

## The Ushpizin and the Chassidic Rebbes in the drawings and paintings of Shoshannah Brombacher, Ph.D.

It is customary to invite guests to one's sukkah on the Festival of Sukkot. During seven days and nights, people sit, eat, and if possible sleep in their sukkah with relatives, friends and neighbors. According to the Zohar, each night of the Festival a group of seven prominent Biblical guests (the Seven Ushpizin) is invited, in a fixed order: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and David. Avraham Avinu is mentioned as the first guest on the first night, Yitzchak Avinu is mentioned as the first guest on the second night, Yaakov Avinu on the third night, Moshe Rabbenu on the fourth, Aharon the Kohen on the fifth, Yosef the Righteous on the sixth, and on the seventh night King David leads the group. After Rabbi Aaron Raskin, the Chabad Rabbi in Brooklyn Heights who had provided me with a studio in his shul for a couple of years, showed me E. Touger's book *Timeless Patterns in Time* about the connection between the Ushpizin and certain Chassidic Rabbis, I became very enthusiastic and started making a set of oil painting with this theme. This was something I had been waiting for to read!

The Previous Rebbe (the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, 1880-1950) states that the Biblical Ushpizin are accompanied by Chassidic Rebbes with whom they share certain qualities, character traits, or mitzvoth which they want to teach us. They visit the sukkah together, making the amount of Ushpizin fourteen.

The featured guests of the first day are **Avraham Avinu** and the **Baal Shem Tov**, the founder of Chassidism (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, 1700(?) - 1760). Both men traveled extensively. Avraham left his country, and the Besht visited Jews living in remote corners of war and terror stricken Ukraine to give them *chizzuk*, courage, and a sense of belonging and community at a time many communities had been destroyed by marauding Cossacks during the uprising of Bogdan Chmielnicky in 1648. Avraham and the Besht were known for their hospitality to strangers and any people who are not appreciated or invited, for various reasons. The Besht put out plates and cups for guests himself and did not leave it to servants, just like Avraham himself served the angels visiting him at Mamre to comfort him when he was in pain after his circumcision.

The guests of the second day are **Yitzchak Avinu** and the **Maggid of Mezhritch** (Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhritch, 1740(?) - 1772). Both did not travel around but stayed in one place. They emphasized the importance of digging for one's Godly core, digging "wells," which they accomplished through prayer and intense study.

The guests of the third day are **Yaakov Avinu** and the founder of Chabad Chassidism, the **Alter Rebbe** (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1813). Both of them studied Torah under less easy circumstances. Their example encourages scholars sitting in the Bays haMidrash, like Yaakov who “sat in his tents”. The name Shneur is associated with *shnay or*, the dual light of the revealed and the hidden mystical Torah, and of the Shulchan Arukh and the Tanya (Likutei Amarim, Slavuta 1796) which the Alter Rebbe compiled. Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s descendants became the leading Rabbis of the Chabad movement.

The guests of the fourth day are **Moshe Rabbenu** and the **Mitteler Rebbe** (Rabbi Dov Baer of Lubavitch, the son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, 1773-1827). The Mitteler Rebbe, like Moshe Rabbenu, was preoccupied with Eretz Yisrael. At one point he tried to persuade all Chabad Chassidim to settle in Chevron. He loved Torah study and deepened it even more than the Ushpizin of the third day. Like Moshe Rabbenu, he served as an interpreter and transmitter between the Torah and the Jews.

The guests of the fifth day are **Aharon the Kohen** and the **Tzemach Tzedek** (Rabbi Menachem Mendel, a grandson of the Alter Rebbe, 1789-1866, named after his response Tzemach Tzedek). Both of them promoted peace and harmony. Aharon was known for the big mitzvah of making or restoring peace between a man and his wife. Aharon and the Tzemach Tzedek loathed strife other than honest disputes between scholars. The Tzemach Tzedek assisted the Chabad community in Chevron. He fought assimilation, which spread rapidly in Eastern European Jewish communities under the influence of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement, and strove to ease the plight of forcibly conscripted Jewish (child) soldiers, the cantonists.

