



Discover the Joy of Shabbos

Explore the deeper meaning of the Zemiros, Tefillos and Hanhagos of Shabbos.



The Grandeur of Shabbos Guests

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E5)

When you think of your home and your table, do you think about enjoying them? Do you think about sharing them? Do you have a plan for what that sharing should (and should not) look like?

The story of Hachnasas Orchim

Most everyone who has ever done the Mitzvah of Hachnasah Orchim has a story to tell about the positive outcome of having welcomed a guest. In my case, my success as a writer and speaker all owe to that precious Mitzvah. You are reading these words because my parents – עליהם השלום – went out of their way to make sure that their guests were well-attended to and felt welcome.

The guest that made a lifelong impression on me was Rav Sholom Shwadron זצ"ל. My father ע"ה had been listening to and was deeply affected by the Maggid's talks for quite some time before Rav Sholom's visit to the US in 1964. In those days you could not download a shiur that was uploaded moments before. But the cassettes made their way to my father via a network of relatives who helped. And my father could not get enough of Rav Sholom's talks. He could hardly believe that a saintly Maggid lived in our times and was yearning to make his acquaintance.

And so, when Rav Sholom, together with Rav Yisroel Grossman, came to the US, three generations of my family went to the airport to greet the man whose Torah and piety had made such an impression on my father. My father had never met him, but he knew that it would be a privilege to be in his proximity.

While the details of how Rav Sholom came to our home attest to the Providence involved, the point for this discussion is that despite other arrangements, Rav Sholom stayed in our home for six months, and Rav Yisroel Grossman stayed for three of those months.

I am testimony that if you bring a living Sefer Torah into your home, there will be blessing. Dovid HaMelech welcomed the Aron HaKodesh because if you cherish the sanctity of the Aron, the Aron brings blessing in its wake. That is how the Mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim became so dear to my heart.

Whenever we attend to the needs of another, we are winning the game.

The finest form of Chinuch

The message that children absorb when parents make room in their homes and hearts for Talmidei Chachomim cannot be overstated. The parents are saying, in the only language that children can understand – the language of example – that the walls of our house do not just shield us from foreign elements outside; they offer us the opportunity to bring Torah and purity into our homes.

The effect is not immediate, but it is durable. Years after my parents welcomed Rav Schwadron into our home, I was inspired to start writing the stories that he loved to tell and which he used to inspire others. And now, years later, you are still hearing the echo of that Mitzvah, if you will, the 'Echo of the Maggid.'

The history of Hachnosas Orchim



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Every child learns that Avraham Avinu was a specialist in Hachnasas Orchim. The Posuk¹ attests to this when it says ויטע אשל – simply translated as 'he planted an orchard.' Why do we need to know what his garden looked like? The answer is a packed message attesting to his performance of הכנסת אורחים.

First, Rashi cites two opinions regarding the אשל that he planted. It was fruits, to satisfy the desires of those who passed his tent. Or it was a place of lodging to address their needs. The word אשל has been understood as an acrostic to refer to שתיה, אכילה, - food and drink – and the 'ל' can refer either to לינה – lodging, or לווייה – to escort one's guest, a crucial part of relating to a guest.

R' Bechaye notes that the letters אשל can be arranged to form the word שאל – asking. He is highlighting the fact that real hosting means inquiring and thinking about what the guest might need.² The bottom-line is that when you think about others you are emulating the Divine and expanding yourself from your narrow self-interest to the focus on the welfare of your fellow. That is the essence of Hachnasas Orchim.

Who do we welcome?

It is wonderful to welcome any needy or lonely person. Hachnasas Orchim applies to anyone who could use a place to rest, a drink, a nourishing meal, or a kind word. Whenever we attend to the needs of another, we are winning the game. But when the guest is a Talmid Chacham, the stakes are even greater.

Some limitations

¹ בראשית כא: לג

² ed note: In אבות דר' נתן ז: א: we learn that Avraham Avinu prepared for guests such that (a) he upgraded his guests to

Hachnasas Orchim is extremely precious. The essential message is that a human being, by nature caught up with, 'how am I? Am I okay?' can reach out beyond himself and ask, 'how are you?' This is a stretch of one's ego to include others; first one's spouse and children and then beyond, to include guests and even strangers. But we must not forget the order of the stretching. First come those who are closest to us. As we grow in our ability to care about others, we can include circles beyond. Attending to the guest must not come at the expense of tuning out those who are closest – our spouse and children. Naturally, it is easiest for me to bring that point out with a story.

Rav Reuven Feinstein shared with me that he did not feel deprived when his father, R' Moshe, did not attend the Shabbos of his Bar Mitzvah. His father instead was attending to the needs of Klal Yisrael at the Agudah Convention that Shabbos.

R' Reuven explained that children who question their parent's love feel deprived when some overt demonstration of affection is lacking. In his case, his father's love warmed his veins. He had no question about his father's love and so he did not feel deprived. To illustrate how, as a young boy, he was able to point tangibly to his father's love, he reminisced about how his father, the saintly sage that he was, would come into his room early in the winter mornings and put his socks on the steam radiator. Later, R' Moshe would come in and put the warm socks on his son's feet. When R' Reuven woke up, his feet radiated warmth and love.

serve them food above what they were accustomed to; and (b) whatever his guests might request was already there – he had anticipated their needs.



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R' Reuven also recalled that he was always given the place of honor to sit next to his great father. He would bask in his father's warmth even in the presence of guests. The only exception was when a Gadol was the guest, then the children also participated in the respect due to the Gadol. But, short of the arrival of a Gadol, his son enjoyed that cherished spot. And so, commented R' Reuven, there was no sense of being deprived when the Shabbos of his Bar Mitzvah was marked in his father's absence. He was not missing the warmth, and that is what a child really looks for.

Zemiros are not just for men

Another way that we look after the needs of our loved ones before attending the needs of the guest is by giving one's daughters an opportunity to sing and express themselves through harmony and Zemiros. In a Torah home where a girl would not sing in the presence of men who are not their father or brother, that means that sometimes there might be no guests, at least not unrelated men, at the table. Because thinking about others includes, and indeed begins, with thinking about our loved ones who Hashem has blessed us with.

Children come first

There are many creative ways to demonstrate that the Shabbos meal is, first and foremost, about one's relationship with one's children. It is a chance to mark, together, the gift of Shabbos. The children discover that the precious gift of Shabbos which Hashem has blessed us with includes them, as well. They are part of the embrace of Shabbos.

Cherishing a guest

Another important aspect of Hachnasas Orchim is giving the guest their dignity and the sense that they are

desired, not a burden or an afterthought. This is sometimes tricky, especially when dealing with someone whose needs span over an extended period. One has the all-too-natural tendency to take such guests 'for granted' and to fail to give them a sense of being cherished. An extra measure of maturity, sensitivity and caring is needed to make such guests feel welcome. I was once chastised by such a guest. My offense? I called to invite him too late in the week. I took his need for a meal for granted and he resented it.

Treating a repeat customer as a valued guest is not easy and should be handled with care and intelligence. But the key is to look forward to being able to open our homes and hearts to an ever-widening range of guests.

Takeaway: I will recognize the need to stretch beyond myself to see and think about the needs of others.