



FOR FESTIVALS

ליום טוב

Ushpizin

אושפיזין

USHPIZIN

אושפיזין

The custom of inviting our most revered ancestors to the sukkah as Ushpizin, "honored guests," at the beginning of dinner each evening is based on a passage in the Zohar, which states that as a reward for dwelling faithfully in sukkot, the people of Israel are granted the privilege of welcoming God's presence and seven honored elders of our tradition. Our text pairs distinguished women with the men traditionally invited. Some are husbands and wives, while others are related through various qualities which link them uniquely together. All seven pairs visit every night, led each night by another pair. We graciously welcome them, as we welcome all our guests, along with the poor and the needy, to share in our Sukkot meals.

הָיִינוּ מוֹכְנִין וּמְזַמְּנִין לְקַיָּים מִצְוַת סֻכָּה בְּאֶשֶׁר צִוִּינוּ הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ. בְּסֻכַּת תְּשׁוּבוֹ שֶׁבַעַת יָמִים, כָּל־הָאֲזוּרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בְּסֻכַּת. לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם, כִּי בְּסֻכּוֹת הַשְּׁבִיבִי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּהוֹצִיאֵי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

I am ready to perform the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah as instructed by my divine Creator: "In sukkot shall you dwell for seven days; every inhabitant of Israel shall dwell in sukkot, so your descendants may know that I caused all Israel to dwell in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt."

וַיְהִי נָעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ, וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ בּוֹנֵה עָלֵינוּ, וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ בּוֹנֵהוּ.

May the pleasantness of our Eternal God rest upon us; establish for our benefit the work of our hands.

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רְבוֹן כָּל הָעוֹלָמִים, יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שִׁיְהֵא חֲשׁוֹב לְפָנֶיךָ מִצְוַת יְשִׁיבַת סֻכָּה זוֹ, בְּאֵילוֹ קִיּוּמָנוּהָ בְּכָל פְּרֻטָּיָה וְדִקְדוּקָיָה וְתִרְיָג מִצְוֹת הַתְּלוּיוֹת בָּהּ, וּבְאֵלוֹ פּוֹנְנוּ בְּכָל הַפְּנוּנוֹת שְׁכּוֹנֵנוּ בָּהּ אֲנָשֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה.

Master of the universe, may it be Your will that our fulfillment of this mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah will accrue to our merit as if we had fulfilled all 613 mitzvot faithfully, and as if our devotion were the equivalent of that of our greatest sages.

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Before reciting Kiddush in the *sukkah* on the first and second nights of Sukkot (page 334), or before reciting the blessing over bread and beginning the meal on the other evenings of the Festival, it is customary to invite these special guests, called in Aramaic *ushpizin*, to feast with us in our *sukkah*. Although all the names are mentioned each evening, each night we issue a special invitation to one set of guests.

The Zohar, the classic book of Jewish mysticism, mentions that seven distinguished leaders join the righteous in the *sukkah*: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David (Emor 103b–104a). Isaac Luria, the Ari, of Safed (sixteenth century) created the ritual of inviting guests according to the formula found on these pages. To the seven guests mentioned in the Zohar, modern liturgists have added worthy women: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth. An eighth pair — Solomon and Esther — are also added by those whose custom it is to eat in the *sukkah* also on Sh'mini Atzeret. The order of guests that we follow in this siddur, unlike the Zohar's order, is chronological.

It is also customary to invite needy guests to eat the portions that are set aside for the *ushpizin*.

The Symbolism of the *Sukkah*

The reason for dwelling in the *sukkah* is mentioned in the Torah: “You shall live in *sukkot* (booths) seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in *sukkot*, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in *sukkot* when I brought them out of the land of Egypt . . .” (Leviticus 23:42–43).

On the face of it, this seems to indicate that during their years of wandering, the Israelites dwelt in temporary huts. In order to remember this, we too dwell in fragile huts for one week out of each year. This could be a way of recalling our history, just as on Pesah we recall the Exodus. It could be a way of making us appreciate the fact that, unlike our ancestors, we are not wanderers but have permanent dwellings. We appreciate our well-being better if we are deprived of it temporarily. It could also be a way of remembering God’s graciousness to our ancestors: even in the wilderness, they were given shelter and protection by God.

The Sages disputed the actual nature of the *sukkot* that existed in the wilderness:

Rabbi Eliezer said, “They were clouds of glory.”

Rabbi Akiva said, “They were actual huts.”
(*Sukkah* 11b)

According to Rabbi Eliezer, then, our ancestors did not live in *sukkot*. They were protected by the Presence of God, so that the *sukkah* in which we dwell is symbolic of the Shekhinah, God’s Presence. This interpretation was accepted by traditional biblical commentators (such as Rashi) and is found in the Zohar as well.

