
HOSPITALITY TO GUESTS

The Torah ascribes great importance to the mitzvah of hospitality to guests (*hachnasat orchim*). One of the most detailed accounts of Avraham's (Abraham's) life in the Torah describes his dedication to the mitzvah of hospitality to strangers. It is as if the Torah is stressing that the characteristic which made Avraham so uniquely worthy to be the spiritual father of all mankind was how he exerted himself in this mitzvah.

This class will discuss the importance of hospitality and explain how one who performs it emulates the qualities of God Himself. By looking closely at Avraham's conduct, we will see the ideal way to perform this mitzvah – which includes greeting the guests, letting them wash and rest, making them feel comfortable, giving them food and drink, and escorting them on their way. Finally, we will examine the spiritual reward for this mitzvah.

In this class, we will address the following questions:

- Why is hospitality to guests and strangers so central to Judaism?
- What is the basis and origin of the mitzvah of hospitality?
- What actions and attitudes are included within the mitzvah of hospitality?
- What are the spiritual and mystical impacts of this mitzvah?

Class Outline:

Section I. Why Hospitality is So Central to Jewish Life

Section II. The Special Magnitude of the Mitzvah of Hospitality to Guests

Section III. The Principles and Details of Hosting Guests

Part A. Searching for Guests and Welcoming Them

Part B. Providing Rest and Washing Facilities

Part C. Personally Serving the Guests

Part D. Serving Food Cheerfully and Sensitive

Part E. Providing Sleeping Facilities

Part F. Escorting Guests on Their Way

Part G. How Far Must One Escort One's Guests?

Section IV. Educating One's Children to Extend Hospitality

Section V. The Reward for Hospitality and Escorting Guests

SECTION I. WHY HOSPITALITY IS SO CENTRAL TO JEWISH LIFE

As an introduction to Judaism's attitude to hospitality, imagine the following scene:

Our friend Dave has traveled to the East in search of enlightenment. He has spent many years training in Vipassana meditation from Tibetan masters. Now, by the instruction of his teachers, he will go into the mountains with food and water to begin a five-day solo meditation retreat. His goal is to reach a complete transcendence of the body.

All is going well, until day four, when the silence is rudely interrupted. It is our other friend Josh, who has traveled to the East in search of adventure. But unfortunately his adventure has gotten out of hand – Josh misplaced his Tibetan Mountains map on his five-day solo hike. He's lost and has almost run out of food and water.

Exhausted and hungry, but ecstatic to bump into another human, Josh shatters Dave's pristine meditative silence with, "Um, do you have, like, uh, have a Snicker's bar or something? Like, like, yeah."

Dave thinks to himself, "A Snicker's Bar!! Can't he see I'm meditating?! I'm about to achieve transcendence and he wants a Snicker's Bar?!"

Is Dave right? Or, maybe Dave should really invite Josh for lunch. On the other hand, maybe Josh shouldn't be interrupting Dave in the first place.

The verse "You should love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:18) obligates a person to perform acts of kindness (Rambam/Maimonides, Hilchot Aveil/Laws of Mourning 14:1). Although there are many different ways in which people can help one another (see Morasha class *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*), the Sages enumerated a number of these as specific mitzvot. Two of them are: (1) providing hospitality to guests, and (2) escorting them upon their departure.

This form of "loving one's fellow" – by being hospitable to guests – was fulfilled in an exemplary fashion by the spiritual giants and founders of ethical monotheism, Avraham and Sarah:

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 18:1-8 – This mitzvah is rooted in the exemplary character of Avraham, who is the spiritual father of all mankind.**

God appeared to him [Avraham] in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and there were three men standing before him. He saw them, and ran to greet them from the entrance to the tent, and bowed toward the ground. He said: "My Lord, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not leave your servant."

"Take some water and wash your feet, and rest under the tree. I will fetch some bread and you will satiate yourselves, then go on – in as much as you have passed your servant's way." They said, "Do so, just as you have said."

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' בְּאֵלְנֵי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מִצְּאִתִּי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:

יָקַח נָא מַעֲט מַיִם וְרָחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: וְאֶקְחָה פֶתַח לֶחֶם וְסַעְדוּ לְבַבְכֶם אַחֵר תַּעֲבֹרוּ כִּי עַל כֵּן עַבְרַתְם עַל עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַרְתָּ:

So Avraham hurried to the tent, to his wife Sarah, and said, “Hurry! Three measures of fine flour – knead them and make cakes!” Then Avraham ran to the cattle, took a good, tender calf and gave it to the youth who hurried to prepare it. He took cream and milk, as well as the calf which he had prepared, and he placed these before them. He stood before them, under the tree, and they ate.

וַיְמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵלֶּלֶה אֶל שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מְהֵרָה שְׁלֵשׁ סָאִים קִמּוּחַ סֵלֶת לֹשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת: וְאֵל הַבָּקָר רֵץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן בָּקָר כֵּךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַנְּעָר וַיְמַהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: וַיִּקַּח חֲמֵאָה וְחֵלֶב וּבֶן הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לְפָנֵיהֶם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

To show what it was about Avraham that made him so uniquely worthy to be the spiritual father of all mankind, the Torah related that what he did was on the third day after his circumcision, when the wound is most painful and the patient most weakened (Rashi, Bereishit 18:1).

To spare Avraham the physical effort of caring for guests, God brought a heat wave so that no wayfarers were up and about that day. But Avraham longed for guests, because a *tzaddik* (righteous person) is never satisfied with his spiritual accomplishments. In response, God sent him three travelers, and Avraham ran to invite them and serve them personally, despite his age and illness (Rabbi Nosson Scherman, The Stone Chumash, Bereishit 18:1). Furthermore, as we shall discuss below, Avraham was talking prophetically to God when the guests arrived. Despite this Avraham asked God to wait, so to speak, while he attended to the guests! In the opening story, our friend Dave might want to consider interrupting his meditation to help Josh!

The following story illustrates the sensitivity that the Chofetz Chaim exerted in performing this mitzvah:

Once, a student traveled a long distance to eat a Friday night meal at Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (The Chofetz Chaim, Radin, 1838-1933). The student was exhausted from his travels and the Chofetz Chaim suggested he take a nap before the evening prayers and the meal which would follow.

When the student awoke he was embarrassed to see that he had missed the Friday night service. “Don’t worry, you can daven here in the house,” said the Chofetz Chaim. He was also surprised to see that the Chofetz Chaim’s wife had gone to sleep. “She was very tired and needed to retire early,” explained the Chofetz Chaim.

