

The Ushpizin

The Seven Guests of Sukkot

1

Who are the Ushpizin and what can we learn from them?

- ▶ Abraham represents love and kindness
- ▶ Isaac represents restraint and personal strength
- ▶ Jacob represents beauty and truth
- ▶ Joseph represents holiness and the spiritual foundation
- ▶ Moses represents eternity and dominance through Torah
- ▶ Aaron represents empathy and receptivity to divine splendor
- ▶ David represents the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven on Earth



2

| Day | Sefirah | Ushpiz |
|-------------|--|---------|
| First day | <u>Chessed</u> : the attribute of "Benevolence" or " <u>Love</u> " | Abraham |
| Second day | <u>Gevurah</u> : "Restraint" and "Discipline" | Isaac |
| Third day | <u>Tiferet</u> : " <u>Beauty</u> ," " <u>Harmony</u> " and "Truth" | Jacob |
| Fourth day | <u>Netzach</u> : "Victory" and "Endurance" | Moses |
| Fifth day | <u>Hod</u> : "Splendor" and "Humility" | Aaron |
| Sixth day | <u>Yesod</u> : "Foundation" and "Connection" | Joseph |
| Seventh day | <u>Malchut</u> : "Sovereignty," "Receptiveness" and "Leadership" | David |

3

Abraham

- ▶ Abraham is honored the first night of Sukkot. In Genesis, he is commanded by the Divine to leave behind everything he knows and journey to an unknown place and life. As he encountered different lands and peoples, Abraham learned to see with the eyes of love and kindness. He had a deep knowing that all of us are passing through this world. We can choose to see our fellow travelers with kindness as we journey on. Can you see someone you have difficulty with as a fellow traveler this week?

4

Abraham and Chesed

- ▶ What is Chesed?
- ▶ *Chesed*, which is translated as "kindness."
- ▶ Kindness is often thought of as being synonymous with niceness, but the connotation of *chesed* is much deeper than this. *Chesed* is properly described as an act that has no "cause." It is not a reaction of a previous act.
- ▶ Every action in the universe has a cause -- except that which is the first one. Within the sphere of visible action, *chesed* is without cause, a proactive expression of expansiveness.

5

Chesed is a boundless, everlasting, love in action and this is the kind of love G-d has for His people.

This is the kind of love we are called to have for our fellow human beings.

6

Proper balance of Chesed important

- ▶ As with all soul-traits we must seek balance.
- ▶ Yes, chesed is love that takes us beyond the boundaries of selfishness.
- ▶ But, out of balance, Chesed could cause us to lose a proper sense of boundaries.
- ▶ Abraham is a great example of proper Chesed balance.
- ▶ He had a great propensity for Chesed, but he did not allow his natural inclinations to lead him blindly. He harnessed it and at times curtailed it.
- ▶ Ex: Let it flow with the visitors (angels)
- ▶ Ex: Curtailed it at Sodom and Gomorrah

7

Welcoming Guests - Lessons For Life

- ▶ We can learn many lessons for life from *Parashas Vayeira* and can readily apply them to our own situations. Among these lessons are:
- ▶ (1) **The Chuppah - Abraham's Model for the Jewish Home:** Abraham's tent was open on all sides so that it might be accessible from every direction. To this very day, in remembrance of the Tent of Abraham, the *chuppah* (marriage canopy) is open on all sides, in the hope that the home of the young couple will replicate Abraham's tent, in which guests were lovingly provided with hospitality. This teaching applies to *all* guests, for even though Abraham thought that his guests were simple desert nomads, he welcomed them with great honor.

8

(2) Enthusiasm:

- ▶ Abraham *ran* to greet his guests and he ran to serve them, teaching us that when we perform a mitzvah, it should be done with alacrity and joyous enthusiasm. It is not only *our performance* of mitzvos that is critical, but *the manner* in which we do so: grudgingly or happily, angrily or kindly, warmly or coldly.

9

- ▶ (3) **Attend to the needs of guests:** Abraham had many servants, but he and his wife Sarah *personally* attended to the needs of their guests. Thus we learn that it is proper to honor visitors by serving them.

10

- ▶ **(4) Say little, but do much:** Abraham invited his guests to partake of “a little water” and “a morsel of bread,” but then proceeded to prepare a lavish banquet, teaching us that a host should say little - so as not to make his guests feel beholden - but deliver much.

11

- ▶ **(5) Thank G-d:** Abraham did not allow his guests to express thanks to him, but instructed them to thank G-d. He impressed upon them that all that he possessed and shared was from Hashem. From this we learn that when we entertain guests, we must also consider their spiritual needs and make them aware of G-d’s presence and bounty.

12

- ▶ **(6) Escort guests:** It is written that when the angels took their leave from the tent of Abraham, he “walked with them to escort them” - reminding us that not only is it a mitzvah to invite guests to our homes, but when they depart, we should accompany them (for example, if we live in an apartment building, we should escort them to the elevator; if we have a private home, we should walk them to the door).