Rabbi Akiva’s interpretation emphasizes the fact that the *sukkah* should make us aware of those who are homeless and in need.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתְּשַׁרְרָה
שְׁכִינְתְּךָ בֵּינֵנוּ, וְתַפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ, וְתַקְיֵה אוֹתָנוּ
מִזִּו כְּבוֹדְךָ הַקָּדוֹשׁ וְהַטְהוֹר. וְלִרְעֵבִים גַּם צִמְאִים הֵן לַחֲמֵם
וּמִיָּמָם נֶאֱמָנִים. וְתוֹכְנֵנוּ לִישֵׁב יָמִים רַבִּים עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲדַמַּת
קֹדֶשׁ, בְּעִבּוֹדְתְךָ וּבִירְאָתְךָ. בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם, אָמֵן וְאָמֵן.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to cause Your divine spirit to dwell in our midst. Spread over us Your shelter of peace, and encompass us with Your glorious majesty, holy and pure. As for those who are hungry and thirsty, grant them sufficient bread and water. Grant us long life in the Land of Israel, that we may serve You with reverence. Praised be Adonai forever, amen, amen.

אֲזַמֵּן לְסַעֲדָתִי אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּן עֲלָיִן: אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה
אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד, שָׂרָה רֵבֵקָה לֵאָה רַחֵל מְרִים דְּבוּרָה וְרוּת.

I am honored to welcome to my *sukkah* the following distinguished guests: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth.

On the first evening:

בְּמָטוּ מִנֶּה, אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָי, יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד,
רֵבֵקָה לֵאָה רַחֵל מְרִים דְּבוּרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Abraham, welcome Sarah. You parented a faith together in Haran and carried your beliefs wherever you traveled. May we, like you, be models of faithfulness and fortitude in all we do.

On the second evening:

בְּמָטוּ מִנֶּה, יִצְחָק וְרֵבֵקָה, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָי, אַבְרָהָם יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה לֵאָה רַחֵל מְרִים דְּבוּרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Isaac, welcome Rebecca. You carried forward the foundation laid by your forebears, and prospered as you passed on their legacy. May we, like you, honor the ways of our parents and cause their inheritance to flourish.

Conclude each evening with the meditation on page 333.

Rabbinic Legends Concerning the Special Guests

On the third evening:

בְּמָטוֹ מִנֶּה, יַעֲקֹב וְלֵאָה, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יוֹסֵף מִשֶּׁה אֶהְרֹן וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה רַבְקָה רַחֵל מֵרִים דְּבוֹרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Jacob, welcome Leah, primary progenitors of Israel. Through you did Israel grow in size and might. May we, like you, overcome all obstacles to ensure a strong and confident future.

On the fourth evening:

בְּמָטוֹ מִנֶּה, יוֹסֵף וְרַחֵל, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב מִשֶּׁה אֶהְרֹן וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה רַבְקָה לֵאָה מֵרִים דְּבוֹרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Joseph, welcome Rachel, nurturers of generations past, caretakers of generations to come. May we, like you, merit blessing through compassion, vision, hope, and our dreams.

On the fifth evening:

בְּמָטוֹ מִנֶּה, מֹשֶׁה וּמִרְיָם, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף אֶהְרֹן וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה רַבְקָה לֵאָה רַחֵל דְּבוֹרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Moses, welcome Miriam. You brought Israel out of Egypt, and led her in singing “This is my God” at the Sea of Reeds. May we always rejoice in our freedom; may we always sing songs of praise to God, our Redeemer.

On the sixth evening:

בְּמָטוֹ מִנֶּה, אֶהְרֹן וְדְבוֹרָה, אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזוּ עֲלָאֵי, אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מִשֶּׁה וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה רַבְקָה לֵאָה רַחֵל מֵרִים וְרוּת.

Welcome Aaron, welcome Deborah. You shaped Israel’s destiny, one with words of peace, one with a call to battle. May we have the wisdom always to strive for peace, but never lack the courage to oppose injustice.

Conclude each evening with the meditation on page 333.

Abraham and Sarah

Abraham and Sarah had a tent that was open to all four directions in order to receive wayfarers. Unlike Job, who would wait for passersby to come and then offer them hospitality, Abraham would go out and search for strangers. When he found them he would bring them in and feed them better food than they were accustomed to eat: fine bread, meat, and wine. After they had eaten, he would say to them, “Recite a blessing.” They would ask, “What shall we say?” He would reply, “Blessed is the Eternal God, of whose food we have eaten.” Abraham and Sarah would teach people about God and would convert them — Abraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women.

Adapted from Avot D’Rabbi Natan A 7 and Genesis Rabbah 54:6; 39:14

Isaac and Rebecca

During Sarah’s lifetime, the divine Presence lingered near the tent, the doors of the tent were open to receive strangers, and the tent was filled with light and blessing. When Sarah died all of this ceased, but when Rebecca came it was restored. When Isaac saw that Rebecca emulated the ways of his mother Sarah, “Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother’s death” (Genesis 24:67).

