

## Shabbat Shalom

It's a wonderful holiday. This is Zman Simchateinu, this time of our rejoicing. An ancient manuscript found in a wall carving in a Babylonian archeological site indicates that the word Simcha has an earlier root and it means something more than "joy." It had the meaning of contract and it referred to the acceptance of the contract. It has been suggested that this Zman Simchateinu, these days of Sukkot which come after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, days when we have literally prayed for our lives are about feeling our place in this universe and the acceptance we should experience by virtue of being alive. So, there is no greater place to experience that acceptance than in the world of nature. That's why we will leave the synagogue and go into the Sukkah. It is there that we fulfill one of the most important mitzvot of this holiday. Hopefully what that does, that sense of acceptance and the expression of appreciation for the world and its beauty will lead us to a sense of joy and exultation. Z'man Simchateinu is about our acceptance and certainly it is about our joy.

I would like to talk about our quaint little custom, one many of you know, of the holiday of Sukkot. It is known as *Ushpizin* is a tradition of welcoming guests into our Sukkah. The guests that we welcome into our Sukkah are guest from our biblical past. We welcome Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We welcome Joseph. We welcome Moshe Rabeinu and King David. Quite a line of guests and amongst other things we ask ourselves how do we prepare for these guests? *Ushpizin* serves a number of functions. Certainly it allows us to keep alive the great men of our biblical past and by virtue of their presence through formula recited, then we not only recall them but it gives us an opportunity to teach our children about them and the important things that they stood for and the important lessons that we learned from their lives. In our Early Childhood program every year, Rabbi Englander, Rabbi Rader and myself and Cathy Berkowitz and Daniel Mesa and Nancy Goldstein, we dress up as one of these characters and the children go into the Sukkah and we tell them about ourselves, who we were and what we did. It's a wonderful educational process. Last night I did what many rabbis and teachers do. I used the opportunity to allow children to talk about whom they would invite into their Sukkah, who are their heroes, who is important to them and what we learn from them. We very often get some very funny answers. Well, if you could have anyone in your Sukkah from our past, who would you invite and why would you invite them. Something you might want to speak about later. But, the tradition also speaks to another aspect of Sukkot that connects to a basic value concept of our people and our tradition. It's the value of welcoming guests into our Sukkah, welcoming guests into our home. The rabbis taught us that Avraham, the very first Jew, one of the very first things he taught us was about *Hachmasat Orchi*, welcoming guests as he rushed to greet three men, angels of God and he had Sarah rush to make sure that all was in place for the three guests who came to visit him when he was recovering from his illness. It is a beautiful idea and having an open home is often a manifestation of having an open heart.

This past week gave me pause to think about inviting guests. I want to think about who we invite and who we don't invite and why and what's the meaning of all of that. This past week Columbia University invited President Ahmadinajad of Iran. With great controversy they invited this world leader to their campus to engage in a dialogue with students. It was filled with political intrigue and frankly a tremendous amount of showmanship. One of the leading spokespeople from the Department of International Studies at Columbia University justified it by saying that he would even have invited Adolph Hitler to university to engage in dialogue. The question, of course, is the use of dialogue when dealing with enemies who are out to destroy you. There are other questions that it raises, of course. Whether dialogue, in fact, can be fruitful with someone who is responsible and states sponsored terrorism? Do we invite someone who at the time of the conversation is ordering the death of our soldiers? Do we speak to someone who is responsible for the death of innocents? Do we speak to someone who is calling for the destruction of a people and the destruction of a nation? We know Ahmadinajad is calling for the destruction of Israel. There is also a question about a great university inviting somebody who casts a doubt on that which we know to be historical truth. Universities are to a great degree based on a desire to find truth and this man who at one time denies the truth, although he now denies that he denied. Ahmadinajad is truly offensive and is truly the head of a reprehensible regime that denies human rights to women, to gays. So, is this someone to whom we should have a conversation with and can there be a productive outcome to that conversation?

I noted this past week a stark contrast, I wanted to point it out to you that I found to be deeply disturbing. That is the following. Dr. Lawrence Summers, the past president of Harvard University was invited by a department at the Davis Campus of the University of California to speak. Dr. Summers is a brilliant man whose passion is scholarship. Not too long ago, the pressures on Dr. Summers to leave the presidency were so great, that he ultimately was forced to resign from Harvard. The pressures came from two sources, primarily feminist studies, but also in the background Saudi supporters of the Near Eastern Department because Dr. Summers is not only a Jew, but an outspoken supporter of Israel and a spokesperson for just and fair peace in the Middle East. Dr. Summers was involved in a controversy at Harvard where he encouraged the research indicating a biological distinction between men and women that could explain the fact that there is a disproportionate men involved in the study of mathematics. In the far left liberal corners of American universities today, distinguishing sexes, races, ethnic groups, by virtue of biology is considered to be political incorrect, an absolute no, no. In spite of the fact that genetic studies, brain studies and biological studies may in fact indicate distinctions between peoples, one is not able to speak to that publicly for fear of social implications. The issue, of course, is what one does with that information and whether or not it impacts ones attitudes towards equal rights, equal access, etc.

