection.

The walls of the *sukkah* represent the Clouds of Glory that surrounded us at Sinai and then descended on the Mishkan. As such, they represent the

bond between the physical and the spiritual. The clouds, like the *sukkah*, are a temporary manifestation of G-d's presence, and we can achieve that state through our service to Him. The ultimate bond, however, is achieved in the World to Come, from where our guests have come to visit us on this holiday. When we sit in the *sukkah*, we are basking in the joy of being in G-d's presence. Therefore, if one experiences discomfort while in the *sukkah*, one is exempt from sitting there, while one should attempt to "live" in the *sukkah*, catching up on one's reading and Torah study in this holy environment.

According to the Netivot Shalom, 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. Each year, as the world is being 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 as individuals so we can work on our mission as G-d's nation. We do not need their help on Pesach, but on Sukkot, when we've just started rebuilding the world, we can use their help with *chesed* and *gevura* and all the other traits they embody.

Sukkot is called *z'man simchateinu*, the season of our joy, for it is the only holiday the Torah commands us multiple times to be joyous. Oztrot HaTorah cites the Zohar who picks up on this nomenclature. Every time we celebrate a *simcha*, we are joined by our parents, and G-d brings the departed souls of the previous generations to celebrate with us. How can we acknowledge their presence as our guests? 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 yourselves, the *ushpizin* want no part of it and leave. After all, the whole concept of *ushpizin* is inviting guests. Your spiritual high must be grounded in reality and must include those less fortunate. It is, after all, *Chag HaAsif*, the holiday of gathering the wheat, but the gathering should also include gathering people together in joy.

Let us make our special guests feel welcome. Make each one the center of the conversation of the night dedicated to him. The point of Sukkot is to give hope to people, for just as the Clouds of Glory surrounded us in the desert, so does G-d's presence surround us throughout our lives, and He sends down some majestic mentors and role models to help us on our journey.

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