So the Rabbi and the student ate together, sang a song or two, and shared words of Torah wisdom, after which the Rabbi went to sleep. As the student was preparing to get into bed, he noticed that the clock was stuck at 3 p.m. Then he realized: the clock was actually working, and he had slept all the way until 2 a.m. and finished his meal with the Chofetz Chaim at 3 a.m.!

The Chofetz Chaim had stayed up into the night and pretended that it was still early, to let the student rest and avoid any possibility of embarrassing him! (Heard from Rabbi Eli Monsour, Brooklyn; cited in The Chofetz Chaim Biography, ArtScroll).

Hosting guests not only fulfills the mitzvah to love one’s fellow as oneself (Vayikra 19:18), but also fulfills another mitzvah in the Torah:

2. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 13:5 – The Infinite God calls on finite man to draw close to Him and follow after Him. How is this possible?**

The Lord, your God, shall you follow and Him shall you fear. Keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cleave to Him.

אַחֲרֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ וְאֹתוֹ תִירְאוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ וְאֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ וְבוֹ תִדְבְּקוּן:

God summons man to “cleave to Him.” The Oral Torah reveals the means by which man is to achieve this:

3. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sotah 14a – When a person emulates the ways in which God cares for His creatures (as described in the Torah narratives), then that person “walks in His ways” and cleaves to Him.**

Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘After the Lord your God shall you follow’ (Devarim 13:5)? Is it possible for a person to walk and follow the *Shechinah* [the Divine Presence]?”

“Rather, this teaches us to emulate God’s attributes – just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: ‘And God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them’ (Bereishit 3:21), so must you clothe the naked.

“God visits the sick, as it is written: ‘God appeared to him [Avraham who was recovering from his circumcision] in the plains of Mamre’ (Bereishit 18:1), so must you visit the sick.

“God comforts mourners, as it is written: ‘And it was after the death of Avraham that God blessed Yitzchak his son [as comfort for the loss of his father]’ (Bereishit 25:11), so must you comfort mourners.

“God buries the dead, as it is written: ‘He buried him [Moshe/Moses] in the valley’ (Devarim 34:6), so shall you bury the dead.”

ואמר רבי חמא בר חנינא מאי דכתיב אחרי ה' אלקים תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? ...

אלא הלך אחר מידותיו של הקב"ה: מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם, אף אתה הלבש ערומים;

הקב"ה ביקר חולים דכתיב וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא, אף אתה בקר חולים;

הקב"ה נחם אבלים דכתיב ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלקים את יצחק בנו, אף אתה נחם אבלים;

הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב ויקבור אותו בגיא, אף אתה קבור מתים.

4. **Shelah, Parshat Vayeira, Ner Mitzvah (second paragraph) – When a person engages in hospitality, he is emulating and becoming similar to God Himself. Just as God is Host to the entire world, so too a person can become a host to others.**

It is clear to me, that besides for its status as a lofty moral attribute, the mitzvah of hospitality constitutes fulfillment of the mitzvah to “walk in His ways” [by emulating God, as in Devarim 13:5 above, and as listed by the Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvot, #8].

For the Holy One, Blessed be He, extends hospitality to [all of His creatures who are] guests – in every period and epoch, at every second and every moment of every day. If not for God’s hospitality at every moment, then all of existence would cease to exist.

This means that all the inhabitants of the world are like guests of God. A person is like one

ונראה בעיני פשוט...מצות הכנסת אורחים שהיא בכלל מצות עשה דוהלכת בדרכיו נוסף על שהיא מעלה גדולה ממצות המידות...

וזה כי הקב"ה מכניס אורחים בכל זמן ועידן, בכל שעה, ובכל עת, ובכל רגע. כי אם לא היה מכניס אורחים רגע כמימריה היה העולם אבד.

ר"ל כי כל העולם אורחים הם לגבי השי"ת כאורח נטה ללון כי גרים אנחנו והוא מכניס.

who has come to lodge [in this world for a time]. We are visitors here, and God hosts us. [Therefore, by acting as a host to others, one is directly emulating God and “walking in His ways.”]

For a full discussion of the concept of emulating God’s ways, see the Morasha class *Being Like God*.

Finally, any time one does an act of kindness motivated by the fact that “it’s the right thing to do,” then one fulfills the mitzvah to do what is “fair and good”:

5. **Devarim 6:18 – The mitzvah to do what is “fair and good.”**

You must do what is fair and good in the eyes of God, so that it will be good for you...

וְעָשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי ה' לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ ...

The Ramban (Nachmanides) explains the above verse:

6. **Ramban, Devarim 6:18 – Since the Torah could never practically specify the correct conduct for every life situation, God gives us a general guideline: do what is fair and good in His eyes. Hospitality to guests is included in this category.**

The intention behind the mitzvah to do what is “fair and good” is the following: the previous verse states, “You must keep His decrees and testimonies that He commanded you” (Devarim 6:17). Now this verse is saying: “Even regarding matters in which I have *not* explicitly commanded you, make sure to do what is good and right in God’s eyes, because He loves that which is good and right.”

This is an important principle. It would be impossible for the Torah to specify the proper [interpersonal] conduct for every life situation regarding neighbors, friends, businesses, communities, and countries.

The Torah does, however, specify the proper conduct for many situations, even if not for all situations. For example, “You shall not be a gossipmonger...” (Vayikra 19:16), “You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge ...” (ibid. 19:18), etc.

Our verse now states a *general* principle to do what is good and right in *all* life situations.

... והכוונה בזה, כי מתחלה אמר: שתשמור חקותיו ועדותיו אשר צוך, ועתה יאמר: גם באשר לא צוך תן דעתך לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו, כי הוא אוהב הטוב והישר:

וזה ענין גדול, לפי שאי אפשר להזכיר בתורה כל הנהגות האדם עם שכניו ורעיו, וכל משאו ומתנו, ותקוני הישוב והמדינות כלם,

אבל אחרי שהזכיר מהם הרבה, כגון לא תלך רכיל (ויקרא יט טז), לא תקום ולא תטור (שם פסוק יח), ולא תעמוד על דם רעך (שם פסוק טז), לא תקלל חרש (שם פסוק יד), מפני שיבה תקום (שם פסוק לב), וכיוצא בהן, חזר לומר בדרך כלל שיעשה הטוב והישר בכל דבר ...

A person's natural sense of wanting to be "a good person" is a very valuable asset in the eyes of the Torah. For God asks that we do what is "fair and good" in all situations, even if He didn't tell us exactly how. Therefore, hosting guests and having in mind that it's the right thing to do is a fulfillment of this mitzvah to do what is "fair and good" (heard from Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem).

