

Good Shabbos Everyone. One day, several years ago, Reb Mordechai Shain was passing the corner of Main and Maple streets in Monsey, New York, on a Friday afternoon when he spotted a family sitting on the front steps of the Yeshivah Spring Valley.

With their car parked nearby, heaped full of luggage, it was clear that they had nowhere to go. "Welcome to Monsey," he greeted them. "Can I help you in some way." Said Reb

"Yes, please." the man said gratefully. "We need a place to stay for Shabbos." "No problem at all," he reassured them. "My parents live right across the street. I'll make the arrangements and come right back."

In no time, the Parimen family was settled in the Shain home, where preparations for Shabbos were in full swing. It wasn't until later, when they were relaxed and sitting around after the Friday night meal, that Dr. Parimen had a chance to tell his story.

Mark Parimen had grown up in Minnesota, but a search for the truth and a study of history brought him to understand that the ultimate truth lay with Orthodox Jewry. Eventually, Mark became an Orthodox Jew. Mark's career path led him to the medical field and then to the army. It was there that he met his future wife, and together they deepened their religious commitment.

The years of service went by, and finally, it was time for Mark's discharge from the army. One of his last duties was performing final medical examinations for soldiers who were also leaving the military. As Mark worked, he asked several Jewish soldiers if they could recommend a religious community where he could set up a medical practice.

One soldier suggested Spring Valley, New York. At that time, it was a fairly new community, but over 400 families had already moved there. "It has great potential," the soldier assured him. Dr. Parimen thought it sounded promising. "But I have no contacts in Spring Valley," he realized. "How can we get to know the community?"

"Just go to the corner of Maple and Main and park your car near the yeshivah," he was told. "In a place like Monsey— where everyone is so caring—someone will definitely come to help you out."

Dr. Parimen was a bit skeptical, but in the end that's what he did. "And that's what happened," Mark concluded, turning to the Shains with a smile. "We parked in the yeshivah parking lot, and sure enough, Reb Mordechai showed up to fulfill this mission!" (From Visions of Greatness).

Through experiencing the Shain family hospitality, the Parimen family came even closer to Yiddishkeit and was able to make new contacts and get settled in a Jewish community. From here we see the importance of the mitzvah of welcoming guests into our homes. In the case of the Shains and the Parimens, the mitzvah affected generations!

This week the Torah introduces us to the greatness of Avrohom Avinu, who personifies Chesed – doing kindness to others. Next week, we will read about the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim, welcoming guests into our homes, a midah which Avrohom excelled at. The Torah tells us that Avrohom Avinu "was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." (Bereishis 18:1)

Rashi explains that Avrohom was waiting to see if travelers would pass by, so that he could invite them into his home. When Avrohom saw that three men were approaching, Avrohom ran towards the men in order to offer them hospitality. When the guests arrived, Avrohom was in the middle of receiving the Shechina - the Divine Presence of Hashem. Hashem had come to visit Avrohom who was still recovering from his bris milah which had taken place three days earlier.

The Torah quotes Avrohom as saying "My L-rd, If I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not away from Your servant." (Bereishis 18:3) The Talmud explains this verse to mean that Avrohom Avinu asked the Divine Presence to wait for him, so that Avrohom could take care of the guests. Avrohom and Sorah then quickly prepared a large meal for the travelers. (Shabbos 127a and Shevuos 35b)

The fact that Avrohom put the needs of his guests over receiving the Divine Presence, shows the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. (ibid.) As the Sages tell us, "let your house be open wide" (Avos 1:5) Bartinurah explains that a Jew's house should be like Avrohom Avinu's home, which had entrances on all four sides in order to make it easy for guests to enter.

When members of the Chofetz Chayim household would see the Torah great preparing a bed for a guest, they would tell the sage not to bother and to let them attend to such menial preparations. The Chofetz Chayim responded: "When it comes to the mitzvah of putting on tefillin, would you also like to fulfill it for me to save me the bother?" (Love Your Neighbor p.69, Rav Z.Pliskin citing Amud HaChesed, p.12-13)

In order for us to be able to perform the mitzvah of welcoming guests properly, we will now briefly detail some basic guidelines of this most important mitzvah. A host should avoid keeping a guest hostage through excessive talking or by delaying the recitation of bircas hamazon. The host should also avoid pressuring the guest to eat too much whether directly or indirectly by serving him extra large portions. In fact, although a guest must generally do as the host tells him, a guest however need not listen to a host who insists that he eat more. (O.C.170:5, M.B.17 citing Bigdey Yesha)

Also, although it is perfectly natural and proper to engage the guest in conversation, the host should chose his questions wisely, avoiding personal questions which could embarrass the guest.

Just as the host has obligations to the guest, the guest also has obligations to the host. A guest should avoid being a burden on the host. The Talmud tells us that a guest should appreciate that his host has spent time, money, and effort on his behalf. (Ibid. Rav Pliskin citing, Brochos 58a) The guest should not ask the host questions about his business, especially on Shabbos. A guest should also do his best to avoid raising topics of discussion which may be inappropriate for younger ears. Finally, a guest should not make a nuisance of himself by staying too long or by coming too often. (Ibid. citing Pele Yoetz, Orchim)

The mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim is so powerful that the tradition among Jews in France was to make their coffins from the wood of their dinner tables. (heard from Reb Binyomin Shulman) The table is the main location of entertaining guests and learning Torah. By using the wood of the table for the coffin, we show our belief that the only thing we take with us to the next world are the mitzvahs that we do in this world. A Jew therefore brings with him the mitzvahs of Torah learning and welcoming guests which he was able to do at his table.

By following the basic guidelines for welcoming guests which we detailed above and by learning from the examples of Avrohom Avinu and the Jews in our story above, we should have the merit to warmly welcome guests into our homes for many years to come.

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