



# Inviting Joy

*Simchah and Hachnasat Orchim,  
Joy and Hospitality – Sukkot*



## SUKKOT

### *Joy and Hospitality*

Sukkot is the Feast of Booths; a seven-day holiday where we abandon sturdy shelters and opt instead for flimsy shacks. On Sukkot we don't sleep in 5-star hotels, we sleep in 5-billion-star hotels made of palm fronds and tapestries.

- It is the grand exit from all of life's fixed sureties. We are busy studying how to release our clutches on physical wealth and take firm hold of the riches of Spirit instead.
- The main theme of Sukkot is *simchah*, Hebrew for true joy. Interestingly, it occurs almost immediately following the solemn and introspective High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.
- This teaches us that true joy is not dependent on physical factors. Rather, it comes from savoring all that we have: the spiritual growth we experienced during the High Holidays, the blessings that permeate our lives, the relationships we have built, the beauty of our tradition, and the rarified pleasure of connecting with the Divine.
- Joy is also most strongly born from doing good and being of service. The *mitzvah* of welcoming guests, *hachnasat orchim*, is thus

an unparalleled way to access joy – and one of the focal points of this holiday. An archetypal form of giving is when we open up our very homes with generosity and love to friends, family, and those in need. Such giving fills our lives with the richness of a joy that propels us upward to express our very best selves and bring out that best in others.

#### Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *What messages does the world around me communicate about what will bring me happiness? Which of those messages do I agree with? Which do I reject?*
- *What about opening my home and heart to others could/might help me reach simchah, true joy?*
- *What are some actionable steps I can take to care for those around me who are in need of friendship or physical support?*
- *Which Sukkot traditions might I want to try out this year? How can I introduce them to my family with joy?*

## SHELTERING AND REJOICING ON SUKKOT

*What Is the True Nature of Protection?*

People seek wealth, power, physical walls, and strength to guard against danger. When moving into a *sukkah* for a week, Jews don't reject the value of these; instead, we remind ourselves of their limitations and potential pitfalls, lest, in search of security, we sacrifice precious connections with family, friends, and our own soul. Chasing after status, "likes," or success can become modern-day idolatry. The *sukkah* reminds us of the role that vulnerability has in true protection, joy, and connection.

After the Jewish people were miraculously redeemed from Egypt, they wandered through the wilderness for forty years before reaching the Land of Israel. During that time, God protected them from the dangers and discomforts of the wilderness by sheltering them in *sukkot*. The rabbis of the Talmud disagree regarding what kind of shelter these *sukkot* were. One opinion says they were actual huts or booths, while another says they were God's Clouds of Glory, which covered the Israelites as they made their way to the Promised Land.

### Leviticus 23:39–43

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, once you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall observe the festival of God for seven days... and you shall rejoice before your God seven days. You shall dwell in *sukkot* seven days... in order that future generations may know that I had the Israelite people dwell in *sukkot* when I

brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am your God.

אָךְ בַּחֲמֹשֶׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׂבִיעִי בְּאַסְפְּכֶם אֶת תְּבוּאֹת  
הָאָרֶץ תַּחֲנוּגוּ אֶת חַג ה' שִׁבְעַת יָמִים... וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה'  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים... בְּסֻכּוֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים... לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ  
דוֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בְּסֻכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם  
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

- *As a mother, what kind of protective home do you seek to provide for your family? What do you hope your children will remember about the home they grew up in?*
- *Given that Sukkot is the holiday most focused on rejoicing, what do you think is the understanding behind the connection between joy and going out of our homes to dwell in the natural elements?*
- *Sukkot takes place exactly six months after Passover. Both are weeklong holiday enactments of the Exodus. Why might our sages have set daily reminders of the Exodus in Jewish liturgy as well as two major enactments – one of the exhilarations of freedom from prolonged slavery, and one of the forty-year journey through the desert on the way to the Promised Land?*
- *What could it look like to follow God's example of providing shelter and comfort to the vulnerable, the way God did with the Israelites in the desert? What are examples of ways to do that in your own life?*

## THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF JOY



Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, vol. 2, p. 255

In Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers), the sage Rabbi Yehudah son of Teima tells us: “You should be light as an eagle.” But the eagle is not light; it is a heavy bird! Why is it described as light? It is because the eagle has very large wings that transport it easily and lightly to the heavens. It is a majestic sight to see the eagle rising higher than any other bird and flying with its outstretched wings in the sky.