There is one final reason why hospitality to guests is so central to Jewish life. Kindness and consideration for others – of which hospitality is an expression – are seen a prerequisite for Torah study, as described in the next source:

7. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 3:17; Rabbeinu Simcha, Machzor Vitri, Ch. 426 ibid., and Rabbi Pinchas Kehati, Mishnayot Mevu'rot ibid. – A person needs to be civilized enough to care about others (*derech erez*) in order to be able to attain Torah wisdom.**

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya says: "If there is no Torah study there can be no proper conduct. If there is no proper conduct there can be no Torah study."

Machzor Vitri:

"If there is no proper conduct there can be no Torah study" – If a person is not already civilized and cultured enough to act properly towards others, then the Torah that he studies will not improve him. Furthermore, he will eventually forget what he studies.

Kehati:

"If a person lacks *derech erez*" – One who does not have good character traits and does not represent the epitome of interpersonal conduct "lacks Torah" in the sense that his Torah study has no value, and his very conduct degrades the majesty of the Torah.

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר: אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ, אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה.

מחזור ויטרי, סימן תכו

אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה. שאם אין תרבות לאדם לנהג כשורה, אין תורתו מועלת לו כלום, ואינה מתקיימת בידו.

ר' פנחס קהתי

אם אין דרך ארץ – מי שאינו בעל מידות טובות ואינו נוהג יפה עם הבריות, אין תורה – אין ערך לתורתו, שכן התורה מתחללת ונמאסת על ידו.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ∞ Hospitality is central to Jewish life. This idea is reflected by the fact that Avraham was the founder of ethical monotheism, and yet that is not what the Torah emphasizes about him. He is not extolled for his recognition at a young age that the design apparent in the universe implies a Designer, nor that his ideas about ethical monotheism catalyzed the most influential intellectual revolution in history. Instead the Torah describes his and Sarah's hospitality to guests. In the sweltering heat, while recovering from circumcision, Avraham runs to invite three unknown desert travelers into his home to wash, eat, and rest. It is this that the Torah extols.
- ∞ What motivates the Jewish drive for hospitality? The Torah recognizes that there is a natural inclination to be a good person. Inviting and serving guests are expressions of this aspiration and fall under the overarching mitzvah of "doing what is fair and good" at all times. Moreover, hospitality to guests is one of the principle forms of fulfilling the mitzvah to "Love one's fellow as oneself."
- ∞ Finally, there is a deeper motivation behind Avraham's and Judaism's tenacious pursuit of

hospitality: since God is the ultimate Host to all of mankind – providing food and hospitality to mankind at every moment – we become more God-like when we too provide food and hospitality to our fellow man. The common goal of providing for another's needs makes us similar to God. Hospitality is thus a central feature of Jewish life: in building relationships with other people, and in building a relationship with God, Who is the Ultimate Host.

SECTION II. THE SPECIAL MAGNITUDE OF THE MITZVAH OF HOSPITALITY TO GUESTS

Before describing the practical details of fulfilling this mitzvah (see Section III), we will first discuss sources that highlight the importance and value that the Torah accords it.

1. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:1 – The detailed narrative of Avraham's hospitality is a reminder to his descendants throughout history to follow his example.**

How treasured by God is the mitzvah of hospitality! The Torah devotes much attention and great detail to the episode of Avraham's hospitality (Bereishit 18:1-8). This is to serve for us as a reminder and inspiration to follow in his footsteps our entire lives.

Indeed, immediately after recording this episode, the Torah goes on to praise Avraham specifically because he educated his children – including future generations – to follow in his ways of righteousness and hospitality. [This refers to the verse: "For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God," (Bereishit 18:19).]

כמה חביבה מצות הכנסת אורחים לפני השי"ת,
שנכתבה פרשה שלימה בתורה המדברת מענין זה,
והיא לאות לנו שנתחזק בזה ג"כ כל ימי חיינו.

וכמו שמצינו שתיכף אחר מעשה זה שיבא אותו
הכתוב, עבור שיצוה את בניו ג"כ לילך בדרך צדקותיו.

2. **Ibid. 3:2 – Even though Avraham kept the entire Torah, his fulfillment of hospitality to strangers receives special emphasis.**

We see that the Torah devotes much space to depicting every detail of Avraham's hospitality. We are taught that Avraham Avinu kept all the laws of the Torah. Yet it is specifically with regard to his fulfillment of the mitzvah of hospitality that the Torah goes into such minute detail, and it relates the other mitzvot that he kept in general terms only.

הנה ראה ראינו שהתורה הרחיבה לספר בענין הכנסת
אורחים של אברהם אבינו, איך היתה בכל פרטיו, מה
שלא מצינו כן בכל חלקי התורה שקיים אברהם אבינו,
שסיפרה רק בדרך כלל שקיים כל התורה.

As we shall see in the next source, the importance that the Torah accords to hospitality to guests can be seen from the priority placed on this mitzvah relative to other obligations:

3. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – Hospitality is on the same level as going to study Torah.**

Rabbi Yochanan said, “Welcoming guests is as great as rising early to attend the *Beit HaMedrash* (study hall).”

אמר רבי יוחנן גדולה הכנסת אורחים מהשכמת בית המדרש...
...המדרש.

In general, the mitzvah to study Torah is valued more than all other mitzvot (see Morasha class *Torah Study: The Foundation of Jewish Life*).

(Refer also to Sefer Ahavat Chesed 3:1 (in the footnote) which describes the halachot of desisting from Torah study or missing prayer in a minyan for the sake of hosting guests, including a case where a person of honor already has a host, but is receiving hospitality unbecoming his status.)

The Maharal explains why welcoming guests is as great as studying Torah:

4. **Maharal, Chidushei Agadot, ibid. – Hospitality to guests and the study of Torah are both Godly pursuits.**

When one extends hospitality to guests, he is welcoming human beings who are created in God’s Image. This is in essence a Godly activity, just as one who arises early to attend the Beit HaMedrash in order to study Torah is engaged in a Godly pursuit.

We see this in the teaching of the Sages, where the Torah and the Godly nature of human beings are equated: “Beloved is man, for he is created in the Divine Image. Beloved are the Children of Israel, for they have been given the precious tool [i.e. Torah] (Pirkei Avot 4:14).”

פירוש הכנסת אורחים שהוא נברא בצלם אלקים, ודבר זה נחשב ענין אלקי, כמו מי שמשכים לבית המדרש לתורה שהיא אלקית.

