

India & Welcoming Worksheet

Passport to Peoplehood

Jews are a multicultural people who live around the world.

Big Ideas

1. Hachnasat Orchim (Hakh-nah-SAHT ohr-KHEEM) means hospitality or welcoming guests in Hebrew.
2. Hachnasat Orchim or welcoming people is a central value in Jewish life, but it is not a value that is unique to Jews, and only happens when we take action to actively welcome 'strangers.'
3. The welcome extended to Jews in India sets the Indian Jewish experience apart from the history of Jews in other places.



Directions

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This exercise uses the story of Abraham and Sarah as a text to anchor the idea of welcoming as a Jewish value. Print out the text below for each student and have the students read it. Use the introduction shared below to help frame the text that students will discuss. Have students work in pairs or small groups to study the biblical text and highlight the elements of the story that show how Abraham and Sarah welcomed guests. After students have completed the group work, come back together to discuss their findings and compare them to the story of the arrival of the Jews in India.

The Story of Abraham and Sarah

A long time ago, Abraham, the first Jew, was sitting outside his tent. He lived in Israel, it was very hot and there wasn't much shade. When he saw three strangers walking in the distance, he got up from the entrance of his tent. Abraham knew how important it was to welcome guests. He ran towards them to greet them, bowed down and invited them for a bite to eat and some rest and relaxation. So they came in and stayed.

The Torah chooses to detail the *hachnasat orchim*, or hospitality, that Abraham and Sarah offered to the three wayfarers who passed by their tent. The details are important. Each one of them teaches us something about the way we can welcome people into our homes and communities. As it turned out that they were not really strangers, but messengers sent from God with news for Abraham and his wife Sarah that they would soon have a son.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is an example of how welcoming the stranger is a Jewish value. In Judaism the value of welcoming others is called *Hachnasat Orchim*, welcoming guests or welcoming strangers. Welcoming strangers and guests is a value that Jews share with the people of India.

The text that tells this story goes into great detail about how Abraham and Sarah acted.

"Let some water be brought, please, and wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may nourish your heart. After, you shall pass, inasmuch as you have passed your servant's way." They said, "So shall you do, just as you have said." So Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah and said, "Hurry! Three se'ahs [measures] of unsifted flour, sifted flour! Knead and make cakes!" Then Abraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the youth who hurried to prepare it. He took cream and milk and the calf which he made, and placed

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[these] before them; he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate (Genesis 18:4-8).

The story of Jews coming to India

A story is told of how the first Jews arrived in Indian in ancient times. One time a group of Jews from the land of Israel set out to trade olive oil and spices with people in India. It was very far. First they had to go overland and then they traveled by boat. The journey was hard and took many weeks. As the traders neared India, a storm struck and their ship was wrecked on the rocks. They prayed to God and the prophet Elijah and hung on to pieces of wood and rocks all night long. In the morning, local people saw them. The Indians came out to rescue the Jews. They brought them into their homes. They fed them. They gave them dry clothes and safe shelter. The Jews felt so happy that they made India their new home. Since that time Jews have lived in peace in India.

This welcome that Jews received in India continues to this day. The Jewish community is small but has never faced antisemitism. This makes India stand out in the history of Jewish experience because Jews have truly felt welcome and safe in India. (In 2008, foreign terrorists attacked Mumbai and one of the targets was the Chabad house. Indian Jews are quick to point out that this was not perpetrated by Indians)

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Genesis

Va-yera Chapter 18

This translation was taken from the JPS Tanakh

1 The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. 2 Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, 3 he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. 5 And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" 7 Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. 8 He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

ספר בראשית

פרק יח

א וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה בְּאַלְנֵי מַמְרֵי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:
ב וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרָץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אַרְצָה: ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל־נָא תִּעְבֹּר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ: ד וַיִּקְח־נָא מִעֶטְמִים וְרֹחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: ה וְאֶקְחָה פַת־לֶחֶם וְסָעֲדוּ לְבַכֶּם אַחֵר תִּעְבְּרוּ כִי־עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל־עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ: ו וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֶלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מְהֵרָה שְׁלֵשׁ סָאִים קִמַּח סֹלֶת לְוִשֵׁי וְעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת: ז וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רֵץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בְּנֵי־בָקָר רַק וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנָּעַר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: ח וַיִּקַּח סִמְאָה וְחֹלֵב וּבְנֵי־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

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Discussion

1. Highlight or underline in the text actions that Abraham and Sarah take to make the guests feel welcome?
2. Discuss each element that you highlighted. The Torah goes into an unusual amount of detail when describing Abraham and Sarah's hospitality. Why do you think that the Torah included this level of detail? **Note for educators:** Here is an outline of some of the detail to discuss:
 - a. When traveling, being able to stop and rest for a moment in comfortable surroundings (shade in this case) is so welcome that Abraham starts with this simple thing.
 - b. Abraham then offered the guests some water to wash their feet. When guests come to our home, making people comfortable is key.
 - c. Abraham offered them bread. He does not offer food right away because he knows they might feel uncomfortable accepting a full meal.
 - d. But Abraham and Sarah quickly prepared a big meal for their guests, with a calf, etc. once they are more comfortable.
 - e. Abraham didn't just ask Sarah to help prepare food, he included his son, Yishmael, as well. So hospitality became a "family project".
 - f. This teaches us that this sensitivity in welcoming guests is very important and hopefully will make the world a better place!
3. How does what Abraham and Sarah did compare with what the Indians did for the Jews in ancient times?
4. How do we welcome people to our homes? Why is it important to welcome people? Is it easier to welcome someone we know or someone who is a stranger? Why?
5. Share a time when you have felt welcome into a new space and how that welcome felt for you.
6. Optional activity: Working in groups, have students make a list of actions they have taken or might imagine taking to make someone new to the school feel welcome.



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