Adapted from Genesis Rabbah 60:16

Moses

Moses wept when he saw the suffering of his people, thinking, “I would die for them!” The work they had to do was the hardest work of all. Moses would help them, taking their burdens upon himself. When he saw that burdens appropriate for the strong were placed on the weak, he would leave his guard of honor and try to redistribute the burdens appropriately, all the time pretending to be helping accomplish work for Pharaoh. Said the Holy One, “You abandoned your own concerns and went to help Israel in its time of trouble and acted like a brother to them. Therefore I shall abandon My concerns and speak to you.”

Adapted from Exodus Rabbah 1:27

Miriam

When Miriam was stricken with leprosy, the entire camp of Israel, the very Presence of God, the clouds of glory, the Ark of the Covenant — all waited an entire week until she recovered and could join the procession. Why? This was a reward for Miriam's action when she waited by the river to see what would happen to her baby brother Moses. Thus we learn that as one acts, so do others act toward them.

Adapted from Sifre Numbers 106

Ruth

When Naomi told Ruth to return to her own home, Ruth said to her, "Do not urge me to leave you (Ruth 1:16). I am determined to convert. Is it not better that I do so through your teaching than with someone else?" When Naomi heard this, she began to explain Jewish beliefs and practices to Ruth. She told her, "My daughter, the daughters of Israel do not go to pagan theaters." Ruth then said, "Wherever you go, I will go" (Ruth 1:16). Naomi said, "My daughter, the daughters of Israel do not lodge in a house that does not have a *mezuzah*." Ruth said, "Where you lodge, I shall lodge. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16). Said Ruth, "I shall abandon all my idolatry and observe all the other *mitzvot*."

Adapted from Ruth Rabbah 2:22

On the seventh evening:

בְּמִטּוֹ מִנֶּה, דָּוִד וְרוּת, אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עֲלָאִי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עֲלָאִי, אֲבָרְהֵם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מִשָּׁה אֶהְרֹן,
שָׂרָה רָבֵקָה לֵאמֹר רַחֵל מְרִים וּדְבוּרָה.

Welcome David, welcome Ruth. You represent the living legacy of Israel, the future as well as the past. As you embraced God with all your being, may we too live in dignity and honor, a source of pride to God and to our heritage.

Conclude with the meditation below.

There is a tradition that in the diaspora, on the eve of Sh'mini Atzeret, we welcome an eighth pair of visitors to our sukkah as we prepare to take leave of the Festival.

בְּמִטּוֹ מִנֶּה, שְׁלֹמֹה וְאֶסְתֵּר, אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עֲלָאִי, דִּיתְבוּ עִמִּי וְעִמְכוֹן
כָּל אֲשֶׁפִּיזִי עֲלָאִי, אֲבָרְהֵם יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף מִשָּׁה אֶהְרֹן וְדָוִד,
שָׂרָה רָבֵקָה רַחֵל לֵאמֹר מְרִים דְּבוּרָה וְרוּת.

Welcome Solomon, welcome Esther. You each exercised royal judgment in the interests of Israel's well-being. May we, in tribute to your example, live with wisdom and determination for the preservation and betterment of our people.

On each evening we conclude with this meditation:

We call upon you, revered elders — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David (and Solomon), Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth (and Esther) — to join us in this sukkah. May God's presence also dwell among us and bring us honor, prosperity, and peace.

Upon leaving the sukkah for the final time, one may recite this prayer of messianic anticipation:

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, כְּשֶׁם
שְׁקִימְנוּ וְיִשְׁבְּנוּ בְּסֻכָּה זוֹ, בֵּן נִזְכָּה לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה לֵישֵׁב בְּסֻכַּת
עוֹרוֹ שֶׁל לְוִיָּתָן. לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.

May it be Your will, our God and God of our ancestors, that just as we have fulfilled the mitzvah of dwelling in the sukkah on this Festival, so may we be privileged in years to come to dwell in the fabled sukkah, fashioned from the skin of the legendary Leviathan, in the holy city of Jerusalem.

David

A harp hung over David's bed. Every night at midnight the north wind would cause the harp to play by itself. David would then awake and study Torah until dawn. David said to God, "Am I not pious? All the other kings sleep late, while I rise early to study Torah. Furthermore, I busy myself answering questions of the people concerning matters of purity and impurity and of right and wrong. Are not my decisions just and correct? Nor am I ashamed to ask others who know more than I." Some say that David did not say that he was pious. He was afraid that his sins would cause God to punish him. Therefore he said, "I know that you reward the deserving in the world to come, but I am not certain that I shall have a share in that world."

Adapted from Berakhot 4a