A person is also very “heavy” — tied to the physical... How, then, can a person elevate herself? This is what Rabbi Yehudah son of Teima tells us: “Be light as an eagle — as a human being you too have large wings; use them and ascend higher!”

What are the wings that a person has that can allow her spiritual ascent? *Simchah* (joy) and *mitzvot* (commandments)! In order to transcend the physical, we can be grateful (joyful in our lot), and we can find joy in [performing] *mitzvot*. These two together are truly an effective pair of wings.

בפירקי אבות, רבי יהודה בן תימא אומר "הוי קל כנשר" - הנשר אינו קל: הוא עוף כבד. מהי הקלות שלו? הוא בעל כנפיים גדולות מאוד, והן נושאות אותו בקלות למרומים. זהו מחזה

מיסטי איך שהנשר מגביה לעוף יותר מכל ציפור אחרת ורוחף ברקיע בכנפיים פרוסות. והנה האדם הוא "כבד" מאוד... כיצד הוא יכול להתרומם כל כך בקלות? הוא אשר אמר ר' יהודה בן תימא: "הוי קל כנשר" - גם לך, אדם, יש כנפיים גדולות, השתמש בהן, והתרומם! ומה הן הכנפיים של האדם? מהן - השמחה. ר' חיים ויטאל כתב בשערי הקדושה, כי התיקון של יסוד העפר הוא להיות שמח בחלקו ושמח במצוות. זהו "זוג כנפיים" הגון!

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, a 20<sup>th</sup> century master of the field of Jewish character development called *Mussar*, explains how joy can lead us to unparalleled heights.

- Consider a time in your life when a joyful outlook helped you more easily overcome obstacles to reaching a challenging goal.
- How does gratitude lead to joy?
- Jewish mystical teachings tell us that people differ in where they find special meaning and joy in *mitzvot*. Is there a certain Jewish practice that gives you a feeling of great joy? What impact does the joy from that practice have upon you?
- Think about a person you know who leads their life with authentic joy. What impact does their joy have on you or others?
- What is the connection between joy and hosting others?

## TRUE JOY AND THE *MITZVAH* OF WELCOMING GUESTS



All too often, the world of advertising sells us the idea that physical comfort and luxury will guarantee us happiness. The great legal scholar and philosopher Maimonides writes regarding the holidays that yes, it is important to have physical joy in our festivities, but we must also remain mindful that true joy involves helping others, especially those in need.

A growing body of contemporary research concurs, indicating that a reliable path to personal happiness is doing something kind for another. Acts of generosity not only benefit the recipient but also “create a pleasurable ‘helper’s high’ that benefits the giver,” says Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Jennifer Aaker.<sup>1</sup>

“*Simchah* in the Torah is never about individuals,” wrote Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, “it is always about something we share. A newly married man does not serve in the army for a year, says the Torah, so that he can stay at home ‘and bring joy to the wife he has married’ (Deut. 24:5). You shall bring all your offerings to the central sanctuary, says Moses, so that ‘there, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and rejoice in all you have put your hand to, because the

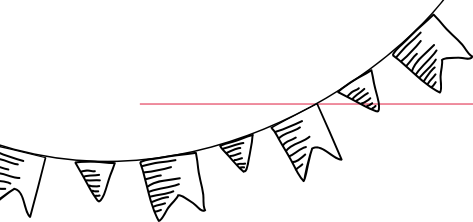
Lord your God has blessed you’ (Deut. 12:7). The festivals as described in Deuteronomy are days of joy precisely because they are occasions of collective celebration: ‘You, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless and the widows living among you’ (16:11). *Simchah* is joy shared. It is not something we experience in solitude.”

Our sages point out the etymological similarities between the word *mitzvah*, which means commandment (from the root *tzav*), and the *tzavta*, the Hebrew word for connection or joining. They note that this similarity is not coincidental. Reaching out to others – physically and spiritually – is what the Jewish practice of *mitzvot* is entirely about.

*Hachnasat orchim*, the *mitzvah* of welcoming of guests, and its centrality in Jewish tradition, dates back to the Jewish progenitors, Sarah and Abraham. Abraham would sit outside waiting for the opportunity to invite passersby into the shade of his tent. He and Sarah would then rush to prepare a meal from their finest ingredients.

