

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Chanah *bas* Freidel *a”h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Down to Earth

## PARSHAS EMOR 5776

While in these pages we generally strive to provide fairly thorough coverage of upcoming *yamim tovim* and the like, there is one festival that does not get featured as frequently – the *\Yom Tov* of *Sukkos*. This is mostly for technical reasons related to production scheduling and its close proximity to other seasonal events. In any event, this week’s *parshah* – which contains an entire section detailing the various festivals (including, of course, the festival of *Sukkos*) – gives us an opportunity to make up some lost ground, so to speak. As such, we shall attempt here to focus on a certain practice of *Sukkos*, which serves to illuminate the overall *Yom Tov*.

### Enter, Sacred Guests

One of the curious institutions of the *Sukkos* holiday is the practice of welcoming the “*Ushpizin*,” the illustrious Biblical figures who grace our *sukkos* during the course of the festival. The Zohar describes the exalted occurrence of sharing our *sukkos* with these righteous figures: *בְּשַׁעֲתָא דְּבַר נֶשׁ וְתִיב בְּמִדּוּרָא דָּא צִלָּא דְּמַהִימְנוּתָא שְׂכִינְתָּא פְּרָסָא גְדַפְקָה עֲלֵיהּ מְלַעֲלָא... אַבְרָהָם וְחַמְשָׁא צְדִיקָיָא וְדָוִד מְלֶכָא שְׁנֵי מִדּוּרֵיהוֹן עִמֵּיהּ... וַיִּבְעֵי בַר נֶשׁ לְמַחְדֵּי בְּכָל יוֹמָא וְיוֹמָא מְלַעֲלָא* – “At the time that a person dwells in this residence (i.e. the *sukkah*, which is known as) the ‘Shelter of the Faithful One (Hashem),’ the Divine Presence spreads its wings over him from Above... And Avraham, the five righteous figures (Yitzchak, Ya’akov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon), and King David likewise establish their residence with him... A person should thus rejoice each day, with a shining countenance, together with these *Ushpizin* who reside with him.”

What is not readily apparent about this event, however, is its relevance to the festival. Granted, the Zohar states that they come to visit the *sukkah* – but why did they choose this specific time and this specific mitzvah? Why not come instead to join us at the Pesach Seder or while we light the menorah on Chanukah? Is there some inherent connection to *Sukkos*?

Actually, as we shall see, it might be practical considerations that spur their visit in this particular venue. To better understand this, there are some fundamentals about the world in general that we first need to clarify. A certain quality of the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple) will help bring this idea into stark relief.

### Pristine Location

We get some idea of the other-worldly quality of the Temple site from a well-known Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:5):

*עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נַעֲשׂוּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ. לֹא הָפִילָה אִשָּׁה מְרִיחַ בִּשָׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ, וְלֹא הִסְרִיחַ בִּשָׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ מְעוֹלָם, וְלֹא נִרְאָה זָבוּב בְּבֵית הַמִּטְבָּחִים, וְלֹא אָרַע קָרִי לְכַהֵן גְּדוֹל בַּיּוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים, וְלֹא כָּבוּ גְּשָׁמִים אֶשׁ שֶׁל עֲצֵי הַמַּעֲרָכָה, וְלֹא נִצְחָה הַרוּחַ אֶת עַמּוּד הָעֶשֶׂן, וְלֹא נִמְצָא פְּסוּל בְּעֹמֶר וּבִשְׂתֵי הַלֶּחֶם וּבְלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים, עוֹמְדִים צְפוּפִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים רְחוּסִים, וְלֹא הִזִּיק נֶחֱשׁ וְעַקְרָב בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם מְעוֹלָם, וְלֹא אָמַר אָדָם לְחַבְרוֹ צַר לִי הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁאֲלִין בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.*

“Ten miracles were wrought for our forefathers in the Beis Hamikdash: No expectant mother ever miscarried on account of smelling the sacrificial meat; the sacrificial meat never went

putrid; no fly was ever spotted in the slaughterhouse; the Kohein Gadol was never disqualified through defilement on Yom Kippur; the rains never extinguished the fire burning on the wood-pile arrangement (atop the altar); the wind never disrupted the smoke-column (arising from the altar); there was never a disqualifying blemish found in the (grain offerings of the) *omer* (brought on the second day of Pesach), double-loaves (of *Shavuos*) or the (weekly) show-bread; while the worshippers were packed tightly together, they were able to bow with expansive room; no snake or scorpion ever caused harm in Yerushalayim; and no one ever complained of lacking a place to lodge in Yerushalayim.”

What is somewhat noteworthy about this list is that the bulk seem to focus more on “negatives” – nothing unpleasant, of course, but more of an emphasis on what misfortunes were avoided as opposed to actively miraculous events. There were actually other such miracles that took place in the Temple – one example would be the decorative golden trees that actually bore fruit (*cf. Yoma 21b*).

In his commentary, the *Chassid Ya'avetz* explains that the list in our Mishnah was quite deliberately selected, as it focuses on a common theme. Notice that most of the items feature a notable lack of expected deterioration: “the sacrificial meat never went putrid; no fly was ever spotted in the slaughterhouse;” etc. This is because the Mishnah’s purpose is not simply to recount miraculous events, but to convey the nature and type of atmosphere that prevailed in the Beis Hamikdash. What it chiefly represented was the original, pristine state of the world – as it existed in Gan Eden, prior to Adam’s ejection on account of his sin. The hallmark of the Gan-Eden form of existence was that it was completely pure and unblemished. The notion of “*killul*” – deterioration – was only introduced to the world as a consequence of sin. But when the world was entirely pristine, nothing ever spoiled, withered, or suffered any degradation. Of course, this all changed with Adam’s sin, but there remained one corner of the world where the original, blessed order still prevailed. And that was in the Beis Hamikdash.

Unfortunately, we no longer have the Beis Hamikdash with us. But there is still one place where a similar situation is replicated – in the *sukkah* on the *Sukkos* festival.

The Nesivos Shalom (*vol. II, p. 207*) explains that when one enters the *sukkah* during the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos*, he is enveloped in an atmosphere of supreme sanctity. As we have seen from the Zohar cited above, the *sukkah* effectively serves as the resting place for the Shechinah itself. Thus, the environment is somewhat reminiscent of that which was present in the Beis Hamikdash. The Beis Hamikdash was a specially designated location that transcended the regular bounds of the atmosphere that prevailed in the rest of the world; it was one small corner in which the pristine conditions of Gan Eden were preserved. In a similar sense, explains the Nesivos Shalom, a remarkable effect is achieved in the *sukkah*. It serves to transport, to some extent, the environment that exists in the Celestial spheres right down here to our (otherwise) spiritually contaminated world.

This, then, is the secret of the *Ushpizin*. As the Nesivos Shalom explains, their terrestrial visit coincides with this specific time and place – because it is the only instance when the conditions are refined to such a supreme extent. It is only on *Sukkos* – in the *sukkah* – that their presence can be properly accommodated. This is a circumstance which reveals the true potency of this situation: it is a Heavenly haven here on earth. That is the essence of the *sukkah*.