



Ask The Rabbi...



17 September 1994 - Issue #35

This issue is dedicated in the memory of Albert Ernest O.B.M.

This edition contains:

1. *Ushpizin* — Sukkah Guests.

Mrs Alexis S. Berman wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I seem to be having a difficult time understanding the concept of inviting Abraham, Isaac, et al, to join as guests in the Sukkah. This is my first time observing Sukkot. I would appreciate it if you could explain it to me as easily as possible.

Thank you,

Dear Mrs. Berman,

This concept that you mention is called the "*Ushpizin*" - "Guests" in Aramaic. According to tradition, the *Ushpizin* visit us in our sukkah every night of sukkot.

The source for the concept of the *Ushpizin* is the Zohar:

"When a person sits in his Sukkah the Shechina (G-d's Divine Presence) spreads its wings (metaphor) over it from above and then Avraham together with the other five Tzadikim (Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe and Aharon) and King David dwell together with him."

One of the important experiences of Sukkot is that of leaving the protection of our permanent dwellings and basking in the shade and protection of G-d's presence. Each of the seven *Ushpizin* exemplified this idea during their lifetimes. For instance Avraham left the security of his home and the house of his father and went off on a journey protected by G-d's promise. Yitzchak had to leave his home and dwell amongst the Philistines because of famine. Yaakov had to leave his home and live with Lavan, etc.

The seven also correspond to attributes of G-d which we aspire to. For instance, Avraham represents *Chessed* (Loving Kindness), Yitzchak *Gevurah* (Strength), etc. These seven attributes also refer to much deeper concepts which are oft discussed in Chassidic texts as well as the Kabbalah, called the *Sefirot*. These are aspects of the way in which G-d interacts with his Creation.

There are two opinions as to the order of the guests' arrival. According to one tradition the order is their order of birth, whereas according to the Arizal (Rabbi Isaac Luria) the order is that of the *Sefirot*, thus Yosef comes after Aharon.

There is a custom attributed to the Arizal to invite seven poor people to eat in the Sukkah corresponding to the seven *Ushpizin*. You then have seven exalted guests from above, with seven earthly guests and G-d's Divine Presence hovering over it all.

Some Sephardic Jews have the custom of setting aside a chair in the Sukkah for the guest of the day. The chair is decorated and an announcement is made each day that this is the chair of the *Ushpizin*.

In my neighborhood (Neve Yaakov) here in Israel the children have a beautiful custom of gathering together and then visiting every Sukkah that has a child with the same name as that day's *Ushpizin*. They dance and sing in the Sukkah; and they get some treats for their effort. My children wait each year with such excitement for the night when the boys will come and dance in our Sukkah. I strongly suggest it for communities everywhere.

Sources:

- Zohar - Parshat Emor.
- Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov - The Book of our Heritage (English edition), vol. 1, pp. 155-161.
- Otzar Yisrael Encyclopaedia - *Ushpizin*.

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