ובמושנה אבות קאמר “חביב האדם שנברא בצלם חביבים ישראל שניתן להם כלי חמדה,” אלו שניהם שוים.

The Talmud records a second statement – that hospitality to guests is even greater than Torah study, and is explained by the Maharal:

5. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – Hospitality is even greater than going to study Torah.**

Rav Dimi of Naharda’ah said: “It [hospitality to guests] is even greater than arising early to attend the Beit HaMedrash.”

ורב דימי מנהרדעא אמר יותר מהשכמת בית המדרש.

6. **Maharal, Chidushei Agadot, ibid. – Honoring a guest is like honoring God Himself, in Whose image the human guest has been created.**

Rav Dimi maintains that hospitality is even greater than arising early to go to the Beit HaMedrash. This is because hospitality is extending honor to God. By inviting a person – who has been created in God’s Image and form – into one’s house and honoring his needs,

וקאמר רב דימי יותר מהשכמת בית המדרש, כי הכנסת אורחים זהו עצמו כבוד אלקים, להכניס האדם לביתו ולכבד אותו שנברא בדמות ובצלם, ודבר זה נחשב כבוד אל השכינה, והוא יותר מן התורה.

one is in effect honoring the Divine Presence. And in the teaching of the Sages, [according honor to the Divine Presence] is greater than according honor to the Torah (Shabbat 127a).

This is seen from the fact that the Tanna states: “Man is beloved because he is created in the Divine Image” first, and only then states that “he has been given the precious tool [i.e. Torah]” (Pirkei Avot 4:14).

שהרי התנא מקדים חשוב זה שהאדם נברא בצלם אלקים למה שנתן להם כלי חמדה.

Finally, a third statement in the Talmud declares that hospitality to guests is even greater than being in God's Presence, and is explained by the Maharal:

7. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – Hospitality to guests is even greater than being in the Presence of God.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav, “Welcoming guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence.” [Avraham was standing before God and he noticed some guests approaching.] He said to God, “If I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not leave me” [i.e. “Please wait while I go and greet the guests” (Bereishit 18:3).]

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מהקבלת פני השכינה, דכתיב ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור.

8. Maharal, Chidushei Agadot, ibid. – There is a more complete connection with the Divine Image in a person, than with the Divine Presence itself.

Rav Yehudah maintains that hospitality is even greater than receiving the Divine Presence. The reason for this is that although it is possible, to a certain extent, to connect with the Divine Presence, this relationship is somewhat limited, for there is, after all, an unbridgeable distance between man and God. As God Himself tells us: “No human can see My face and live” (Shemot/ Exodus 33:20).

However, it is different regarding hosting a human guest whom one honors and has fondness for. One can connect completely with the Image of God that is in this person. In this way, hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, because connection with the Divine Presence is limited [but connecting with the Divine Image embodied by a person is complete. In other words, through connecting with a person's Divine aspect, one connects more closely with God Himself.]

ורב יהודה אמר גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מן הקבלת פני השכינה, וכל זה מטעם שאמרנו כי האדם נברא בצלם יוצרו, ואילו הקבלת פני השכינה אין זה כבוד השכינה כי לא יראני וחי.

ואין דבר זה כהכנסת אורחים, שהוא מכבד האדם כאשר באו אליו פנים חדשות, וחביב עליו האדם כאשר נראה אליו, והוא מתחבר לגמרי אל צלם אלקים הזה, והוא יותר מהקבלת פני השכינה כי אין חיבור אל השכינה.

9. **Ibid. – The connection with a person’s Divine Image occurs most when welcoming a guest.**

You must know that all of this refers specifically to welcoming guests [as opposed to other forms of showing care and respect for the Divine Image of human beings], for it is specifically by the act of welcoming a human being into a new setting that one displays true honor for the Divine Image.

ודע לך שדוקא להכניס אורחים קאמר שפנים חדשות באו, וכאשר פנים חדשות כאן הנה זהו כבוד צלם אלקים, כאשר באו אליו פנים חדשות והוא מכבד אותנו...

There is another important lesson to be learned from the fact that Avraham interrupted his prophecy with God to invite the desert travelers (Source 7 above). Rabbi Benzion Klatzko teaches that Judaism is a religion of action. In contrast to other religions, which may value *closeness and communion with* God as the highest value, Judaism regards *acting* and *being like* God to be more important (see Michtav M’Eliyahu, Vol. II, pp. 179-180).

10. **Vayikra 26:3-4; Rashi ibid. – The aim of Torah study should be to fulfill it in action.**

If you will follow my decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time and the land will give its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit.

Rashi:
“If you will follow my decrees” – ... This refers to exerting oneself in Torah study.

“And observe My commandments” – Exert yourself in Torah study in order to guard [against transgressing prohibitions] and to fulfill [the mitzvot].

אם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם. ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם ונתנה הארץ יבולה ועץ השדה יתן פריו.

רש"י

אם בחקתי תלכו - ... שתהיו עמלים בתורה:

ואת מצותי תשמרו - הווי עמלים בתורה על מנת לשמור ולקיים, כמו שנאמר (דברים ה א) ולמדתם אותם ושמרתם לעשותם:

For example, even though Torah study is the highest form of achieving closeness to God and His wisdom, we would still be required to interrupt it in order to do a mitzvah that no one else can do, as described in the following source.

11. **Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah (Laws of Torah Study) 3:4 – Action precedes even Torah study if no one else can do the mitzvah.**

If one has a choice of doing a mitzvah or of studying Torah:

- If the mitzvah *can* be done by others, one should *not* interrupt one’s Torah study.
- If the mitzvah *cannot* be done by someone else, one should do the mitzvah and then return to one’s studies.

היה לפניו עשיית מצוה ותלמוד תורה, אם אפשר למצוה להעשות ע"י אחרים לא יפסיק תלמודו, ואם לאו יעשה המצוה ויחזור לתלמודו.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ Apart from emphasizing the centrality of hospitality to Jewish life, the Torah's detailed description of Avraham's hospitality serves another purpose: it stands as a reminder and inspiration for the generations of his descendants to follow in his footsteps. Even though Avraham observed all the laws of the Torah, he was distinguished in the mitzvah of kindness and hospitality. Indeed, if one wants to be called a true descendant of Avraham, then one must follow his example (Rambam, Matnat Aniyim 10:1).
- ≈ Furthermore, the Talmud emphasizes that hosting guests is a Godly pursuit, because every guest is a human created in the Image of God. Therefore, hosting guests (when no one else can do the mitzvah) is *just as significant* as the study of Torah, which is the pursuit of Godly wisdom in this world. If the mitzvah of hosting guests is done properly, then it is even *greater* than Torah study, since if no one else can honor the guest, who is made in God's Image, one is in effect honoring the *Shechinah* (the Divine Presence), which is greater than honoring the Torah.
- ≈ Finally, Avraham's example makes an astounding statement throughout history: Hospitality to guests is greater than communicating with God's Presence. Due to the infinite nature of the Presence of God, one's connection with Him is limited while one is still in a finite body. However, no such limitation exists when connecting with the Divine Image that resides in the soul of another person, such as when greeting a guest!

