

HOSPITALITY ON SUKKOT - USHPIZIN

The mitzvah of הַכְנֵסֵת אֹרְחִים - *Hachnasat Orchim* - "welcoming guests" - is given special importance during Sukkot. Traditionally, we welcome friends, family, and the community into our Sukkah and we visit others. Unfortunately, during this time of pandemic and physical distancing, gathering together in person in the Sukkah is not safe. There is a way, however, to invite guests into our Sukkah.

Ushpizin (Aramaic for "guests") is a custom that originated amongst the mystics of Safed in the 16th century. According to this tradition, each Sukkah is blessed with visits by seven honoured guests, one for each night of the festival: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David. A more modern tradition is to also invite *Ushpizot* – seven women of virtue.

In a modern Reform variation to this custom, each night can be connected to a related social action theme:

First Night - חֶסֶד - *Chesed* – “loving-kindness” - On the first night we welcome Abraham and Sarah, the primary exemplars of hospitality and welcoming. They teach us *chesed* - lovingkindness. Whom do we invite into our homes? What are other groups that we might welcome more warmly into our lives, homes, or communities?

Second Night - גְבוּרָה - *Gevurah* – “strength” - On this night, we welcome Isaac and Rebecca, who teach us *gevurah* - strength. Isaac is an exemplar of powerlessness - one who was passive and had no will of his own. On the other hand, Rebecca, by causing Jacob to take his brother's birthright, is an exemplar of proactivity, taking control over the future of her people. When might it be best to sit back and subdue ourselves, and when is it important to take action for what we believe in? What are examples of actions that we can be taking in order to ensure a better future for humankind?

Third Night - תִּפְאֶרֶת - *Tiferet* – “splendor” - Tonight, we welcome Jacob and Rachel. Jacob fell in love with Rachel because of her beauty, rejecting her sister, Leah, who had "weak eyes." What role does physical appearance play in our lives? How can we embrace diverse beauty concepts that recognize the value in various cultures and backgrounds? In what ways do we discriminate on the basis of physical characteristics and abilities? How can we ensure justice and equality for all, regardless of appearance?

Fourth Night - נְצִיחַ - *Netzach* – “eternity” - On the fourth night, we welcome Yocheved and her son, Moses. Yocheved ensured the survival of the Jewish people by defying the ruling power and saving Moses. Moses' acts of leadership resulted in our freedom from slavery. They encourage us to remember the importance of standing up for what is right and taking action to bring about justice for ourselves and others. Today, are there others who are still struggling for their freedom? What is our responsibility to those people?

Fifth Night - תִּה - *Hod* – “glory” - On this night, we welcome Miriam and her brother, Aaron. Miriam and Aaron are known for their words: Miriam led the women in song at the shore of the sea and was also punished for spreading gossip about her sister-in-law. Aaron was Moses' spokesperson, standing up to Pharaoh and helping the Israelites find freedom. How do we use our speech - to hurt or demean others, or to make the world a better place? How can we use communication to create change? What are some specific ways we can raise our voices to speak out for social justice?

Sixth Night - יֶסֶד - *Yesod* – “foundation” - Tonight, we welcome Joseph and his Egyptian wife, Osnat. After suffering injustice and servitude, Joseph became quite powerful in the land of Egypt. Both Joseph and Osnat are symbols of wealth, power, and abundance. The Israelites found refuge in Egypt as they fled famine; so too, many now come to America to find a better life. How might this analogy affect our perception of our nation's role in the world? What should our sense of responsibility and action be in light of our overall wealth and power?

Seventh Night - מַלְכוּת - *Malchut* – “sovereignty” - On the last night of Sukkot, we welcome David and his wife, Michal. Although he is remembered as a great leader, as king, David shed much blood and abused the power of his office for personal gain. Today as well, world leaders have the capacity to make war or peace, to use their authority to help others or to achieve personal profit. Do our leaders use their power wisely? If not, what is our responsibility to make sure that they do? (From <https://rac.org/sukkot-ushpizin-welcoming-seven-holy-guests>).

In addition to these traditional Ushpizin, you can invite in spiritual anyone you wish, dead or alive, into your Sukkah.

For Sukkot 2020, Rabbi Alan Henkin has created a pandemic Ushpizin list:

- 1) Moses who persuaded the Israelite slaves to shelter in place while the plague of the Death of the First-born ravaged Egypt.
- 2) Physician Abraham Catalano who in 1631 at the height of the bubonic plague wrote his eyewitness account *Olam Hafuch* – “An Upside-Down World”.
- 3) Rabbi Akiva Eger, who wrote movingly about the cholera pandemic of the 1830s.
- 4) Rabbi Israel Salanter, who during another cholera epidemic in 1848 permitted people feeling weak to eat on Yom Kippur, going so far as to make kiddush and eat cakes himself.
- 5) Rabbi Moise Berg of Albuquerque's Congregation Albert who helped that city cope with the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918;
- 6) Dr. Jonas Salk who led the effort to develop the polio vaccine in the 1940s and 1950s.
- 7) and Dr. Charlotte Friend, who in the 1950s and 1960s proved that some cancers were caused by viruses.

Who will you be inviting into your Sukkah?