13

- ▶ **(7) According to the effort is the reward:** The reward is commensurate with the pain: Although Abraham was suffering intensely due to his circumcision, he transcended that pain so that he might perform the mitzvah and experienced great joy in doing so. We learn that the greater the effort and *mesiras nefesh* (self-sacrifice) that the mitzvah entails, the greater the satisfaction in doing it. Today, we go to services despite distance and inclement weather; we study Torah despite our fatigue; we give *tzedakah*, despite the fact that we are on a tight budget, and we grow spiritually as we perform each mitzvah.

14

- ▶ **(8) Hospitality:** *Hachnasas orchim* may be proffered on many different levels. People are lonely. They yearn for warmth and family. People are perplexed; they need guidance. They are spiritually deprived and are yearning for something to hold on to, something to believe in. The hospitality that Abraham extended encompassed all this. By following in his footsteps, we can bring people closer to G-d. A most auspicious time to extend such hospitality is Shabbos, for the spiritual power of the day is all encompassing and will leave a life-transforming impression on our guests.

15

- ▶ **(9) Responsibilities of guests:** “They [the angels] asked Abraham, ‘Where is Sarah, your wife?’” Rashi explains that the angels knew where Sarah was. Nevertheless, they inquired about her whereabouts to praise her to Abraham. Their question called his attention to her fine character traits and modesty, thus making her even more beloved to her husband.

16

- ▶ (10) **Praying for others:** “He who prays on behalf of another when he himself needs that very same thing is answered first.” G-d granted Sarah a son after Abraham prayed for Abimelech to be blessed with children.
- ▶ Find someone who has the same problems as you and pray for that person, and G-d will hearken to your prayers. Admittedly, this is not an easy challenge, for we tend to be consumed by our own needs. We see only our own requirements, but if we can transcend ourselves, if we identify with the pain of our neighbors and sincerely beseech G-d on their behalf, that is our best reason to hope that G-d will answer us.

17

Isaac

- ▶ His Hebrew name, *Yitzhak*, means “he who laughs.” Isaac was an internal man. Through his deep meditations, he was able to see beyond duality, the world of comparison and judgment, to a higher level of reality. He was able to laugh in a hidden, quiet way at the drama of his own life. Isaac found great strength in this ability. Can you take some time this week to laugh at yourself?

18

Gevurah

- ▶ Means discipline and strength. It is exemplified by Isaac, who stood firm, like a tree, straight and tall and quiet. He walked to the mountain top, joined in his heart and will with his father and with G-d, where he requested that he be bound so an involuntary flinch would not mar the sacrifice. Isaac, firmly rooted in the Promised Land, the only patriarch who never left the Land of Israel and who quietly carried on the work begun by his father. Isaac, who had the strength of character to shed tears of joy and sorrow that he had been stopped from bestowing a great blessing upon an unworthy son.

19

Jacob - Beauty, Harmony, and Truth

- ▶ *Tiferet* is associated in the soul with the power to reconcile the conflicting inclinations of *chesed* and *gevurah* so as to allow for focused compassion.
- ▶ His simplicity is related to purity and wholesomeness. Jacob's purity allowed him to see beauty in everything around him. Seeing in this way kept his heart open. Can you open your heart and see beauty in something in your life with new eyes?

20

Moses - Victory and Endurance

- ▶ Through his trials and experience at the burning bush, he overcame his doubts about himself and the Divine to go on to become a model of living faith regardless of what the outside world threw at him to challenge it. Any of us who have had the experience of persevering to follow a vision, in particular against all odds and logic, knows the role faith played in manifesting that vision. Can you catch yourself when in doubt about something and replace it with faith?

21

Aaron - Splendor and Humility

- ▶ Aaron, Moses' brother, is honored the fifth night. One of Aaron's challenges was to learn to be a peacemaker. He developed eyes that saw the potential for peace ahead and then took action to create it. Instead of avoiding "bad" people, he sought them out to greet them warmly with the intention to bring them back to their good nature. Can you think and act on one deed that would bring more peace into your world?

22

Joseph Foundation and Connection

- ▶ Joseph, honored the sixth night and characterized as a dreamer in the Bible, saw with the eyes of vision. He learned to leave his past behind to create space for a greater vision of who he could become. To be able to see a different kind of future, you must be willing to let go of the past. Can you pay attention to your dreams this week and look forward instead of backward?

23

David - Sovereignty, Receptiveness, and Leadership

- ▶ He did not have an easy life. More than once he had to literally run for his life to avoid death. Even when faced with difficult circumstance, David was able to find a way to praise the Divine. Seeing with the eyes of praise elevated him out of despair into a higher consciousness. Can you find something to praise in everyone you meet this week? (Note: the essence of praise is genuine compliments.)

24