The Torah tells of God appearing to Abraham when he was at the entrance to his tent during the heat of the day. In the middle of that mystical experience of seeing the Divine, Abraham

<sup>1</sup> Susan Greenberg, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, July 11, 2014.



spotted three wayfarers in the distance and ran to greet them, excusing himself from God’s Presence. The sages of the Talmud concluded, “Hospitality is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence.”<sup>2</sup>

It turns out that the strangers were three angels coming to inform Sarah and Abraham that they would have a son in a year. Rabbi Sacks shares a teaching by the Hasidic master Rabbi Shalom Rokeach of Belz, who attends carefully to the Torah’s choice of words. Rabbi Rokeach notes that when Abraham first saw the visitors, he bowed to them and they were “standing above him,” Abraham being human and they being angels. However, once he and Sarah serve them food, Abraham then “stood above them.” Rabbi Rokeach concludes that hosting strangers lifts us even higher than angels.

**The following story, told by Joseph Telushkin,<sup>3</sup> may give an idea of angelic hospitality:**

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761–1837) was entertaining visitors at his Shabbat table when a guest accidentally knocked against the table and caused a cup filled with red

wine to spill on the white linen tablecloth. Even before the mortified guest could react, Rabbi Eiger nudged the table with his leg and knocked over the wineglass in front of him. “Oh, there’s something wrong with the table,” he reassured the guest. “I had better get it fixed after Shabbat.”

For us, for whom hosting doesn’t always come easily, Chaya Lester offers a guide on Happy Hospitality in the Learn with Your Sister section (pp. 142–145), and Karina Chemea shares her experience of becoming a frequent host (pp. 146–147).

 **Writing Exercise**

Turn to the writing chart found on pages 150–151, and fill in your thoughts on how gratitude, joy, and joyful hospitality have played a role in your life. What could be your vision for increasing the role? What are some concrete ways you could achieve your vision, and what supports would help you achieve your goals?

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-by-Day Guide to Ethical Living*.

## SUKKOT TRADITIONS



Sukkot is a time of rejoicing and celebrating with family and friends. In fact, many of the Sukkot rituals and traditions take place at home:

- Families celebrate nature's bounty by preparing and eating seasonal recipes for the meals and offering appreciation for everything we have.
- At each meal there is a welcoming ceremony where ancestors are symbolically invited to join. We share stories about these ancestral guests, called *ushpizin*, and glean lessons from their character that we can apply to our own lives. Some have a tradition of also inviting family ancestors or role models and speaking of what we can learn from their traits.
- Family and friends visit a local *sukkah* (possibly a public one) and enjoy a meal in it.
- Family and friends gather to build a *sukkah*, a temporary structure with at least three sides, whose roof is made out of thatch or branches. It's an unforgettable and fun way to prepare for the holiday.
- Family members decorate a *sukkah* together using art supplies, tapestries, foam chains, strings of popcorn, lights, fruits, and above all, creativity! Remember, the *sukkah* is exposed to the weather, so using outdoor-rated materials works best.
- During Sukkot, to celebrate the bounty of the harvest, each day family members hold and shake four species of plants (*arba minim*) while reciting a blessing. The four species are palm (*lulav*), myrtle (*hadas*), willow (*aravah*), and citron (*etrog*).
- Weather permitting, meals are eaten in the *sukkah*. Some people also sleep there for one or more of the holiday nights. Some make the *sukkah* into a form of glamping – glamour camping – bringing out comfy mattresses, pillows, and special objects for decoration.

### Sukkot Resources

- Watch this video to learn more about what constitutes a *sukkah* and how to build one: <https://bit.ly/2qyUd87>.
- Purchase at-home *sukkah* kits from a variety of websites.
- Click on this link to visit [myjewishlearning.com](https://myjewishlearning.com)'s Sukkot page, which includes a video enumerating each of the four plant species and the blessing: <https://bit.ly/2ISfNvP>.

## UNIFICATION OF COUNTERPARTS

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

The holiday of Sukkot is both particular to the Jews and universal to all humanity. It is one of the three pilgrimage holidays that celebrate the journey of the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt, through their journey in the wilderness, to receiving the Torah on their way to the Promised Land.

At the same time, Sukkot has universal themes. It is a celebration of the harvest, as well as a time to pray for rain in the coming year. The Temple offerings made during Sukkot symbolized our prayers for all humanity. The priests made seventy offerings, which according to the book of Genesis is the number of nations across humanity. The prophet Zechariah describes Sukkot as a holiday that would one day be celebrated by all the nations of the world.

A teaching from Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe goes further, and claims that joy itself is a unification of contradictions:

- Which aspects of your life and Jewish practice connect you to all of humanity?
- How might you share with your children the message of Sukkot (and Jewish tradition as a whole), which values both the particular and the universal?

### Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, vol. 2, page 325

Heaven and earth, man and woman, soul and body – they are counterparts. However, they don't always remain counter to each other: there are times when they affect each other for the good, and there are times when they totally unite.

In every connection of counterparts there is *simchah*, and this is the place and the essence of *simchah*: everywhere [*simchah*] is present, there is connection or unification.

רב וולבה, עלי שור

שמים וארץ, איש ואשה, נשמה וגוף - ניגודים הם. לא תמיד הם נשארים ניגודים: יש, שמשפיעים זה על זה לטובה, ויש שמתאחדים לגמרי.

בכל התקשרות הניגודים יש שמחה, וזה מקומה. ומהותה של שמחה: בכל מקום שהיא נמצאת יש התקשרות או התאחדות.

- Where in your life have you experienced joy from the unification of counterparts or opposites?
- Where might you, as an individual, family, or Momentum group, take action that unifies counterparts?

## SPOTLIGHT ON ISRAEL

*Immigration to Israel  
The Law of Return*



In 1950, two years after its declaration of independence, Israel’s Knesset (parliament) passed a remarkable law, beginning with a few simple words that defined Israel’s central purpose: “Every Jew has the right to immigrate to this country.”

With the inception of the State of Israel, two thousand years of wandering were officially over. Since then, Jews have been entitled to simply show up and request to be Israeli citizens, assuming they pose no imminent danger to public health, state security, or the Jewish people as a whole. Essentially, all Jews everywhere are Israeli citizens by right.<sup>4</sup>

• *How is Israel’s Law of Return an expression of welcoming?*

### Immigration to Israel Total Immigration by Country<sup>5</sup>

(1948–2017)

Former Soviet Union	1,262,020
Arab and Muslim countries	890,000
USA/Canada	149,831
France	107,501
Ethiopia	93,104
Argentina	69,435
UK	39,986
S. Africa	22,050
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,633,927</b>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from The Jewish Agency for Israel.

<sup>5</sup> This report is based on data from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Reference: <https://bit.ly/2ITuhvp>.

*Ethiopian Jews  
immigrating  
to Israel*



*French Jews  
immigrating  
to Israel*



*Russian Jews  
immigrating  
to Israel*



## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

*Spotlight on Happiness, with Yaffa Palti<sup>6</sup>*

We are born with a list in our hands. The title of the list is, “How Do I Achieve the Happiness I’m Entitled To?” and then it proceeds to mention a few essential pointers that we need in life in order to achieve that happiness:

- *You must be pretty.*
- *You must be skinny.*
- *You must be rich.*
- *You must be successful.*

And we suddenly become ultra-religious as we devoutly follow this Happiness Bible. But then... we realize we still aren’t happy. And we notice that the wealthiest people in Hollywood are not the actors, not the singers, and not the producers. The wealthiest people in Hollywood are the therapists.

We live our lives chasing these goals, developing eating disorders and going under the knife, all to achieve what is only the illusion of happiness. We realize that people who have accomplished every challenge on the Happiness List are still turning to drugs, still creating unhealthy relationships, and still committing suicide. And then we panic. If this will not make me happy, then what will?

We tend to live our lives in waves of euphoria and unhappiness, ignorant of the fact that true happiness is not wild or intense; it is calm and tranquil. We’re often disappointed that the ecstatic feeling accompanied by euphoria lasts

only a short while, and the unhappiness that follows the wave of euphoria leads to despair. That causes us to frantically create other euphoric moments, thus creating a never-ending vicious cycle.

Happiness remains the most cherished yet elusive of all human desires. So how can we possibly achieve it? Let’s talk about it in lady lingo.

### SHOES

There. I woke ya’ll up. No matter how much pleasure I get from buying a new pair of shoes, those shoes will never, ever become a part of me. They will always remain external to me. And therefore, they can’t create true happiness, because the euphoria felt through them is short lived.

No external matter can truly make me happy because it is all external to me. The only thing that can cause lasting happiness is something that connects with the eternal part of me. With my essence. With my soul. Happiness is a proper balance between the mind and the heart. It is the feeling of contentment, inner peace, and positive well-being, and it is acquired through living a life that is meaningful and worthwhile.

I want to share with you one of my favorite teachings from Viktor Frankl:

“Don’t aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to

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<sup>6</sup> Yaffa Palti is a Community Leader and educator who has served communities in Israel, Mexico City, and San Diego.

miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run – in the long run, I say! – success will follow you precisely because you had *forgotten* to think of it.”

