

Welcoming the Ushphizin: Points to Ponder While Embracing Sukkot's Spiritual Guests

by Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy

- How can spending time with those around the table become a more spiritual experience? What do I need to do to recognize the deeper message in tonight's gathering? What character should I embody in the story of my life?
- Seek inner wealth. What would truly enrich and empower your spirituality? How can you nourish it with what surrounds you? How might your day-to-day life, work, friends and family be different if you centered your inner voice as your guiding force?
- Focus on your closest relationships. How can you create deeper, more meaningful moments of connections with them? What prayer do you hold in your heart for these relationships in the coming year? Consider how you can nurture these bonds through your actions.
- What spiritual gifts have you been blessed with? What might it look like to allow those gifts to come forth?
- How can we foster unity? What small action can we take today to bring people together and heal rifts in society?
- What kind of "river" is God calling us to be today? What unique blessing are we meant to bring to the world? How can we expand our vision beyond the 'here and now' to ensure we are building a strong foundation for future generations.
- Who is still waiting for an invitation from you? Who are the people in your life who would truly appreciate being your guests and how can you make them feel at home?

Succot Based on the Teachings and Writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"tl

- Can you think of examples from Jewish history when Jews lived through risk and uncertainty yet still managed to find joy in their lives?
- Where do you find the most meaning in your life?
- Where do you find the most joy in your life? Is your answer to this and previous question the same?
- Take a moment to consider if you agree that it is a privilege to be alive and how that understanding will impact the way you live your life?
- How can the message of Succot help us through difficult times?
- How do the Four Species connect us to the land of Israel, and how is this connected to the themes of Succot?
- How does the land of Israel encourage the human spirit to grow?
- What is the connection between the mitzvah of hospitality and the themes of Succot?



Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Based on the Teachings and Writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"tl

- What themes of Succot are universal and relevant to all of humanity?
- If the national mission of the Jewish people is to model the universal values of the Torah, are we doing a good job?
- What makes all of humanity the same? What makes Jews different?
- How could we find joy if we had lost everything as a people?
- How will you continue to find joy this Simchat Torah despite the difficulties and challenges you have experienced over the past year?
- Why is it important to celebrate the completion of a unit of study?
- Why is it important to immediately begin the Torah cycle again?
- Why do you think Simchat Torah became so important for the people after the destruction of the Temple, during their exile from the land of Israel?

Conversation Starters via the American Jewish World Service



- The succah reminds us of the tents that the Israelites used when they wandered the desert. What would it be like to not have a home?
- There's tradition to invite guests- ushpizin- into our succah. Who would you invite into your succah? How does it feel to share with others?
- Succot celebrates the harvest, when farmers pick the crops they worked hard all year to plant. What have you worked hard on this year? What do you feel proud of?
- Succot is called "our time of happiness" – sman simchatenu. What makes you feel happy? How can you bring joy to others?
- On Succot, we shake the lulav branches in all directions to remember that there is goodness all over the world. Which good deeds do you like to do?
- Tikun olam is an important Jewish concept to repair the brokenness in our world. What do you think is broken in the world today? How can you help to fix it?