

Welcoming Abraham and Sarah: A Story of *Hachnasat Orchim* (hospitality)

It was a hot summer day. Rachel and her brother, Jacob, were sitting on the porch. “There’s nothing to do today,” said Rachel. “I know,” said Jacob, with a big sigh.

This story is great for teaching children the Jewish way to respond to guests in the classroom

Rachel looked up for a moment. “Look, here comes Uncle David and Aunt Hannah.”

“They look tired,” said Jacob. He jumped up and was about to run toward them when Rachel said, “Look! There are other people with them. I wonder who they are?”

“They look tired too,” noticed Jacob.

“And I bet they’re all thirsty,” Rachel added.

“Hey!” Jacob said, very excited. “Remember the story from the Torah we learned at school last week?”

“Yes!” Rachel jumped up. “Abraham greeted the guests that came to his tent...”

“And Sarah helped make food too!” Jacob finished.

“We can do that!” said Rachel. “I’ll get cold water for them to drink.” She ran into the house.

“Don’t forget cups!” called Jacob, as he jumped off the porch and ran toward his uncle and aunt and their friends.

The story of Abraham and the visitors can be found in Genesis 18:1-8. It would be interesting to read the Torah story and compare Abraham and Sarah’s actions to those of Jacob and Rachel.

Jacob walked back along side the guests. Uncle David and Aunt Hannah reached the porch just as Rachel came out of the house with cups and a pitcher of water. “Hello, Rachel! We were just introducing Jacob. Please meet our friends, Sarah and Abraham Cohen. They are visiting us and we decided to take a walk to visit with you and your parents.” Rachel smiled and said, “Please, come have a seat on the porch.” Jacob said, “I’ll go tell my parents that you’re here,” and he rushed into the house. He soon came back onto the porch, his mother and father following close behind, carrying a box of cookies and some oranges.

To greet someone with a pleasant expression is an important Jewish value called *sayver panim yafot*.

“Hello David, hello Hannah. How nice of you to visit us. Please have something to eat,” said Rachel’s mother.

“Rachel and Jacob greeted us so nicely,” said Uncle David. “We are quite tired. Our friends Abraham and Sarah are visiting us, and we thought it would be nice to walk over to see you, but we didn’t realize just how hot it was today. We finished all the water that we brought along.”

The grownup began to chat, and Jacob whispered to Rachel, “Rachel, isn’t it funny that the names of the guests are Abraham and Sarah?” “Yes,” Rachel whispered back, “Just like in the story from the Torah. Only this time, Abraham and Sarah are the visitors, and we got to greet them!”

For discussion:

1. How could Jacob and Rachel tell that the people were thirsty and tired?
2. Is it important that Rachel greeted the guests with a smile? Why or why not?
3. What do you think Jacob did or said when he reached his aunt and uncle and their friends?
4. What are some things that you would do for guests?
5. What happens in your house before guests arrive? How do your parents prepare for guests? Why do they do these things?

For home life:

1. Create a plan for greeting guests who come into your home. Should your child be responsible for least smiling at guests, or something more?
2. Encourage children to act out the story of Abraham and Sarah, perhaps by knocking on the door and announcing, "Hello, I've come to visit you!"
3. Have a family discussion: how do you care for guests in your home? Maybe make a book of your family's favorite thing to do for guests, or with photos of children with guests in your home.