



Rabbi Avi Berman Executive Director, OU Israel

The unique, underlying component of the holiday of Sukkot is leaving the physical comfort of our home and moving into the sukka for 7 days. Instead of eating, sleeping, and praying in the physical structures of our homes and synagogues, Hashem commands us to spend the chag in temporary dwellings.

I must say, this year the change felt less drastic than usual. For months, we've been davening outside, be it in our yards, pathways or even our mirpasot (each of us in our own situation). Usually when we go into the sukka, one of the goals is to feel more connected to those around us. We hear their singing, laughter, divrei Torah and yes, even their yelling. This year, I feel as if we have been experiencing this for many months already.

Another drastic change was not having our usual Sukkot guests. My family looks forward to hosting many guests in our sukka, including former Vancouver NCSYers and their families, certain neighbors we have over each year, and close friends visiting from North America. We missed these people deeply, but since we need to make the best of our unique circumstances this year, my family and I turned towards the ushpizin and welcomed them as our

guests in a new way this year.

Since we were unable to host physical guests, we tried to welcome our spiritual guests in a more pronounced manner. While these 7 spiritual giants are our guests each year, in the past we said a few lines and divrei Torah about them. This year they had a dominating presence in our sukka. Each night, someone else in the family prepared a presentation, play or unique way to connect to that night's ushpizin, and we added special foods to our menu that symbolize each one of the ushpizin.

While we daven for a speedy end to the coronavirus pandemic, I feel a need to thank Hashem for enabling us to connect to this sometimes overlooked aspect of the chag, to talk a lot more about the ushpizin, and gain much more from them.

Sukkot also signifies the end of the summer, as we begin davening for rain. For months now, our OU Israel Youth Centers across the country have been able to continue our work with at-risk teens through outdoor programming. As winter approaches, I daven that we will be able to find ways to help them and work with them despite cold weather and the hope of much gishmei bracha.

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