SECTION III. THE PRINCIPLES AND DETAILS OF HOSTING GUESTS

As we shall see in the sources below, Judaism's approach to hospitality is all-encompassing and very detailed – it includes greeting the guests, letting them wash and rest, making them feel comfortable, giving them food and drink, and escorting them on their way. The details are important because in human relationships it's the details that count. So too, in building the relationship with God, it's how we perform the details of the mitzvot that counts. These two concepts are expressed beautifully in the mitzvah to host guests, as we shall see below.

PART A. SEARCHING FOR GUESTS AND WELCOMING THEM

1. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:2 – One should search for guests, and accept them into one's home with as much affection as one would have toward a wealthy person from whom one expects to receive a large sum of money.**

In the description of Avraham's hospitality to strangers [see Section I, Source 1 above], the Torah relates how although Avraham was still in pain from his circumcision and the day was hot, he nevertheless sat at the entrance to his tent, hoping that he might spot some passerby whom he could invite into his home. When he did indeed see some travelers, he ran to them, prostrated himself before them, and pleaded with them to accept his offer of hospitality.

הנה בתחילת הפרשה סיפרה לנו התורה איך שהוא היה עדיין חולה ממצות מילה שלו, ואעפ"כ היה יושב פתח האוהל בעת החום לראות אולי יראה מרחוק איזה עובר ושב ויכניסו לביתו וכאשר ראם רץ לקראתם ונשתטח לפניהם וידבר להם דברים רכים אולי יוכל להכניסם לביתו.

Although this awesome level of conduct is beyond our reach, we should still learn from here to search for guests, and to accept them into our homes with great affection, much as we would act toward a wealthy man from whom we hope to gain a large sum of money!

ואע"פ שאין מדרגתנו לקיים באופן זה עכ"פ נלמוד מזה שצריך לתור אחריהם ולקבלם בחיבה יתירה כמו שהיה מקבל עשיר גדול שיכול להרויח ממנו הרבה.

The following story illustrates the effort and thoughtfulness required to host guests:

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski was a world-renowned Torah leader in pre-war Vilna. One Sukkot in his later years, a guest came to his home to eat in his sukkah. R' Chaim Ozer excused himself saying that his old age made it uncomfortable for him to sit in the sukkah, referring to the halachah that "One who is uncomfortable due to the cold or heat in a sukkah is exempt from being there" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 640:4), and retired to the house. The young guest, however, was not exempt and remained to eat in the sukkah.

A short while later, R' Chaim Ozer emerged from the house and returned to sit with the guest in the sukkah. The guest was perplexed. R' Chaim Ozer explained: "The halachah states that a person is exempt from being in the sukkah if he is uncomfortable, but it does not say that he is exempt from hospitality to guests!" (Heard from Rabbi Eitan Feiner, Jerusalem.)

2. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:1 – There is a mitzvah to extend hospitality whether the guest is rich or poor.**

The mitzvah of hospitality to guests does not only include taking care of the needs of poor guests. Even if the person whom one is welcoming into his home is wealthy and not in need of any material kindness, nevertheless the warmth and respect which one shows him is a fulfillment of this mitzvah.

ודע עוד דמצות הכנסת אורחים נוהג אף בעשירים... ואף שאין צריכין לטובתו אפ"ה הקבלה שמקבל אותם בפנים יפות ומשתדל לשמשם ולכבדם לפי כבודם היא מצוה.

Although there is a mitzvah to extend hospitality to both rich and poor, receiving poor guests is more important since it includes the mitzvah of *tzedakah* (charity) as well (Ahavat Chesed, Ch. 1, in the name of the Maharil).

Sadly, we often encounter the exact opposite of the Torah ideal, and wealthy visitors are greeted warmly and showered with honor and attention, while the poor, especially the downtrodden and dispirited, are received far less graciously (Ahavat Chesed, *ibid.*).

PART B. PROVIDING REST AND WASHING FACILITIES

1. **Bereishit 18:4-5**

[Avraham said:] "Take some water and wash your feet, and rest under the tree. I will fetch some bread and you will satiate yourselves, then [you can] go on [with your journey]."

יוקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ: ואקחה פת לחם וסעדו לכם אחר תעבורו.

2. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:2 – When guests arrive, one should immediately allow them to wash and rest if they need to.**

Afterwards, Avraham told the guests to rest under the tree while he prepared their meal. We may learn from here that one should offer his guests the opportunity to rest up from their travels before serving them food and drink.

אח"כ ביקש אברהם אבינו להאורחים - שבתוך כך שיכין להם איזה דבר לאכול - ישענו תחת האילנות כי שם טוב להיות בצל וינפשו שם מטורח הדרך. מזה נלמוד שטרם שיכינו להאורח לאכול יבקשו לו להשען ולהנפש מטורח הדרך.

Since guests might need to wash, one should make sure that his facilities are kept clean and attractive for their use (Journey to Virtue, Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, 56:9).

PART C. PERSONALLY SERVING THE GUESTS

1. **Bereishit 18:8**

He [Avraham] stood before them, under the tree, and they ate.

והוא עמד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו:

2. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, 3:2 – A host should not consider it beneath his dignity to personally serve his guests.**

[The above verse teaches that] Avraham himself stood over them and served them throughout their meal.

ובעצמו עמד ושירת לפניהם כל עת האכילה.

Avraham, who had been coronated Prince of God by all the nations, did not consider it beneath his dignity to serve his guests, even though he believed them to be low and uncouth idol worshippers. He, in turn, learned from God, Who provides for every creature (see Kiddushin 32b). Therefore, how much more so should ordinary hosts treat ordinary guests with honor and deference (Journey to Virtue, Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, 56:12).