We waste our lives running after smoke and mirrors and flashing lights that call out to us and promise us happiness. But they're all lying. The list is a lie and the lights are a lie. Because the greatest mistake we can make in life is to depend on something external to create our happiness. There is no one, and there is nothing in this world that can be, or should be, responsible for your happiness. Not your bank account, not your dress size, not your vacation plans, not your children, and certainly not your husband.

We spend years and years searching for the city of happiness, without realizing that it's really a state of mind. The term for “being happy” in Hebrew is *besimchah*. If you switch around all the letters, in Hebrew, you get the word *machshavah*, which means “thoughts.”

It is no coincidence that the process of happiness and the process of thinking are made up of the same exact letters. The only person responsible for my happiness is me. And the place to begin creating that process is in my head. It requires a change in perspective toward the positive. We cannot change most of the circumstances in our lives. But we *can* change the quality of our lives by focusing on the positive.

Take rain. Is rain good or bad? Well, that depends on whom you ask. For a farmer, it's the greatest blessing! But for a woman who just spent two hours in the salon getting her hair done, well, it ain't a blessing. We cannot control the circumstances in our lives, but we can absolutely control how they affect us.

What does all this have to do with Sukkot, you ask?

We have a few special *mitzvot* on Sukkot.

We say a *brachah* and shake a *lulav* and *etrog*. We build a *sukkah*, we decorate it, eat in it, and together with the neighborhood cats, we even sleep in it.

But there's one more *mitzvah* on Sukkot that is actually its main *mitzvah*, yet not as much fun as the others and therefore often overlooked. We have to be HAPPY.

This doesn't mean we have to run off to go watch our favorite comedian. Nor does it mean we have to look for a new euphoria injection. It means becoming people who are truly happy in life. It means becoming people who view their lives, the world, and the people in it through positive eyes and minds.

The whole idea of eating in the *sukkah* is to teach us this lesson. We willingly leave our stable, warm, and comfortable homes and go camp out in a cold, wobbly hut for an entire week. What are we, a bunch of masochists? No. We are learning an essential life lesson. We don't need materialism to make us happy! We cannot depend on anything external to make us happy!

Happiness comes from inside ourselves, and we can create that inner peace, no matter where we are and no matter what challenges life throws our way.

Wishing you all a very happy Sukkot!

By the way, don't step on the scale till the holiday is over. Ignorance is bliss.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

*Spotlight on Welcoming Guests with Chaya Lester*



We like to host. Maybe some of you have come to our house for a Shabbat of a Lifetime meal?!

I get goosebumps just thinking about the shining faces, the tears shed, the sacred space held at these holy feasts. People think I'm this amazing hostess. Oh, I am. But not the way you think.

In fact, I'm a fretful wreck in the kitchen. But it doesn't matter. Because I have a 5-step formula for how to host the ideal Shabbat or holiday meal. Here's my secret:

### **Most Important: Don't Be Fooled by the Food**

I get all indignant just thinking about those cookbook standards that no middle-class, multi-child'ed woman can sanely reach. What's worse is that all those pretty settings entirely miss the point of a Shabbat or holiday meal.

Because it's not just a meal. It's a ritual.

The food is the just the excuse. Don't let it trip you up or hold you back. The goal of the meal is to create a sacred space for people to connect – to each other, yes – but more essentially, to their very own souls. You see, our souls are like scared animals crouching under the table. The gift of a great ritual meal is that it coaxes our souls out and invites them to sit firm and



flourishing in our seats. When we realize it's not about the food, what do we care if the fish is plain as long as the singing is strong and the conversation is a communion? Get rid of the prep stress and put the stress on the soul instead.

### Potluck is the New Paradigm

Some people get crafty in the kitchen. I just get anxious. So what started happening to me was that I would get so stressed out before a meal that I started hosting less and less. It was an all-or-nothing game. Either I had to be perfect or I would shut down shop altogether.

In my quest for balance I discovered potluck. And I feel lucky indeed.

Here's my favored potluck formula: We provide the essentials of drink/wine/challah/dips and let's say a brisket and salad. Totally doable on a Friday. Everyone else brings a dish. A significant dish, mind you – A fish, a quiche, a curry. *Voila*. It's a royal feast. (For my friends who don't keep kosher, they buy kosher and bring that! Or come over early to help me cook, and we get some great connecting time while cutting peppers.) The other great thing about potluck is that it's egalitarian. Everyone's a king; no one's a slave. No more heavy, top-down hierarchy to get in the way. Gone is the model of burned-out families

where the wife is the offering on the altar of a lavish table. We must morph the expectations and the definitions of "holiness" into healthy holiness, shared responsibility, and cooperation. Don't go nuts, go potluck.

