

Hospitality / Hakhnasat Orchim

HaCH-Nas-AT Orkh-HEEM



These traditions of hospitality persist today. Hospitality — known as hakhnasat orchim in Hebrew — is considered one of the most important value in the life of a believer. Our sages even say that welcoming guests is “greater than welcoming the Divine Presence [Shekhinah].”

Hospitality is “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.” In the Brit haChadasha, the Greek word translated “hospitality” means “love of strangers.” Hospitality is a virtue that is both commanded and commended throughout Scripture. In the Tanach, it was specifically commanded by G-D: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Mitzrayim” (Vayikra 19:33-34). Even toeday at the beginning of every Pesach seder, we recite a declaration of an “open house” policy of hospitality: “Let all who are hard-pressed come and eat. Let all who are in need come and share the Pesach sacrifice.” This statement is an expansion of what the third-century Babylonian sage Rav Huna was known to make every time he sat down to a meal: “Let all who are in need come and eat!” (Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 20b)

A midrash presents the biblical patriarch Avraham as the paragon of hospitality, because of his reception of wayfarers in Genesis 18. His position at the entrance of his tent in the midday heat is interpreted as a proactive seeking out of passing travelers. Other elements of the story, too, contribute to Abraham’s reputation: his eagerness, his largesse, and his insistence on seeing his guests off as they departed.

During His public ministry, Yeshua and His talmidim depended entirely on the hospitality of others as they ministered from town to town (Mattiyaahu 10:9-10). Likewise, the early followers also depended on and received hospitality from others (Acts of Yeshua's Emissaries 2:44-45; 28:7). In fact, travelers in ancient times depended heavily on the hospitality of strangers as traveling could be dangerous and there were very few inns, and poor people could not afford to stay at them, anyway. This generous provision to strangers also included opening one’s home for synagogue services. Hospitality was indeed a highly regarded virtue in ancient times, especially for Jewish leaders (Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2).

The residents of Jerusalem, too, are portrayed in midrashic literature as excelling in this virtue. When the Holy Temple still stood in Jerusalem, that city was the destination of pilgrims from throughout the Land of Israel at the shalosh regulim (three harvest festivals). The rabbinic storytellers of late antiquity relate that Jerusalem’s residents opened their homes for free to those visitors. “No person ever remarked to another, ‘I couldn’t find a bed to sleep on in Jerusalem.’ No person ever remarked to another, ‘Jerusalem is too small [i.e., crowded] for me to be able to stay over there’” (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 33). Which we would have to agree with since even though there was no “room at the inn” to be found for Yosef and Miriam they were still provided for within the gates of the city.

A lesson in Parasha Vayera

Hospitality / Hakhnasat Orchim... continued

Not only are food and lodging to be provided for passing travelers, but the travelers must be accommodated graciously. The statement of the early sage Shammai that one should “greet each person with a cheerful facial expression” (Mishnah Avot 1:15) is understood midrashically (in Avot De-Rabbi Natan 13) as an admonition to hosts not to provide for their guests amply but angrily. Better, teaches the midrash, to offer a guest but a little in a gracious tone than large portions obviously proffered grudgingly.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us not to forget to “entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). Indeed, in the book of Genesis we read of Avraham’s humble and generous display of hospitality to three strangers. Wealthy and aged, Abraham could have called on one of his many servants to tend to the three unannounced visitors. Yet the hospitable and righteous Abraham generously gave them the best he had. And, as it turned out, he had entertained Ad-nai and two angels (Bereshit 18:1-8).

We are “G-D’s workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10). As followers of HIM, we emulate His love and compassion when we show hospitality, not only to fellow believers, but even more so to strangers and the less fortunate. In fact, we honor G-D when we are kind to the needy (Mishlei 14:31; 19:17). As Yeshua said, “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed” (Luke 14:13). Christ also taught us the second greatest commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mattiyahu 22:39), and the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that “neighbor” has nothing to do with geography, locality, or race. Wherever and whenever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Yeshua, show mercy. This is the essence of hospitality.

In Mattiyahu, Yeshua discusses the hospitable behavior of those who will inherit the kingdom: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Mattiyahu 25:34-36). In these days we often don’t think much about entertaining strangers, but hospitality is still an important part of our ministry (Romans 12:13; 1 Kefa 4:9). By serving others we serve Him (Mattiyahu 25:40) and we promote the spread of G-D’s truth (3 Yochanan 5-8).

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Name: _____

Compare how Avraham treated the travelers-

to the way the people of S'dom treated them-

Neither of them knew, at first that the travelers were messengers from Ad-nai HIMSELF.

Do you think Avraham would have treated them differently if he had known?

Yes / No

Why?

Do you think the people of S'dom would have treated them differently if they had known?

Yes / No

Why?

Do you think Ad-nai would have spared S'dom if they had treated the messengers differently? Share your thoughts:

What is hospitality?

What can you personally do to show someone hospitality?

Give an example of when someone showed you hospitality

What is your understanding of the context of the words Yeshua speaks in Mattiyahu 25:14-46?

Is this understanding an encouragement to you to treat others with hospitality? YES /NO
Why or Why not?