PART D. SERVING FOOD CHEERFULLY AND SENSITIVELY

1. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:2 – Following Avraham's example, we should provide for the needs of our guests – food, drink, a place to wash and rest, etc. – cheerfully and sensitively.**

When guests arrive at one's home, he should greet them cheerfully and set out food for them immediately, for perhaps they are hungry but are too ashamed to ask for food. He should provide their needs with a pleasant expression. Even if he is worried about something, he should attempt to keep his concerns hidden [so that the guest does not feel that he is inconveniencing his host].

He should speak to them pleasantly so that they will feel comfortable. He should not talk about his troubles, since they will think that they are

כתבו הספרים הקדושים: כשיבואו אורחים לביתו של אדם יקבלם בסבר פנים יפות, וישים מיד לפניהם לאכול כי אולי העני רעב ומתבייש לשאול. ויתן להם בפנים צהובות ולא בפנים זועפות. ואף אם יש לו בלבו דבר דאגה יכסנה בפניהם...

וינחמם בדברים, ובוזה יהיה להם למשיב נפש. ואל יספר לפניהם תלאותיו כי ישבר את רוחם בחשבם שבשבילם אומרו, וכמעט שמאבד שכרו עבור זה.

the cause of them, and that he is losing money by hosting them.

While the guest is eating, the host should express his wish that he could serve even more and better food, as the verse states: “And offer your soul to the hungry [and satisfy the afflicted soul].” (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 58:10). In other words, one should show them good will.

Regarding the verse: “Surely you should break your bread for the hungry” (Yeshayahu 58:7), the Zohar (Parshat Vayakhel) teaches that the host should slice the bread in the presence of the guests because they might be ashamed to slice it themselves. To prevent embarrassing the guests, one should not watch them closely [or in any way make them self-conscious] while they are eating.

ובשעת האוכל יראה עצמו כמצטער על שאינו יכול להשיג ליתן יותר, שנאמר ותפק לרעב נפשך. רצונו לומר רצון טוב.

איתא בזוהר ויקהל על הפסוק “הלוא פרום לרעב לחמך” שצריך בעל הבית לחתוך חתיכות לחם לפני האורח כדי שלא יבוש ולא יכלם. וכל שכן שלא יביט בפניו כשהוא אוכל, כדי שלא יתבייש.

If one sees that his guests wish to remain only a short while and then continue on their way, he should suggest that they eat only a small amount rather than delay them with a full meal (Ahavat Chesed 3:2, based on Bereishit 18:5 where Avraham encourages his guests to continue their journey after partaking of a small meal).

The following story is a striking example of the importance of making guests feel comfortable by engaging in pleasant conversation:

Once, a guest went to the Slonimer Rebbe (Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky) for a meal on Rosh HaShanah, one of the holiest and most auspicious days of the year. The guest was very excited to be in the presence of such a great Sage renowned for his fiery devotion and complete immersion in spiritual matters, and wondered what great revelations he might witness.

But when he sat down at the meal he was disappointed. He saw that the holy Rebbe spent the meal talking to him and the other guests – one of whom was a less observant cousin of the Rebbe. Then he realized: the Rebbe was inquiring about their welfare, their health, their families, and their jobs to make them feel comfortable, accepted, and cared for as guests. Indeed this was a revelation of loving-kindness and consideration more holy than he’d considered imagining. (Heard from Rabbi Binyomin Feldman, Jerusalem.)

PART E. PROVIDING SLEEPING FACILITIES

1. Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:2

If the guests are spending the night in his home, he should give them the best of his bedding. A person sleeps better in a comfortable bed. At times a good rest can be even more important than a good meal! In order to motivate oneself, one should say to oneself: “If I were the guest I would certainly want to be treated with respect

ואם ילינם אצלו ישכיבם במיטב מטותיו, כפי הראוי להם כי גדולה מנוחת עיף בהיותו שוכב בטוב. ולפעמים יותר עושה לו טובה המשכיבו היטב מן המאכילו והמשקהו. ויאמר בלבו אלו הייתי מתארח אצל זה בודאי הייתי רוצה שייכבדני ואכילני וישקיני ויתן לי לינה טובה; אעשה לו כן גם אני וגלגל הוא שחזור בעולם...

and concern. I should therefore treat my guest accordingly. A person never knows where he might eventually end up!” (See Shabbat 152b.)

PART F. ESCORTING GUESTS ON THEIR WAY

1. Bereishit 21:33; Rashi, Sotah 10a, s.v. *pundak* – Avraham’s hospitality included escorting his guests on their way.

He [Avraham] planted an *eshel* in Be’er Sheva, and he called out there in the name of God, Master of the Universe.

Rashi:

“[he planted an *eshel* which is] a lodge” – for travelers. The term *eshel* is an acronym for the Hebrew words: eating, drinking, and escorting guests on their way.

וַיִּטַע אֲשֵׁל בְּבְאֵר שֵׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא שְׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' קָל עוֹלָם.

רש"י:

פונדק – ללון בו אורחים. ולשון אש"ל
נוטריקון הוא אכילה שתיה לוויה.

2. Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed 3:2 – Guests should be shown the way to their destination.

Especially if the guest is not familiar with the way, and the roads branch out in several directions, it is a great mitzvah to accompany him or at least clearly explain where to go so that he will not get lost.

ובפרט אם האורח אינו יודע היטב הדרך, והדרך מתפצלת לכמה נתיבות, מצוה רבה לילך אתו ולהראות לו או עכ"פ לברר לו היטב כדי שלא יכשל בה...

3. Maharal, Netivot Olam, Netiv Gemilut Chasadim, Ch. 5 – Escorting the guest is a way of according the proper honor to one who is created in the Divine Image.

When someone sets out on the way and others see him off, they in effect give honor to the Divine Image in which he was created. If people fail to do so, it is as if they had shed his blood [as is stated in Sotah 46b], for when one is robbed of the honor due to his Divine Image this is true bloodshed.

ולפיכך כאשר יוצא לדרך ובנ"א מלוין אותו... דנותנין אל צלמו כבוד שאין מניחין אותו שיצא בלבדו, וזהו שנותנין לו לוויה בדרך, ולכך נשאר הכבוד... ואם אין מלוין אותו כאילו שופך דמים, פירוש שנוטלים ממנו צלמו אשר האדם נברא בצלם אלקים, ובבטול הצלם זה עצמו שפיכות דמים לגמרי.