### Don't Host at the Expense of Your Kids

Don't let your ideal meal be at the expense of your darling mess-makers. If you're like us, then Shabbat meals are one of the few windows in the week to actually connect with the kids. And this is an ideal ritual for doing so. Here's how we do it:

Bribery. Yes, I am willing to air the dirty truth of my parenting. Generally, my kids take off to play upstairs at the first opportunity. I call them down before dessert and make a deal with them. I put aside choice healthy food for them and then leverage the heck out of dessert: "Whoever wants cake, first eat at least ten big big bites of this green stuff..." Once you have fulfilled your Mother-Jones regulated version of being a respectable parent... pull out the chocolate chips. Pose questions about the Torah reading or holiday, with age-appropriate questions for each kid. If they answer it right, throw them a chocolate chip. It's a joy-fest memory-maker you and your kids will cherish forever.



### Enjoy in Joy

Don't forget to ask yourself, "Am I having fun yet?" If you're not having fun, then just stop right there and figure out how to. For me, I look at our meals as my weekly adult playdates with friends. It's downright gleeful, and that glee is contagious. Don't let the meal get burdened by hostess-stress. Ask yourself how you can make your guests – and yourself! – most comfortable. Ask your guests what funny thing happened that week. Have someone share a joke or an animated story.

### Dish Out the Real Soul Food

Prepare content beforehand, just the way you would prepare the food. Zone in on a theme for the meal. Base it on a teaching from the weekly Torah reading or the nearest holiday, or something, anything, educational. Share a little teaching and pose a provocative question to the table. Make it personal. Not just intellectual. Not just informational. Preferably something with a psychological twist so that everyone can apply the teaching directly to their most intimate, real-time lives.

For example, let's say you're hosting a Sukkot meal. You can ask, By whom do you feel sheltered in life? By God, by your partner, by

your community? Go around the table and have everyone share. Process it. Or just ask everyone, "What is one thing you are grateful for right now?" Gratitude is the world's best food.

Granted, my husband and I are diehard therapists, so we tend to invite everyone to share their neurosis freely at the table. (Guests beware.) By us, it's like a gourmet group therapy ritual. We have been known to lead a meditation, do impromptu, spoken word free-styling, dramatic renderings, on-stage dream interpretations. Find your own style and bring it. Just remember to keep it creative. Keep it moving with some drinks and hearty *lechayims*. Keep it focused, go deep, and make sure everyone gets the chance (and feels comfortable) to freely speak and to let their souls speak.

A great ritual meal is a crucible for witnessing each other. It is a playground for God-expression. A feast of creativity and togetherness. Let this goal be your hosting North Star.

Don't be fooled by the food. That tasty spread is just the bait to get your soul into the seat.

The learning, the personal transformation, the connections – those are the real feast!



## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

### *Giving the Gift of Hachnasat Orchim – Welcoming Guests – on Shabbat*

By Karina Chemea<sup>7</sup>



Before traveling from Argentina to Israel with Momentum, Karina Chemea's family often ate Shabbat dinner with her parents or siblings. Then Karina experienced Momentum and was amazed to meet hundreds of Jewish women from all over the world – all of whom shared so much in common. “Even though we came from different countries, we all felt the same powerful emotions while lighting Shabbat candles and dancing at the Kotel,” she said. The connection she felt with her Momentum sisters led her to open up her home and share Shabbat with others.

Today, Karina's family hosts Jewish individuals for Shabbat meals once or twice a month. Menora, the Partner Organization that hosted Karina's Momentum experience, sends international travelers and new community members her way. Karina's family has hosted

people from Turkey, South Africa, Russia, Mexico, and many other countries, and sometimes, past guests even refer their friends.

### **Karina's Advice for Welcoming People into Your Home on Shabbat**

#### **1. Greet guests with a smile**

People may be nervous when visiting a stranger's home for the first time. As soon as your guests enter your home, try to make them feel welcome. My five daughters meet our guests at the door and ask them about themselves. They speak about the guests' travels, studies, or work to help our guests feel at ease.

#### **2. Meet your guests' needs**

I want my guests to enjoy themselves, so I make sure to ask them in advance what they like to eat and if they have any food allergies. If they're travelers, I offer them assistance and invite them to spend future Shabbats with us.

#### **3. Give them opportunities to share**

During Shabbat dinner, we have a tradition in which we go around the table and have everyone share the best thing they experienced that week.

