



THE IMPORTANCE OF HACHNASAS ORCHIM



CHESSED IS NOT JUST A NICE THING TO DO

We've been reading and learning about the life of Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu was the pillar of chessed. The amud hachessed.

Many people are under the impression that chessed is a nice thing to do. Special people do chessed, but generally they assume that it's an elective. You can choose to do it, or you can choose not to do it. But this is not true. Chessed is *not* just a nice thing to do.

You have to know that chessed is a *chiyuv*. You have no choice. If somebody needs a chessed done and you can provide it, you are absolutely obligated to provide it. Even if you're learning Torah and somebody needs a chessed done and there's no one else to do it, you're obligated to do it, to stop learning, do it, and then go back to learning. If you're in the middle of learning Torah and there's someone else to do it, then you can let that other person do it. For a lot of people, if they see a chessed coming or smell a chessed coming, the natural tendency is to run, to disappear.

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There is a unique type of chessed that stands out amongst all chasadim, that has its own set of laws, its own *chiyuvim*, and that is the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, hospitality. The Torah singles out Avraham's act of *hachnasas orchim*, but sadly there are many frum Yidden who shy away from this mitzvah.

They might give tzedakah, they might want to give a donation, but to invite a stranger into their house and provide him with *achila*, *shtiya*, and *lina* – food, drink, and a place to sleep – if he needs it, or *levaya*, accompaniment, that is something that many frum people shy away from. They feel it's an invasion of their privacy to allow a stranger into their home. Perhaps even dangerous. How do you know if you can trust him or not? People are very quick to send a stranger to someone else. And to think that this mitzvah is a *chiyuv*! It doesn't say that you only have to do it if you're prepared and you have your whole meal ready to go when somebody knocks on the door.

Every time a meshulach knocks on your door, you have to know, you should consider whether you have a *chiyuv* to provide him with food, because he needs to eat and drink. Most meshulachim are travelers. They go from city to city. They don't have time to eat, and they show up and are starving.

I can't tell you how many times we've asked the meshulachim if they would like to eat, and they've said, "Yes, I'm starving." Even recently, I had a visitor who said, "Smells good, what's going on here?" I said, "Are you hungry?" He said, "I'm very hungry." I said, "Okay, my wife's going to prepare food." He said, "What are you preparing for me?" He wanted to know if it was going to be milchigs or fleishigs. I said, "If you want something quick, it's going to be milchigs. If you don't mind waiting, it's going to be fleishigs." He chose fleishigs. I said, "Okay, so come back after mincha." My wife and I (even in her state) ran around and prepared the guy a beautiful seuda. Beautiful cutlery, beautiful plates, like Shabbos plates. And after mincha the guy disappeared. I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I'm in a rush." I guess he got full from mincha.

But every time a person comes to your door you have to ask yourself if you have a *chiyuv* of *hachnasas orchim*. This is true even if it feels like an invasion of your privacy.

Everybody views his home as his private domain. It's your personal life; it's your private home. Somebody comes, but I can't help you, so you'll send them somewhere else, or tell them where there's a kosher restaurant. The possuk (בראשית י"ח:ד) says that when these three guests came to Avraham Avinu, Avraham Avinu gave them water to wash their feet. And the question is, why did he tell them to wash their feet? Did they use to eat with their feet in those days? Rashi says (ד"ה ורחצו רגליכם) because he thought they were Arabs and suspected that they were involved with avoda zara of the dust.

Reb Chaim Soloveitchik asks: What's the reason that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought malachim that appeared like lowly Arabs? Why didn't they appear like normal people, regular simple people and not like people who look like they might worship avoda zara? What's the pshat? So Rav Chaim said, "Do you know what the Torah is telling me? That *hachnasas orchim* according to the halacha is when the person opens up his home even to the lowliest of people." (Today this doesn't apply to goyim, but to Jews it applies.) And Reb Chaim said, because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to give Avraham Avinu a *zechus*, a great *zechus* of *hachnasas orchim*, He brought him orchim that appeared like Arabs.

To do hachnasas orchim with Arabs takes a certain level of being mafkir yourself, of being really selfless.

It's not stam. And this was what the house of Avraham Avinu was. The Baalei HaTosafos write that Avraham Avinu's home was like the street. It was poshut open for everybody k'reshus harabbim.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY!

I was once zoche to do such a type of chesed. There was a lady and another man who was with her, a man younger than her, it was the reason they were collecting money in front of Telshe Yeshiva in the middle of the hot summer. And I started walking and there were other people walking toward the doors of the beis medrash, and they were standing in front of the doors. A number of people, as they came toward them, made a right turn or a left turn.

I said, "What's the matter?" I had to find out. So I remember walking up the steps, saying, "Hello," and then, the smell that wafted off of these two human beings was something that I had never, ever experienced. Never. Pungent, strong, and they were collecting tzedakah. I said to myself, "Wow, this is an opportunity." So I walked over to them, gave them something and I said to them, "Do you have a place to stay? If you need a place to stay, you're welcome to stay in my home. I live over here down the block." And I wrote down my phone number on a piece of paper and I told them, "Make use of it if you need it." I don't know how, but these two Yidden made it from the Yeshivah to Cleveland Heights to continue their collection. That night about maybe 9:30, I received a call from Reb Hershel Baron, alav hashalom, a rebbi, a rav, who said to me in his sing-song voice, "Reb Yisrael! Do you want these guests?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "There are two people here who claim you invited them to your home. Do you know who I'm talking about?" It took me about 30 seconds to remember and I said, "Oh, the old lady and the young man." He said, "Yes." He said, "Are you aware of their condition? There's a reiach nichoach over here." I said, "Yes. And I'm happy to have them in my house." So he said, "If you're going to invite them to your house, I could tolerate them long enough to drive them from Cleveland Heights back to Wickliffe." And about twenty-five minutes later, he delivered them to my house. My mother-in-law, aleha hashalom, was living with us then—actually, we were living with her— and I said, "Mama, we have guests." And she was an aristocratic woman, this wasn't her style. She didn't see such behavior growing up. And I said, "These are very special guests." And I said, "We have to give them to eat." The old woman was a cardiac patient and she only ate certain foods.