The Talmud states that escorting one’s guest ensures that “he is not harmed” (Sotah 46b). The Maharsha explains:

4. Maharsha, Sotah 45b – An escort provides physical as well as spiritual protection to one’s guest.

Once one has begun to accompany another person, he has shown his desire and wish to protect him. His very intentions can have the effect of protecting the traveler for the entire

כיון שהתחיל ללוותו ד' אמות גם בעיר, הרי כוונתו ודעתו להצילו בדרך, ומחשבתו ורצונו מהני ליה לחברו בכל הדרך להצילו... או שמלאכיו של המלוה גומרים מחשבתו ורצונו לילך במקומו עם המתלוה ולהצילו מהזיק.

journey [even after the two have parted] ...
Another explanation is that the “guardian angels” of the escort will complete the action that he had begun and walk in his stead to accompany the guest and protect him from danger.

PART G. HOW FAR MUST ONE ESCORT ONE’S GUESTS?

1. Rambam, Hilchot Aveil 14:3 – The guest should be escorted according to the honor due to him.

How far must one accompany a guest? A Torah teacher should accompany his disciple until just outside the city. One friend should accompany another to the Shabbat limits (two thousand *amot* or one kilometer outside the city). One should accompany one’s Torah teacher for one *parsah* (approximately 4.5 kilometers). And if the guest was one’s primary teacher of Torah, he should escort him for three *parsa’ot* (approximately 13 kilometers).

וכמה שיעור לזיה שחייב אדם בה? הרב לתלמיד עד עיבורה של עיר. והאיש לחבירו עד תחום שבת, והתלמיד לרב עד פרסה, ואם היה רבו מובהק עד שלשה פרסאות.

2. S’ma, Choshen Mishpat, 427:11 – In practice, the custom is for the guest to excuse his host from escorting him these distances and accept an escort of two meters from the host’s door.

Today we are not in the habit of escorting guests to this extent. The reason for this is that it is assumed that people forgo the honor. Nevertheless, one should escort his guest to the gate, or at least four *amot* (approximately 2 meters).

ובילקוט מהר”ש מצאתי: האידנא אין נוהגין ללות תלמיד לרבו עד פרסה משום דבזמן הזה מוחלים על כבודם ויש לילך עמו או עם חבירו עד השער או לכל הפחות ד’ אמות עכ”ל.

3. Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, 3:2 (footnote) – A short distance of escort suffices since roads today are clearly marked and not as dangerous as in the past. Nevertheless, the host should escort his guest at least for the minimum distance of two meters.

Nevertheless, one may not absolve himself from this mitzvah completely even in our day, for the Talmud implies that the protection that is secured through escorting another human being has a metaphysical component as well. Additionally, it is only through escorting guests that one thoroughly completes the mitzvah of hospitality. This is hinted to in the word *eshel* [which is used by the Torah to describe Avraham’s hospitality], which is an acronym for the Hebrew words: eating, drinking, and escorting.

אבל חלילה לפטור את עצמו ממצות לזיה לגמרי כי מגמרא משמע שהוא דבר סגולה להמתלוה שלא יארע לו אסון בדרך. וגם על ידי הלזיה נגמר המצוה בשלימות כי אש”ל ראשי תיבות אכילה שתיה לזיה.

(I heard about an incident involving a well-known [and generous] host who had a fire on his property. People wondered why the merit of this mitzvah of hospitality did not protect him, One of the leaders of the generation answered: it was the custom of this host to only provide food and drink for his guests and not to escort them. The first letters of the words “eating” and “drinking” in Hebrew make an acronym which forms the word “fire.” In other words, [since the host was lacking in the aspect of escorting] the mitzvah did not have the power to protect him completely...)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ∞ The guiding theme to all the details of hosting guests is that one must strive to emulate the hospitality of Avraham and Sarah. This means tending to the needs of the guests warmly and sensitively, so that they will feel comfortable and welcome – right from greeting them at the front door to seeing them off on their journey.
- ∞ Therefore, one should seek out guests and treat them with great warmth, as if each one were a wealthy person from whom one stands to realize a great profit. When guests arrive, one should immediately allow them to wash or rest if they need to. The food should be served immediately and not just offered, since guests often decline offers out of politeness or embarrassment, but when food is served they are quite happy to eat. The host should personally serve the guests in a cheerful and sensitive manner, which means not watching them closely or in any way making them feel self-conscious! Finally, they should be escorted when they leave in order to accord them honor and show them the way.

SECTION IV. EDUCATING ONE’S CHILDREN TO EXTEND HOSPITALITY

1. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, 3:2 – One should educate one’s children to distinguish themselves in this mitzvah.**

Additionally, we can learn [from the account of Avraham’s hospitality] that one must educate one’s children to do this mitzvah. As it is written, “And he gave [the meat] to the youth [to prepare for the guests]” (Bereishit 18:7). Rashi explains that this refers to Avraham’s son, Yishmael, whom Avraham was training to perform mitzvot.

גם נוכל ללמוד מושם, דיחנך אדם גם בניו למצוה זו, כמו שכתוב “ויתן אל הנער” וכפירוש רש”י שזה קאי על ישמעאל לחנכו במצות.

The following story illustrates the extent to which children can take pleasure in hosting and sharing:

Once, a guest came to a Jerusalem family for a Shabbat meal. The guest noticed that there were six people at the table – the host, the host’s wife, their three children and himself. He also noticed that only five pieces of chicken were served. The host gave a whole piece of chicken to the guest, and cut the last piece in half to share between two children. The guest felt like he was imposing on the family – even though no one else at the table seemed bothered – and refused all further invitations to eat there again.

Finally, he accepted an offer to eat with them again, and brought some chocolates for the host’s children as a gift. But something unexpected happened: when he gave the chocolates to the three children, they said thank you and immediately ran out of the house! A minute later the three children returned with nine of their friends. They all sat down on the living room floor and portioned out the chocolates with beaming smiles!

Then it dawned on the guest: the children had been so positively educated about sharing with guests, that they got more enjoyment from sharing their chocolate – and their chicken – with others, than eating it themselves! (Adapted from Rabbi Paysach Krohn’s Maggid Speaks series.)

In the above story, it was fortunate that the guest came back a second time to see how much his hosts and their children truly loved performing acts of hospitality. However, on his first visit the guest felt like he was *imposing* on the family, and therefore did not want to come back. We learn from this that performing acts of kindness must be carefully thought through. For example, the host should have thought to himself, “I want to exert myself to give more food to the guest, but how will he feel about this: honored or uncomfortable?” This concept is known as “helping to bear another’s burden.” (Pirkei Avot 6:5; Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, written correspondence; see also Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. 1, p. 253 for more details on this concept.)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ⇒ The Torah reveals that God loved Avraham because he would always convey God’s teachings to his children (Bereishit 18:19). A person reveals his values by what he teaches his children. For one to advocate morality but not inculcate it into one’s own family reveals that his principles are less than sincere. In summing up the greatness of Avraham and the reason he was entitled to a role in the Divine scheme of the world, God said that he merited it because of what he taught his children. Following Avraham’s example, we too should teach our children to love kindness and hospitality.

SECTION V. THE REWARD FOR HOSPITALITY AND ESCORTING GUESTS

The Talmud teaches that providing hospitality is singled out as one of the few mitzvot that earns a reward in this world as well as in the World to Come (Shabbat 127a).

1. **Rabbi Aharon Roth, Shulchan HaTahor, p. 101a – One’s welcome into the World to Come is based on how one welcomed guests in this world.**

The Tikkunei Zohar teaches that the manner in which one welcomes guests in this world determines the manner in which his soul will be welcomed into the next world.

ומובא בתיקוני זוהר...כדרך שהאדם מקבל את
האורחים בהאי עלמא ככה מקבלים נשמתו בעולם
העליון.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Chagigah 27a; Rashi, ibid. – Hospitality has the power to erase the effects of one’s transgressions.**

It is written: “The *Altar* was of wood, three cubits tall, and its length was two cubits including its corners. Its surface and its sides were of wood. He [the angel] said to me, ‘This is the *table* that is before God’” (Yechezkel/Ezekiel 41:22).

[This verse seems puzzling:] It begins by referring to the Altar, and ends off [by referring to the same object as] a table!

Rabbi Yochanan as well as Reish Lakish explained: When the *Beit HaMikdash* [Temple in Jerusalem] stood, the Altar atoned for one’s transgressions [by way of the offerings burned there]. Now, when there is no *Beit HaMikdash*, the table [upon which one eats] atones for one’s transgressions.

Rashi:

“His table atones for him” – through hospitality to guests.

דכתיב המזבח עץ שלש אמות גבוה וארכו שתיים אמות ומקצעותיו לו וארכו וקירותיו עץ וידבר אלי זה השולחן אשר לפני ה'.

פתח במזבח וסיים בשולחן.

רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש דאמרי תרוייהו: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על אדם עכשיו שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו.

רש"י:

שולחנו מכפר עליו – בהכנסת אורחין.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Sotah 46b – There is tremendous reward for merely pointing out the correct way; how much more so for actually escorting someone.**

[When the men of the tribe of Yosef (Joseph) wanted to capture a city they could not find its entrance, whereupon they spotted someone and asked him.]

The reward for escorting another person is boundless, as it is written, “The guards saw a man leaving the city and asked him, ‘Show us the way into the city!’ And he showed them the entrance” (Shoftim/Judges 1:24). [He was then rewarded immensely. Because he showed them the way with his finger they saved him. He thereupon left and built the famous city of Luz.]

If this Canaanite, who did not even utter a word or take one step, was rewarded so greatly, imagine the great reward for someone who actually accompanies another by walking with him.

... ששכר הלוייה אין לה שיעור שנאמר ויראו השומרים איש יוצא מן העיר ויאמרו הראינו נא את מבוא העיר... ויראם את מבוא העיר...

ומה כנעני זה שלא דיבר בפיו ולא הלך ברגליו גרם הצלה לו ולזרעו עד סוף כל הדורות, מי שעושה לוייה ברגליו על אחת כמה וכמה.

The above account from the Talmud indicates that one does not have to be a “host” to perform the mitzvah of “escorting.” Rather, any person who needs escort or directions is considered a “guest” to the one who possesses the knowledge and shows him the way (Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, *Journey to Virtue*, 56:22).

4. **Rambam, Hilchot Aveil 14:2 – Escorting guests is even greater than hosting them.**

The reward for escorting guests is greater than all [other types of kindness]. It is the institution established by Avraham Avinu – he would feed passersby and then escort them on their way. Hospitality is as great as greeting the Divine Presence – and escorting guests is even greater than extending hospitality! The Sages taught, whoever does not accompany one's guest is as if he spilled blood.

שכר הלוייה גדול מן הכל. והוא החוק שחקקו אברהם אבינו ודרך החסד שנהג בה – מאכיל עוברי דרכים ומשקה אותן ומלווה אותן. וגדולה הכנסת אורחים מהקבלת פני שכינה...ולווים יותר מהכנסתן. אמרו חכמים כל שאינו מלווה כאילו שופך דמים.

Why is escorting guests considered greater than hosting them?

5. **Based on Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem Kollel, December 2009 – Escorting accords honor and leads to enhanced self-esteem.**

The Rambam's statement: "Whoever does not accompany one's guest is as if he spilled blood" is based on Devarim 21:1-9 where a corpse found between two cities is attributed to a host not escorting this guest. The Talmud relates that the Sages of the nearest town lay their hands on an eglah arufah, a cow, in atonement for the death and say, "We are blameless for his death." Do we really suspect them of killing this visitor?

Rashi explains that this guest was either not escorted properly, or he was not given the honor necessary for him to feel good about himself, so that when bandits came he was too emotionally depleted to defend himself, and so was killed. Therefore, we escort a guest for two reasons: (1) to show him the way, and (2) to bestow honor upon him, which has practical ramifications for his safety.

The mitzvah of inviting guests essentially ensures the provision of food and lodging for a visitor. However, escorting a guest is considered more important since this accords him honor, leading to enhanced self-esteem, which will help him (or even ensure his safety) on his journey.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:

- ∞ The reward for the mitzvah of hospitality is limitless and has far-reaching spiritual implications.
- ∞ There is a general principle that a person's experiences in the World to Come are based on his actions and moral choices in this world. Therefore, it follows that a person's experience as a newly arrived "guest" in the World to Come will be determined by how one greeted guests in this world. Furthermore, even something as insignificant as pointing out the way is a form of escorting, and when done with the proper intent it is a fulfillment of the mitzvot to love one's fellow and emulate God's ways, which carry unimaginable spiritual reward.
- ∞ Thus, it could be said that *guests give the host much more than the host gives the guests*. Therefore, one should *truly* "seek out guests as if each one were a wealthy person from whom one stands to realize a great profit" (Ahavat Chesed 3:2, Section III above).
- ∞ Finally, escorting guests is considered even greater than hosting them.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Chofetz Chaim: Loving Kindness – Daily lessons in the power of giving, Rabbi Fischel Schachter and Chana Nestlebaum (ArtScroll, 2003)

The Code of Jewish Conduct – The Laws of Interpersonal Relationships, Rabbi Yitzchok Silver (Israel Bookshop, 2008)