This is the same week that Ahmadinajad was allowed to speak at Columbia University. Lawrence Summers had an invitation withdrawn and he was not allowed to speak at the Davis Campus of the University of California. It raises a very important question for me about the sanity of our culture and our educational institutions. How is possible? My assumption is that Lawrence Summers has never been involved in the perpetuation of

violence or destruction or hatred. Lawrence Summers is minimally a respectable academician, a former professor and Dean and President of Harvard University. By all accounts, a very descent man devoted to critical inquiry and human respect. Ahmadinajad promotes murder and evil. How have we gotten to this point and what do we do about it? Who are our guests and who don't we invite?

I go to a sugyah in the Talmud, a very famous story. It is the tale of Kamptza and Bar Kamptza and I am going to tell the story in my own words: Scene: Jerusalem, 2,000 years ago. Kamptza was making a party. He did not want his enemy Bar Kamptza to be invited. Accidentally Bar Kamptza was sent on invitation. Kamptza made sure he was shouldn't come and was dis-invited to the party. It led to a conflict. Bar Kamptza did not want to be embarrassed by not being able to come to the party, he even offered to pay...to no avail, but Kamptza didn't want him there. We don't know the nature of their disagreement. We don't know the nature of Kamptza's distain for Bar Kamptza or visa versa. But we learn a lot about Bar Kamptza when we learn about his response to being excluded from the party. We learn about his anger and we learn about his loyalties. He appeals to the rabbis and the rabbis are silent. They do not intervene on his behalf. Some say it is because the rabbis were being controlled by the wealthy class at that time. Others say the rabbis did not want to get involved in business that wasn't theirs. In any case, the party takes place and Bar Kamptza is not there. Later, we learn that the Roman Governor gives a calf to be delivered to the priest to be sacrificed on the holiday. Bar Kamptza takes the calf and purposely maims it so it will become impure and thus not be able to be sacrificed. The priests see the calf and they reject it. The principles of sacrificial purity learn that the gift was rejected by the priest. We are told that this insult leads to the destruction of Jerusalem on behalf of the Romans. The Roman Emperor orders the destruction. It is a very difficult passage to understand and even more difficult to accept. The rabbis teach it is because of *sinat chinom*, it is because of unwarranted hatred. The hatred between brothers that ultimately lead Jerusalem was destroyed. They take responsibility for the destruction on the story between Kamptza and Bar Kamptza indicating that if Kamptza had just invited Bar Kamptza to the party, he would have been peeved and Jerusalem would not have been destroyed. It also indicates an attitude of the rabbis towards appeasement. They believed in *Shalom Bayit*.....

But that can't be the only interpretation. Here's my own interpretation. Had the conversation taken place between Kamptza and Bar Kamptza perhaps it would have avoided the war, perhaps. My sense is we learn about Bar Kamptza character when we see that he is willing to destroy the calf, to render the calf impure for sacrifice and thus incur the wrath of the Roman leader which led to the destruction of Jerusalem. I think we learn about the man's character and that maybe Bar Kamptza himself needed to be dealt with even more harshly. But therein I am not absolutely sure.

I end the story of Kamptza and Bar Kamptza. I know some of us have studied it together last year and we will have more opportunities to study it and I hope that you think about it. But, I first go back to the invitation of guest to our universities. I am not going to answer the question about Ahmadinajad invitation to the Columbia. It took place. But I will tell you that the dis-invitation of Lawrence Summers to the Davis Campus of the

University of California is sinful and horrible and a terrible reflection on the University of California. It received a lot less notoriety, but goes much further to a type of a political tyranny that exists in this country with our own extremist and fanaticist, on the right and on the left.

The conversation may not always be productive, but it is always worth the attempt. The dialogue, the debate beats isolation and certainly beats violence. So, the first attempt should always go in that direction. If the behaviors are unworthy of the continuity of conversation, then it can be shut off. There is a time when the conversation becomes an absurdity, a ruse and when, in spite of a conversation, terror continues to reign. That's the case with Ahmadinajad that is certainly not the case with Lawrence Summers.

Who do we talk to? Who do we cut off the conversation with? Who do we invite? Who not? So the first guest is Avraham, Avraham who teaches us about hachmasod orcheim, about welcoming guests into our home. We should do that. We should do that with those whom we care about and those who we trust and those who love and those who we wish to get to know and those with whom conversation and dialogue and even debate is worthy. Hospitality is truly something that distinguishes humanity, sharing our space, sharing our place, opening our homes and opening our hearts...hospitality makes for successful communities and synagogues.

It is a beautiful lesson on Sukkot for us to learn. I hope that we not only take it seriously, but the world takes it seriously. To be welcoming, to be open to ideas and at the same time be able to define ourselves properly as is done through the Sukkah. That's the real challenge. And the question is – what's the limit, the border, the boundary.... I believe it's the protection of the Sukkah, its beauty and its meaning...And I mean that literally and metaphorically. And I believe it's the message for the university and the world.

I wish you all a Chag Sameach and I hope it is Zman Simchateinu. I hope the Sukkah and its messages of appreciation, blessing and openness to the universe and at the same time celebrating our uniqueness continues to inspire as we move on from here.

Shabbat Shalom