Ushpizin

Bronfmanim Host in their Sukkot
Tradition has it that on Sukkot, the most wondrous guests visit one’s Sukkah. Called Ushpizin - Talmudic-Greek for guests – they usually consist of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on, each on their own special night, each bringing with them inspiration and blessing.

But on Bronfman we learned to appreciate guests of all kinds as inspirations and blessings: people, texts and art. This year we asked Bronfmanim to host us in their Sukkah for a moment, to pull out a text or image that serves as an Ushpizin, a blessing and inspiration, in their lives.

As this new year descends upon us, we invite you to sit back in the Sukkah – metaphorical or real – and invite these guests to join you. May it be a year of surprising hospitality and blessing.

"Sit, sit, Ushpizin from on high, Ushpizin of holiness"

Chag Sameach!

The Bronfman Fellowships Team
Hineni

These images are drawn from a series of cards I made in 2009, through which I hoped to invoke the call-and-response that reverberates through this season. Ayekah? Where are you? God called out into Eden. And as the leaves fall and the air thins, each year, I hear it anew. Where am I? Where have I been? And You--God, parent, child, friend--Where have You been? And then, the trick of these days, is to attempt an answer. To sift through the nights as they grow longer and then truly long: Hineni. Here I am.

Rachel Farbiarz (’94) is an artist, and formerly, an attorney. She lives with her family in Washington D.C.
Rena Newman ('15) is a senior at Evanston Township High School in Illinois, where she is currently recovering from the 2015 Bronfman Fellowships summer.
Psalm

Lure us to the place where outside is an allegory for perfection and youngsters sing your name in whatever costumes suit them.

Lure us to the place where there’s no need to pose questions to an answerless void, or wave the banner of our cults.

Lure us to the clearing where plum trees are imagination, and gentle rivers pass as in a story.

Lure us, because our purpose escapes measurement - so long as Chase, and Sachs, and Stanley insist on calling “God” any man with zeros to his name. So long as we restrict the name of star to those whose lives are airbrushed, and whose words come recommended only in quotation marks.

Lure us, because the pleasures of a text can only go so far beyond the printed page.

Lure us to the place where we place ourselves in song, the songplace, without all that highfalutin mystical shit. And without the need for protest or hashtag politics.

A place in the eye of the contemporary, in the singular, in the cornea shadow of an eternal now. In the out.

A place whose unreadability proves our mortal need for art, and disproves it. A place we can dream of because we have been there already.

Dr. Zohar Atkins ('05) is a 2nd-year rabbinical student at JTS.
Grogger

I often look to Emma Goldman for her free spirit and courage, and this year I invite her into my sukkah with this political cartoon, which appeared in 1909 in the Yiddish humor publication, Der Groyser Kunds. The image of Emma Goldman as a “grogger” (noisemaker), resisting the silencing efforts of the police, feels particularly resonant these days, reminding me of the imperative to be bold and loud, unafraid of ridicule, and always appreciative of humor.
Voice

Teaching Feminism at an urban High School, the kids I teach live in a reality riddled with violence that most of us can't possibly begin to understand. I learn from their strength and fortitude. I try to grow from it. I am humbled and blessed to be able to do this job. So, when I feel like I'm having a tough day because my body hurts, I think about how my day isn't actually tough at all. It's all about my perspective and attitude. It's never going to be as hard for me as it is for them. That's why I'm still teaching. Because everyone deserves a chance. These kids, especially. I want them to have the tools to change their narrative. They are brave and they are empowered to author their own identities. Our actions matter. Teachers matter. Students matter. I want them to have a voice, to know their voice, and to use their voice.

Sarah Marcus (’02) is the author of BACKCOUNTRY and Every Bird, To You. She currently teaches and writes in Cleveland.
This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

The Guest House | Jalal-a-Din Rumi

Noa Silver (’04) lives in Oakland, CA, where she is currently pursuing her MFA in Fiction at San Francisco State University.
Noa Silver (’04)

As I was reflecting on the inspirational guests I would like to invite into my Sukkah this year, and into my life in the upcoming year, it occurred to me just how little control I actually have over who or what arrives at my (figurative) door on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis. And that, while dreaming up the guests I’d ideally like to populate my home with, what became apparent was that what I hope to invite into my Sukkah, my home and myself this year, is an openness and gratitude for whatever and whoever shows up. I hope that many of my days will be visited by inspiration and joy and love, but I know that some days I will be visited by disappointment and frustration and sorrow. My hope is that I can greet those guests with the same degree of equanimity and generosity as I would the former. This poem speaks to that hope.
Changing Light

