

## **Ushpizin** Welcoming Guests

### **Recommendations:**

This film offers a look at many aspects of Israeli religious society through the lens of the holiday Sukkot and the mitzvah of welcoming guests (*ushpizin*) to the Sukkah. This film offers material to explore the idea of becoming religious in Israeli society, life in Jerusalem religious areas, a look into Hassidic life and the Nachman movement of religion. This lesson plan will focus on the mitzvah of *ushpizin* and how it affects the characters in the film. Students will have a chance to consider their own relationship to hospitality and mitzvot while also considering how it relates to their own lives.

**Target Age Group:** High School Students

### **Objectives:**

- To watch and enjoy the Israeli film "Ushpizin"
- To learn about the mitzvah of *ushpizin* (welcoming guests)
- To reflect on the affect of guests and hospitality in your own life
- To analyze the film and the characters' beliefs

### **Supplementary Texts:**

Appendix #1      Ushpizin Worksheet

## **OPENING ACTIVITY: What is “Welcoming Guests?”**

Write the words *Hachnasat Orchim* on the board (preferably in Hebrew and transliteration) and define for the class that this means “welcoming guests.”

Do a short brainstorming exercise asking the group to throw out associations with these words. Now that they have defined the concept, relate to places where they have seen or heard of this concept (ie. Literature, films, music) and/or associate with people they know who they feel are hospitable (ie. Someone in their family that entertains often).

Next, write the following quote: “If it were not for guests all houses would be graves.” (Kahlil Gibran)

Ask students, either as a whole group or have pairs discuss briefly, how they interpret this quote. Once they have defined it for themselves, ask if they agree or disagree and why.

## **SECOND ACTIVITY: Ushpizin...**

*Goal: This activity will provide background information on the concept of Ushpizin. Students will also interview each other to see how they feel about this concept before watching the film “Ushpizin.”*

Ask students to sit with a partner, either from the previous activity or a new one. Give a brief explanation of the concept of *ushpizin* - welcoming guests into the Sukkah as a spiritual welcoming of major Biblical characters.

Give each group Appendix #1 and provide at least 15 minutes for the discussion. The worksheet provides textual background on this mitzvah as well as a number of personal interview questions for students to discuss their own thoughts on hospitality.

## **THIRD ACTIVITY: A Short Fun Break...**

*Goal: To get students excited about their learning and to bring up their energy before watching a full-length feature film.*

Name of the Game: *Party Quirks*

How to Play: Choose five participants for each round. One leaves the room briefly - s/he is the host of the party. While they are out the class will decide on four quirky ways of behaving for the "guests" who are still in the room. For example, one guest can be "stuck" riding a bike, another might be only able to say a particular word and another might speak only Pig Latin or Gibberish. Challenge the class to think of unobvious quirks to challenge the host. Once the four quirks have been decided, invite the host to return. The guests will each "ring the doorbell" and interact with the host. S/he has to try to guess what their particular quirk is.

*Note to teacher: This game can be a lot of fun for any group inspired by drama games and we recommend having enough rounds that each person participates at least once. If, however, the group is **not** used to drama games, do a quick warm-up of word associations. Stand in a circle and say a word. The person to the left says the first word that comes into their mind and so on around the circle.*

#### **FOURTH ACTIVITY: Watch the Film**

*Goal: To watch and enjoy the film "Ushpizin."*

Watch the film. Ask students to note their learning about *ushpizin* and the mitzvah for Sukkot. Throughout the film, they will notice a number of scenes that relate specifically to the guests and what they cause their hosts. Invite students to jot down these situations to help them remember for the discussion after.

#### **FINAL ACTIVITY:**

*Goal: To discuss the film "Ushpizin" and answer the central question of how, in this film, the mitzvah of hosting ushpizin translates directly into a blessing for the main characters.*

First ask students to react to the film. If you watch it in multiple sections, we recommend giving at least 4-5 minutes at the end of each session to react to what has happened thus far.

Make a list on the board of the different guest scenes in the film (eg. Their arrival, the *etrog* scenes, a holiday meal, how they frustrate their hosts, etc...). Although there are actually many in the film, just ensure that you have at least ten listed.

For each one, ask the students to point out exactly what type of interaction occurred. For example, if they point out the scene when the guests use the

precious *etrog* for lemon, the interaction is one of frustration, that seems to even send their host over the edge a bit.

With this list, highlight which interactions are positive for the hosts and which have negative effects on them. Ask students if they can imagine being in such a position and what they might do in such a situation?

At the end of the film, we note that the couple is able to conceive after years of trying. The implication of the film is that this blessing is a direct result of the *ushpizin* mitzvah. Ask students to get into pairs and discuss the following question:

Do you think your actions can result directly in positive ways on your life? In what ways does the film offer this as a possibility? Can you connect with this?

After giving students some time to discuss in pairs, bring the discussion to the whole group forum. This is a time for students to think about mitzvot as well as the general effects of kindness in their lives.

## **Appendix #1**

Ushpizin = Guests (in Aramaic)

Guests that come to visit the Sukkah throughout the Holiday, either invited or surprise, and believed to bring the spirit of the divine to the host and often associated with luck, blessings and other good tidings.

Kabbalah - In the Zohar, it is told that each day of Sukkot a "spiritual" guest will arrive to visit righteous persons in their Sukkah. These "spiritual" guests are the Biblical characters Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David, one arriving each day of the holiday in this order. It is believed that each of them may bring other guests with them. For each *ushpizin* who arrives to the *sukkah*, the host offers a special welcome. The traditions in Sephardi and Ashkenazi homes are somewhat different, but both bless the different Biblical characters in relation to their character.

Traditionally people will invite earthly guests to visit their Sukkah, friends, family and others, at least one per day of the holiday.

### ***INTERVIEW your friends:***

Sit with a partner and ask each other the following questions:

1. Do you have a Sukkah at your house?
2. If you do, do you or your family invite guests? Who?
3. If not, do you sit in a Sukkah at some point during this holiday season?  
Where?
4. Have you been a guest in someone else's Sukkah?

In the Talmud, (Shabbat 127A) it is written: "...Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the face of the Shechina (the Divine Presence)..."

Discuss with your partner:

1. Why do you think guests are important?"
2. What does it mean to you personally that hosting a guest is compared to receiving divinity?
3. Is there a difference between guests and friends? In what ways?
4. How can inviting a person into your home be an act of divinity?