

Ha'azinu-Sukkot D'var

Often, it is the people we love the deepest that we find we hurt the most. And in many of our closest, healthiest relationships, we find that despite taking out our frustrations, anger, and pain on those loved ones, they are also the ones whom we seek out for comfort at those very same times.

We find ourselves at the last two parshiot of the Torah. At an excruciatingly painful time for Moses. He has lost his two siblings, he is dealing with kvetching, revolting Israelites, and- adding salt to that huge festering wound-he will not be allowed into the promised land. I think that his pain may be less about all the hard work he's done over the last 40 years only to be denied that feeling of his toes actually touching the soil of the promised land, and more perhaps, about a feeling of betrayal. After all, God and Moses had a relationship that no one before or after them shared. A kind of intimate- kinship -that was unique to them.

I think about my own children, and what it was like when they were absolutely at their wit's end. Those magnitude 7 tantrums which, when they were winding down, found the afflicted child crawling up into my lap for comforting 'Ema snuggles'. It no longer mattered the horror I had inflicted upon them; the injustice they would never forget or forgive. What mattered now was safety, comfort, closeness, and most importantly, love. I feel For Moses right now. Every year. It literally hurts my heart to think about how he must have been feeling. Anger, Loss, pain, frustration.....

But as a parent, I believe his end is a good one. To go up on that mountain, with his anger, pain, emptiness, sadness... To then sit up there with God- the one with whom he probably had the closest relationship out of anyone- to get it out and then to be enveloped, like a child, in safety, comfort, closeness and love.... What a beautiful end.....

And then we have Sukkot.

Sukkot is a beautiful holiday for so many reasons. It's connection to nature, welcoming of strangers, thinking of those who are less fortunate than we are..... *it reminds us to appreciate what we have because any moment, that can be taken away. And this year, when so many lives have been changed- and not for the better- because of the pandemic; jobs lost, lack of financial stability, homelessness..... we feel it even more.*

For a week every year, those of us lucky enough to live in warm climates (or of hardy enough stock to brave the snow and ice), live in sukkot- three sided temporary 'booth' like structures with branch covered roofs through which we can see the moon and stars. Each night of Sukkot, According to the Zohar (III:103b), in addition to inviting friends and family to dine in the sukkah with us, we welcome The Shechina (God's divine presence), who spreads her wings over our sukkah each night, along with 7 ancestral guests-one each night- called the Ushpizin- to come into our sukkah and celebrate the holiday with us. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. According to the Talmud, we also welcome, Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther (Suk 54b).

Maimonides tells us that anyone who sits in their sukkah with their family but does not share that which they enjoy with the poor is performing a mitzva 'for the stomach' and not 'for joy'. In the past, it was customary to invite the poor into your sukkah. Today, donations to the needy are made during sukkot. It is thought that, even if the ceremony to summon the Ushpizin is done correctly (it is printed in the full daily/festival siddur), they will not come unless provisions have been sent to the poor.

Each Ushpizin carries with them a special characteristic that they, due to their own wanderings and hardships in life, contributed to the world. Lovingkindness, strength, splendor, glory, holiness, eternity, sovereignty.. And from them we are reminded of the crucial role we have in the world to follow in their footsteps.

It is comforting to know that although we say goodbye to Moses in these last two parshiot, we simultaneously welcome him back to share a meal with him, shake the lulav, smell the etrog, laugh and celebrate.

May each of us have a joyous, meaningful sukkot, and may we gain the wisdom and compassion of our ancestors as we make each moment a meaningful one in this new year. Shabbat shalom and Chag Sameach