

Chagim uMoadim

— from the Masorti Movement



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Sukkot

I am sure you've heard about Oscar Wilde, the famous Oscar Wilde who lived in London and Paris at the end of the 19th century. Oscar Wilde wrote many stories, some of them for children.

The name of one of his stories, which recently was brought to my attention, is "The Selfish Giant." I remember this story as one of the first stories I ever read in my early childhood. Does anybody remember the story?

Every afternoon, after school, the children would play in the giant's garden. The children were very happy in the garden, because in it grew many fruit trees and flowers. After a long trip, the giant came back and discovered the children playing in his garden and chased them away. After that, he built a high fence and put up a sign forbidding entrance to his garden. The children were very sad and walked around outside the garden missing the days they had played in it.

Meanwhile, spring arrived and all the gardens flourished. In the giant's garden, spring refused to come and snow covered everything. The giant didn't understand why his garden didn't flourish and why, in his garden, it was winter all year long. Days passed. One morning, the giant heard the birds singing. Could his garden be flourishing? He looked out the window and realized that the reason spring had come was that the children had made a hole in the fence and had entered the garden. Then the giant understood how selfish he had been. He destroyed the fence and allowed the kids to come back and play in his garden.

The story goes on a little more but for now, that is enough.

The story is about how to take care of a home; how to take care of a garden.

The giant has the option to build a high fence preventing anybody from coming into his home. Nobody will step on the grass; nobody will mess the carpet; and the giant will keep his reputation as a strong giant. Everybody will fear the giant and his power. However, the price to pay for excluding others is an endless winter. Only the presence of other people allows spring to come. Only the children running in the garden allows it to flourish.

The garden in our story can be our home, our congregation, and each of us.

If we allow other people to enter into our lives, in our world, in our daily routine, we take the risk of losing privacy, of not being able to set the right limits, of losing control and power.

However, if we close doors, if we close ourselves to others, if we say, “I don’t need the outsiders,” we transform our home, our congregation and our lives into an endless winter in which nothing can flourish. On the contrary, when I open myself to others, I need to learn to let go and to accept that I will not be able to have absolute control over everything. Only through contact with others, can I grow.

If we want our garden to flourish, we need to go out and look for the people who are waiting for us to contact them. We need to tear down the fences and build bridges. It isn’t enough that other people are out there for us; we must reach out to them. If I want my garden to flourish, I need to learn to forgive, to be able to see the bright side in others.

Rabbi Levi Itzjak of Berdichev used to invite everybody to his sukkah without considering the cultural or the social level of his guests. When someone asked him about his attitude, he answered, “When in heaven, God will construct a sukkah for the just, and the divine presence will preside at the table. I, Levi Itzjak, will want to enter and I will be asked, ‘What is your merit to be counted among the just?’ Then I will answer, “My sukkah was always open to everybody. I never made distinctions.”

The sukkah, with its fragile walls and its wide door invites us to open our hearts to others. The sukkah invites us to share our food, our roof and our spirit.

The richness of a congregation lies not in its walls, or in its fences, or in its bricks, but in its people. Sukkot reminds us that even though our roof is frail, even though a wind can knock down the walls of our little house, even though all is “vanity of vanities,” the bridges we can build in relationships with other people can last forever.

May God bless us so that we will flourish in our garden.

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