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<sup>7</sup> Karina Chemea is a Community Leader in South America, and a close friend of and collaborator with Momentum.

While sharing their reflections, our guests often become emotional. During the week, we don't always have time to engage in real conversations, but at the Shabbat table, everyone listens intently to one another.

#### 4. Serve delicious food

One of the highlights of Shabbat dinner is being able to enjoy incredible home-cooked food. Each week, I bake four *challot*, and sometimes add cinnamon or *zaatar* to them. They're a big hit, and I'm always happy to give my guests the recipes.

#### 5. Make your guests feel comfortable

We often have guests who aren't accustomed to Shabbat meals. Before we make Kiddush, wash our hands, and bless the challah, we explain what we're doing and why we're doing it. Our guests feel included and love learning new things.

- *What would you add to this list?*
- *What memorable experiences of hosting or being hosted do you have?*
- *Consider making a list of people you could invite to a Shabbat meal.*



## TRY IT OUT

### PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

*Cultivate Joy and Joyful Hospitality in Your Family*<sup>8</sup>

#### For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://momentumunlimited.org).
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
  - I am happy with my portion (from Pirkei Avot)
  - I think positively
  - I find joy in connection and the unification of counterparts
  - I welcome guests joyfully
- Aleph Beta Academy is an online library of videos offering in-depth, text-based Jewish learning. To learn more about Sukkot, check out the thirty-minute video, "The Meaning of Sukkot: Why on Earth Would We Celebrate Sleeping in Huts?"

#### For Families with Children of All Ages

- Model a joyful attitude for your children. They learn by what we do, not by what we say!
- Make sharing time together a priority. Connecting with others strengthens us in so many ways.
  - Nurture gratitude by creating a family gratitude ritual:
    - Have each family member mention one thing they are grateful for at the dinner table.
    - Include daily blessings as part of your prayers.
    - Keep a family gratitude journal and update it daily/weekly.
  - Limit your family's exposure to commercials:
    - Download and install ad-blocking software such as Adblock Plus. This handy little app blocks advertisements on websites, Facebook, and even YouTube.
    - Subscribe to commercial-free streaming services and borrow commercial-free DVDs from the library.
    - When watching cable TV, try muting the television during the commercials, or record the shows and fast-forward through commercial breaks.
    - Subscribe to children's magazines that have little or no advertising.
- Help others in your community:
  - Shovel a neighbor's walkway.
  - Bring in a neighbor's garbage can.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from "10 Powerful Ways to Cultivate Joy in Your Family," by Sharon Harding; Rediscovered Families blog, May 16, 2016: <https://rediscoveredfamilies.com/10-powerful-ways-cultivate-joy-family>.

- Bring a meal to new parents, or families coping with sickness.
- Make a point to greet people with a warm smile.
- **Family *hachnasat orchim*.** Involve your family in the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim*! Explore the following questions together, and plan a meal that will truly embody joyful Jewish hospitality:
  - Whom should we invite?
  - Whom do we know who would appreciate a place at our table?
  - How do we find and reach out to someone who is in real need of hospitality?
  - Whom do we know who cannot attend a meal at our home, but would appreciate our delivering a meal or flowers to show that we are thinking of them?
  - What can we do to make all our guests feel comfortable?
  - What are some topics of conversation that would be interesting and meaningful to all?
- **Family movie night.** Sometimes it is difficult to invite certain people into your home. The beautiful Israeli movie, *Ushpizin*, tells the story of a childless couple who were visited on Sukkot by some people from a past they want to forget, and their struggle to figure out and do the right thing. The movie is available with English subtitles and is appropriate for the whole family.
- **Project: Create Your Own *Ushpizin*.** Who are the people you would like to invite into your home or *sukkah* as role models for your family? Put together a photo montage of their images, and hang it up as an added set of personal *ushpizin* in your home or *sukkah* (or both!).
- *Hachnasat orchim* can be done on a personal level by inviting others to our homes, or on a community level by helping others provide meals to those in need.
  - Which organizations in your area provide food and shelter to those in need?
  - What can you and your family do to help support these organizations?
  - Where is there an opportunity to get your family involved, such as in a shelter or a soup kitchen?
  - What other families might you invite to join you? How could you take a leadership position to bring the value of *hachnasat orchim* into your family and your community? Whom could you inspire to partner with you?