The guests of the sixth day are **Yosef haTzaddik** and the **Rebbe Maharash** (Rabbi Shemuel, the youngest son of the Tzemach Tzedek, 1834-1882). He used to say: *lechat’chilat ariber*, if you can’t pass under it climb over it, strife for the top and do not give in to difficulties. Yosef’s complicated life, being honored, then sold, enslaved, imprisoned, but later obtaining a high rank, is a good example.

The guests of the seventh day of Sukkot are **David ha-Melekh (King David)** and the **Rebbe Rashab** (Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer, 1861 or 1866(?) -1920). Both were great organizers. King David expanded and established his kingdom and the Rebbe Rashab founded Tomkhei Temimim (1897), thus spreading Jewish (Chabad) education through yeshivot and Jewish schools even outside of Ashkenazi Eastern Europe. Both Ushpizin bring royalty and a taste of the Messianic era into the sukkah.

In addition to the official seven guests (or fourteen, if you include the Chassidic Rebbes) there is yet another pair. The guests for Shemini Atzeret, the concluding Festival at the end of Sukkot, are **King Shlomo** and the **Rebbe Rayatz** (the

Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, 1880-1950). Rebbe Rayatz guided his movement through turbulent times during World War I and the Russian Revolution in 1917, World War II and the annihilation of many Jewish communities. He settled in the USA, where he continued founding and guiding yeshivot, but this time in a country at peace, just like Shlomo haMelekh built the Bays haMikdash in a reign of peace and prosperity after his father, King David, had fought many wars to secure the borders of Eretz Yisrael.

The last picture in this article (and the detail below, on this page) shows all the Ushpizin and Chassidic guests sitting together in the Sukkat Shalom, the Sukkah of Peace, including the **Rebbe** (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1902-1994), who was extremely successful in organizing Jewish education even for the most detached and ignorant Jews, and made Chabad prosper and flourish in Messianic times.

Sources:

- E. Touger (ed. U. Kaploun): *Timeless Pattern in Time* (Brooklyn)  
A. Rubinstein: *Hasidism* (Jerusalem, 1975)



The Ushpizin of the first five days are shown in the following paintings. They measure 18 X 24 inches (Moshe Rabbenu measure 16 X 20 inches) and were made in 1996.



Avraham Avinu and the Besht. The importance of hospitality.



Yitzchak Avinu and the Maggid of Mezritch. The importance of study.



Yaakov Avinu and the Alter Rebbe. The importance of study and tzedakah. The important role of one's wife, the Rebbetzin.



Moshe Rabbenu and the Mitteler Rebbe. The importance of Torah study.



Aaron haKohen and the Tzemach Tzedek, who helped the cantonists in the Czarist army.

The Ushpizin for the sixth and seventh night have not been completed. I worked on different projects until the year 2001. My family had to move from our apartment after a flood in the building caused a proliferation of rats and I actually caught one myself in the living room under a soup pot. But in 2001, I started with the big Sukkat Shalom with all the Rebbes and Ushpizin around the table in the sukkah.



Then I proceeded with drawings of the Ushpizin (Biblical and Chassidic), starting with Avraham. On the evening of September 10, I realized I needed to buy more paper, ink, and brushes from my art store in Manhattan. But on the morning of September 11, after the kids went to school, I decided to first finish the drawings on my drafting table before heading out to Manhattan. When an artist has an inspired flow it must not be interrupted! That turned out to be *hashgachah peratit*, protective divine interference, because an hour later black smoke billowed past my window from the direction of Manhattan. The World Trade Center had been attacked. It would have been very unfortunate to be in my art store at a stone throw's distance of the World Trade Center. The drawing that "prevented" me from going to Manhattan shows the Festival of Shemini Atzeret with Shlomo haMelekh and the Rebbe Rayatz. Barukh HaShem.

In all of the drawings, the biblical Ushpizin are identified by biblical symbols, like a door to welcome guests, a well, a ladder with angels, the Luchot (Tablets), the garments and breast plate of the Kohen Gadol, the stars, sun and moon from Yosef's dream, a *kinnor* (harp), and the Bays haMikdash.

The drawings were made in India ink on paper and measure 24 X 18 inches. The Sukkat Shalom measures 36 X 29 inches.



Avraham Avinu and the Baal Shem Tov.



Yitzchak Avinu and the Maggid of Mezhritch.



