

Good Shabbos Everyone. Young Leib was thrilled that he would be able to spend Shabbos with his great-uncle the "Chofetz Chayim" (R. Yisroel Meir HaKohen of Radin 1838-1933). Leib was exhausted by the time he finally arrived to the Chofetz Chayim's home. Leib had had no sleep the previous night because of the long and bumpy train ride.

Upon his arrival, young Leib laid down for a short Erev Shabbos nap on the Chofetz Chayim's couch. When Leib awoke from his nap, he realized that the Chofetz Chayim was already sitting at the Shabbos table, reading a sefer. The Chofetz Chayim greeted his great-nephew Leib warmly. After Leib finished praying Kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv, the Chofetz Chayim called his wife to join them at the table.

After the meal, the Chofetz Chayim excused himself and went to sleep. Leib laid down once again on the couch where he had previously taken a nap. Having just slept a little while earlier, Leib found it hard to fall asleep once again. Leib got up and went to the kitchen, where he noticed a small clock. The clock seemed to be working, but it read 4:00!?! He looked outside and it was totally dark. Did the Shabbos meal take that long? Leib could not figure out what time it really was. Confused, Leib went back to the couch where he eventually fell asleep.

When Leib awoke the next morning, Leib asked his great-aunt the Chofetz Chayim's rebbetzin what had happened the previous night. Was the clock in the kitchen correct? There was no way that the Shabbos meal could have taken that long. The rebbetzin said "*I will tell you what happened...*"

In our Torah portion this week *Vayeiros*, we read about the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim, welcoming guests into our homes. 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. (Stone Chumash, p.79 citing 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.

The rebbetzin of the Chofetz Chayim began to tell young Leib what had happened the night before. When the Chofetz Chayim came home from shul Leib was in a very deep sleep. The rebbetzin wanted to wake up Leib so that the young yeshiva student could hear kiddush and they could begin the meal, but the Chofetz Chayim would not let his wife wake up the boy. The Chofetz Chayim told his wife that Leib was very tired from his long trip, and therefore he should be allowed to rest.

The Chofetz Chayim said that he would not make kiddush and begin the meal until Leib woke up. However, as it was getting later and later, the Chofetz Chayim did not want his wife to wait for him, so the Chofetz Chayim instructed his son Aharon and his wife to make kiddush and to eat the meal. The saintly rabbi sat and learned late into the night, beginning the Shabbos meal only after Leib awoke. The rebbetzin then said to Leib, "*You did indeed sleep for quite a few hours, but the Rav insisted that he would not start his Friday night meal without his special guest.*" (Around the Maggid's Table, Rabbi P. Krohn p.48-50)

The Chofetz Chayim was surely hungry and eager to commence the holy Shabbos meal. Yet, the needs of his guest were first and foremost in his mind. We can learn from the actions of the Chofetz Chayim the importance of the mitzvah of welcoming guests. In fact, 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, R.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 the basic guidelines of this most important mitzvah. Most guests have traveled and are usually hungry and thirsty. This is hinted to in the verse which tells us that Avrohom ran to meet his guests. "*Ran*" in Hebrew is spelled Reysh - Tzadi, which are the first letters of the words ra-ev - hungry and tzameh - thirsty. Therefore, a good host will offer his guest something to eat and drink immediately after his arrival. As the verse states in Tehillim "*...and You give them their food in its proper time*" (145:15)

A host should avoid keeping a guest hostage 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 (welcoming guests) 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 holy Chofetz Chayim, we should have the merit to warmly welcome guests into our homes for many years to come.

Good Shabbos Everyone.

Mazal Tov to Chuson Suchi Gelbman on his upcoming chasuna

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