Since I paint people that I know well, and I paint them over long spans of time, the paintings become accumulations of time. I invite them into the studio week after week, for months on end, in order to make a single painting. Sometimes as I paint we talk or debate, other times we listen to music. We can use the time to relax or to unpack our lives. Sometimes the studio is silent. But each painting is built in layers as days or months pass between us in the studio. The paintings are the accrual of these visits. We are collecting all this information in order to tell a story, in order to create Ushpizin who can visit and exist long after my living, breathing guests have gone home. I love to discover how people reveal themselves and disappear.

I am reminded of this quote from Kafka, which I have no choice but to read as a challenge: “We Jews are not painters. We cannot depict things statically. We see them always in transition, in movement, as change. We are story-tellers.”—Kafka

Joshua Meyer (’91) can usually be found in his Cambridge, Massachusetts studio, painting, drinking coffee and singing off-key.
“Changing Light” 20 x 18 inches, oil on panel
This year I am inviting the entire Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union to my Sukkah. Yes, all one million of them. There won’t be enough room, you say? If there was enough room for them in Israel, there will be enough room for them in my Sukkah. Now that’s what I call hospitality! They are a top quality Aliyah: doctors and engineers and math teachers. There will be lots of interesting conversations with them in the Sukkah. They served in the IDF, made the desert bloom and brought us the best non-kosher supermarket chain. Don’t worry, they won’t move too much. With back pains from working a security guard’s shift and swollen feet as a result of working as house cleaners, all they’ll do is sit and smile with a mouth full of gold teeth. They won’t make much noise either. They’ve learned that there is no place in the Israeli public sphere for their language and culture.

However, when I think of it, it’s a bit of a shame. They could have brought with them tasty dishes with weird names like Kholodets and Olivier Salad. They could have recited the poems of Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva and Mandelstam and wept at the memories of their youth in the communal apartment and at the recollections of a fabulous Novy God New Year’s on the streets of Moscow. They would ache while telling stories of the terrible Gulags, they would sing us a Russian song and play an Oscar-winning Soviet movie. Yes, that could have been interesting…

But on second thought…forget about it. More of the same is the best. Long live the melting pot!
Alex Rif (Amitah ’03) is a screenwriter, poet, and activist in the “1.5 Generation” initiative of Israelis from the Former Soviet Union. In her day job she works as an analyst at Israel’s Ministry of Economy.
laughing bc

laughing bc
got a love &
havent got 1
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same position
for a long time
w/o budging
then dancing
bc god suddenly

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bc this love
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she makes
me forget
all the ugly
then crying

bc well bc
here today
gone later
today

Read Nat Sufrin's ('06) recent work in the Antioch Review, InDigest, and BlazeVOX.
Joy

This Simchat Torah I am inviting two Polish guests to celebrate with me: the Hasidic Rebbe of Gur and the poet Wislawa Szymborska. Together they remind me to seek out the grandiose hidden in the small moments, to live life as an ongoing learner, and always seek out the other perspective. With a Torah like this I can dance all night…

“One must be extremely joyous on Simchat Torah, and give much honor to the Torah. For they say “Even if you learned but one letter from your friend – you must treat them with much honor” – how much more so for the Torah itself, which has taught us so much. And one must seek out the illumination of the Torah in all places, even in things that do not have Torah in them. And when a person seeks to learn from everything as if it is Torah, they fulfill “and you shall dwell in study day and night”.

– Sfat Emet, R. Yehuda Arieh Leib of Gur, Sukkot 5564

We are not maximalists. We do not expect intense spiritual ecstasy from our daily reading material. Such emotion bursts forth rarely, and when it does – one must see it as a gift, and not as destiny. As for those daily interactions, it would be nice if what we read would serve to illuminate the world in a light distinct from our own sensitivities, and that it will cause - at least for a moment – some concern, wonder or joy.

–Wislawa Szymborska,“Nonrequired Reading”

Rabbi Mishael Zion co-directs the Bronfman Fellowships and raises his three daughters in his childhood neighborhood in Jerusalem.
The Bronfman Fellowships. Over 1,000 young Jews from Israel and North America. A diverse community of thinkers and creators who inspire and support each other. Committed to learning, questioning and bringing the world to a better place.

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