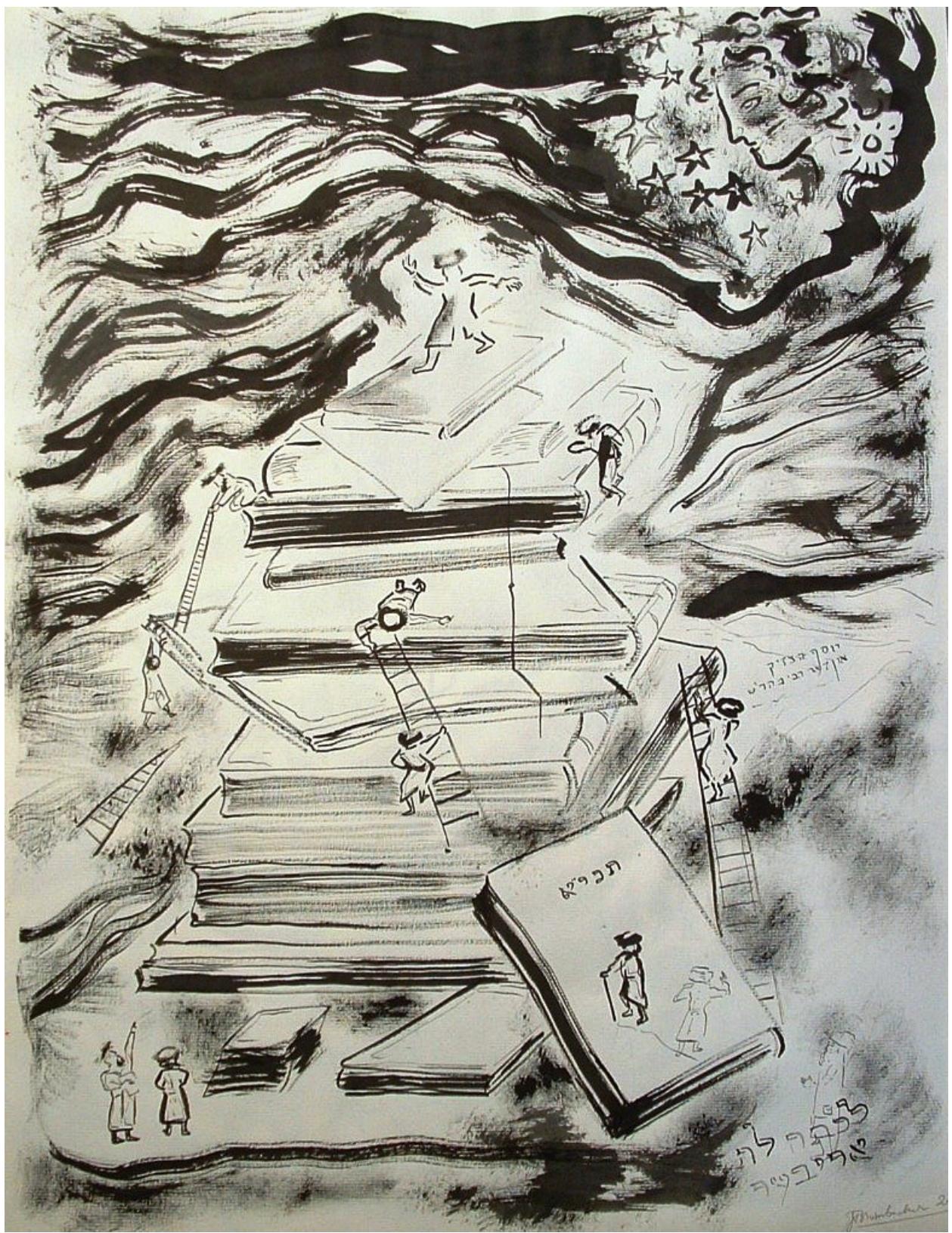
Yaakov Avinu and the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi.



Moshe Rabbenu and the Mitteler Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Baer of Lubavitch.



Aharon the Kohen and the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel.



Yosef haTzaddik and the Rebbe Maharash, Rabbi Shemuel.



King David and the Rebbe Rashab, Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer.



King Shlomo and the Rebbe Rayatz, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak.