



# אורחים Hachnasat Orchim הכנסת אורחים



*Hachnasat Orchim* - showing hospitality to the stranger - is one of the major components of *gemilut chasadim*- "acts of loving kindness". The great Sages maintained that welcoming a stranger possessed a higher level of holiness than welcoming the Divine Presence. A midrash describes the tents of Abraham and Job—

paradigms of hospitality—as having tents that were open on all four sides so any stranger could enter directly. It has always been an important custom throughout Jewish history to invite a stranger home for Shabbat, and frequently people vied for the privilege of hosting a visitor to the community.

## מקורות From our Sources

From the Torah

The Example of Abraham in the Torah:

*My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought - bathe your feet and recline under the tree. Let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves.* (Genesis 18:3-5).

From the Sages (Mishnah):

*Let your house be opened wide and let the poor be members of your household.* (Pirkei Avot 1:5)

Further teachings from the Sages of the Talmud:

*When R. Huna had a meal, he would open the doors of his house and say, "Let whoever is in need come and eat."* (Ta'anit 20b-21a)

*Rav Dimi of Nehardea said: the welcoming of guests takes precedence over the beit midrash -- the house of study...Rav Judah said in Rav's name: the welcoming of guests takes precedence over welcoming the divine presence -- the Shechinah* (Shabbat 127a).

*of the one he removed. For several hours he continued taking gold coins from the purse until he was exhausted. Then he cried out, "Enough!" and this time, when he looked inside the purse, it was empty. The poor brother stared at the mountain of gold coins heaped upon the table and suddenly realized that he was now wealthy beyond his wildest dreams. The next morning his brother came to visit him and was astonished to see the mountain of gold piled upon his brother's table. When he heard the story and description of the beggar, the rich brother realized to his dismay that it was the same man he had turned away from his own door.*

*At once the rich brother ran to the marketplace. He was overjoyed to find the beggar still there.*

*"Please accept my apologies," he said to the man. "It is not like me to turn away someone in need. My wife and I would be glad to welcome you into our house and satisfy your needs."*

*So the beggar accompanied the rich brother home and treated their poor guest like a king. When he finished eating, Elijah said to his hosts, "because of your kindness, I will grant you one wish that will continue until you say, 'Enough!'" As soon as he was gone, the rich brother and his wife wished for gold. How excited they were to see gold spilling out of their purses in an endless stream. They continued pulling gold out until their entire floor was carpeted in gold. But though they were exhausted, they were not yet ready to stop. Slowly the gold mounted up to their knees, then to their waists and then to their necks, but they could not stop. Their hands ached and their bellies pleaded for food, but the sight of gold dazzled them so much that they were powerless to resist it.*

*The next day when the other brother came to call, he found his rich brother and his wife lifeless, buried under a mountain of gold.*

## שיחה For Discussion

The mitzvah of *Hachnasat Orchim* is considered to be one of those mitzvot whose rewards are to be found both in this world and in the world to come. It is maintained as a highest value, for both Jews and non-Jews.

- 1) Can you recall a time when hospitality extended to you made a significant difference in your life?
- 2) How does Hachnasat Orchim help Jews maintain their sense of community?
- 3) How do you benefit from extending hospitality to others?

### Blessing for the Study of Torah:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who makes us holy through mitzvot, and commands us to engage in the study of Torah.

## פרשנות Commentary

As mentioned in the Encyclopaedia Judaica, "In ancient Israel, hospitality was not merely a question of good manners, but a moral institution which grew out of the harsh desert and nomadic existence led by the people of Israel." For Jews, *Hachnasat Orchim* exemplifies the adage, "All Israel is responsible for one another" (BT Shevuot 39a). It is taught that Elijah the Prophet appears in every generation, to remind us what is demanded of us. Often dressed as a pauper, he knocks on doors, seeking hospitality. The welcome he receives helps determine whether the world is ready for the coming of the Messiah. In Jewish folklore, many tales are told of Elijah's adventures. The following famous Elijah story is retold by Rabbi Robert H. Loewy:

*In Jerusalem there once lived two brothers, one rich and the other poor. One day Elijah, disguised as a beggar appeared at the door of the rich brother and asked for some food. But the man was a hard-hearted miser, and he sent the beggar away empty-handed.*

*Then Elijah went to the home of the poor brother who welcomed him gladly and shared his meager food with him. When he was about to leave, Elijah said to the poor man, "Because of your kindness, I will grant you one wish that shall continue until you cry, 'Enough!'"*

*The poor brother thanked him and then Elijah departed. When his guest was gone, the poor man wished for a coin in his empty purse. And when he opened up the purse, there was a shiny gold piece inside. He took the coin out and put in on the table. Then remembering the stranger's promise, he looked in the purse again, and found another coin in place*