### For Families with Young Children

- Consider watching the following short videos with your children:
  - Welcoming Sparks: “*Hachnasat Orchim: How to Make People Feel Welcome*”: [www.bit.ly/2ccR33a](http://www.bit.ly/2ccR33a).
  - Shalom Sesame: “Abraham and the Three Visitors”: [www.bit.ly/2aNuXjg](http://www.bit.ly/2aNuXjg).
- For further grown-up learning, consider watching “What’s Jewish About Welcoming Guests?” on YouTube.





## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

*In this session, we explore living with simchah, joy; and hachnasat orchim, the mitzvah of welcoming guests*

### The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *What messages does the world around me communicate about what will bring me happiness? Which of those messages do I agree with? Which do I reject?*
- *What about opening my home and heart to others could/might help me reach simchah, true joy?*
- *What are some actionable steps I can take to care for those around me who are in need of friendship or physical support?*
- *Which Sukkot traditions might I want to try out this year? How can I introduce them to my family with joy?*

### Meaningful Vocabulary

<i>hachnasat orchim</i>	הַכְּנֶסֶת אֹרְחִים	welcoming guests
<i>simchah</i>	שִׂמְחָה	true joy
<i>mitzvah</i>	מִצְוָה	commandment
<i>sukkah</i>	סֻכָּה	a booth or hut roofed with branches and used during the holiday of Sukkot as a temporary dining and/or living area

### Facilitating the Session

#### 1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Planning an activity to kick off or supplement the session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Hosting the event
- Inviting one or two women to plan and lead a discussion about the media's transmitting the message that physical comfort and luxury will lead to happiness, and its impact on us as individuals, families, and communities
- Inviting one or more of the women to share a way she brought home the learning from your last gathering

**Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!**

#### 2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

#### 3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the space. If you are having this session around Sukkot time, there may be an opportunity to build or decorate a *sukkah*, or to host the session in a *sukkah*.

#### 4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider, for example, tuning in to elements of the natural world as part of a guided meditation, or having women pair up and listen to each other, for two minutes each, as they share what's new with them or how their High Holidays have been.

#### Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

#### 5. Intro and Inspiration

Introduce the holiday of Sukkot and share that a synonymous name for the holiday is "*zman simchateinu*," the time of our joy. Invite each woman to share one thing that brings her joy; maybe something that others would not easily guess.

#### 6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

##### *Sheltering and Rejoicing*

Read together about the holiday of Sukkot. Use the questions on page 132 for dialogue. You may

want to draw on the centrality of the Exodus story (in daily prayer and in two weeklong holidays of enactment), which infuses us with hope and encouragement. Invite the women to share any of the Sukkot traditions or experiences that they have participated in previously, and questions that they have about the holiday.

##### *The Jewish Idea of Joy*

Pair women up and ask them to read Rabbi Wolbe's piece together (p. 133). Afterward, choose one of the follow-up questions and direct the partners to take turns responding to it, while sitting face-to-face. Give each partner time to speak while the other partner listens silently. Then switch rolls. You can time this activity, announcing when each segment concludes. When both partners have spoken, ask for volunteers to share with the group an insight they had.

##### *Unification of Counterparts*

Invite women to read the introductory paragraphs and dialogue about the questions on page 137. Have them work in small groups of three to four to explore these concepts in a visual and tangible way. Each group should then find a way to bring everyone's hands together, shaping them into a depiction of the concept "universal," and give a creative title to their hand configuration. Then have them shape their hands to depict "particular," and give this creation a title. Come back together and have each group show the others their creations, along with their titles.

## 7. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

**Reflection Suggestion:** Ask participants to reflect on the following, perhaps by writing or drawing: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “I would like to further bring *hachnasat orchim* to my family by...”

Direct the women’s attention to the Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families (pp. 148–149). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit that you didn’t cover, and encourage participants to read and implement it at home.

Provide participants the opportunity to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This Learn with Your Sister activity (pp. 140–147) serves as an entry point for conversations that may never

otherwise happen. Inform the women when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

## Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, you may want to consider the following:

- Plan a movie night in which your group views the film *Ushpizin*. Use the film as a jumping-off point to teach about the custom of *ushpizin* during Sukkot.
- Ask a participant to facilitate a discussion about Abraham and Sarah, using the “True Joy and the Mitzvah of Welcoming Guests” section (pp. 134–135). Consider reading the story of Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality together, and ask your participant-facilitator to break the group into *havrutot* (learning pairs) to discuss the questions. Talk about how to make *hachnasat orchim* a part of their lives and the lives of their families.
- If you are planning the session in advance of Sukkot, preview the resources offered in the unit that could help the participants who are interested in building a *sukkah* with their families or neighbors.



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