So we prepared for her what she needed to eat. And the son wasn't playing with a full deck. And he was accompanying his mother. They said that they were in Cleveland for two weeks, basically homeless, in the boiling summer heat. They had nowhere to go, nowhere to be and they didn't speak English. They were super-nebachs. We fed them.

I took them up to their room. The mother was petrified that the son shouldn't walk off and leave her alone because I invited the son to come with me to davening. And I said to them, "My wife is very happy to wash your clothes." So I gave them a bag. I said, "Put all of your clothes in here, whatever you're carrying with you, whatever you have in your suitcase, put it in here, and we'll give it back to you refreshed."

And I told my mother-in-law, "Do you know what kind of zechus we have?" She said, "You're right." And she was so happy to join me in that undertaking. I was ecstatic.

I was ecstatic. Hachnasas orchim is a chiyuv. You don't have a choice because it doesn't say only if they don't smell, only if they use deodorant, only if they shower twice a day, if they smile. It doesn't say any conditions like these anywhere. Just like Avraham Avinu, they were *nidmu k'Arvi'im*.

Your job is to seize the opportunity. And I'll tell you even a better story.

When It Comes to Hachnasas Orchim, You Don't Make Investigations

It is well known that Reb Chaim Soleveitchik invited everybody into his house. And there was once a guy who showed up in his house who appeared to be a talmid chacham.

Reb Chaim greeted him *b'sever panim yafos*, graciously. And he was מקיים מצוות הכנסת אורחים. He personally gave him food and drink, and he set the bed for him. In the morning, the guy got up early and he looked around the home for things of value, which he put in his suitcase and walked out the front door.

When the family got up, they saw that the chashuve guest had ripped them off. So his family turned to Reb Chaim and complained, "You see what happens if you take into your house people you don't know who or what they are? But you take in any stranger at your door without being mavchin and distinguishing between tov and ra!" Reb Chaim told them, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to be mezakeh Avraham Avinu in the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, He sent him Arabs who looked like they did the avodah zarah, who were *mishtachaveh* to the dirt on their feet. Ovdei avodah zarah, disgusting avodah zarah. Why? To teach a *halacha l'doros*. That when it comes to hachnasas orchim, you don't make investigations."

The Gemara (פרק ה, דרך ארץ רבה) brings a story about Rebbe Yehoshua, who took in a guest and allowed him to sleep in the attic. Before going to bed, Rabbi Yehoshua removed the ladder leading to the attic. During the night, the guest gathered valuables from the house, intending to steal them. When he attempted to descend, he discovered too late that the ladder was gone, fell, and injured himself.

SOMEONE NOT OPEN TO HACHNASAS ORCHIM IS NOT OF YIDDISH STOCK

But you have to know that you have no right to be *choker v'doresh*, investigating a person's background and demanding that he bring a letter from the police attesting to his honesty before you're willing to help him. You have to train yourself and your children. This mitzvah is so basic that before you get married, this is one of the questions you have to ask your intended: "Are you open to doing hachnasas orchim?" And if they say, "No," you know they're lacking Torah values.

Yidden throughout the millennia opened up their homes. I was reading about the refugees in World War II who were running away and fleeing, and how in some communities they were accepted with open hearts and open hands. People who barely had anything themselves, but had more than the travelers and refugees, opened their homes, let them in, and gave them whatever they had.

Now, you have to have *chochma*. It doesn't say you have to let everybody sleep in your home. Maybe you don't have room for somebody to sleep. But when it comes to eating and drinking, you should always be able to bring home somebody who's hungry.

You have to ask your wife, "If I were in shul and met somebody who I thought was hungry, or who told me he was hungry, could I bring him home for something to eat?" Maybe your wife will say, "No. Take him to a restaurant, buy him a cup of coffee or a cheap sandwich, and send him on his way. Or send him to Bagel Nosh."

The Bagel Nosh guys are wonderful ba'alei chesed. They provide meals for all the meshulachim in Lakewood. Unbelievable! They give you a bagel, butter, eggs—it's amazing what they give you. It's a standard thing, but you have to know that this is our obligation.

Before I got married, I asked my wife—she should live and be well; may this be a zechus for her, Amen. I told her, "When I get married, I'm not coming alone." She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm coming with another man to the marriage." She said, "Can you explain that to me?" I said, "I'm bringing a homeless man along with me."

She said, "You're going to bring him to Wickliffe?" I said, "Why not? He needs a home. For many, many years my parents hosted him, and I had told my mother that when I got married, I was going to." My mother said, "We'll see." So I told this to my wife, and she said, "Could I get to meet him?" I said, "Yeah. Before we get engaged, we'll go to the house and you'll meet the man." He was an elderly gentleman, and at that point he had no known family and no support at all. I told him he was invited to come. And my wife said, "Okay." She passed the test!

That was the first time this man got on an airplane. He flew with me to the chasuna, and he came to Wickliffe with me. I got married, we had sheva brachos, and then I noticed that I didn't see the guy. After a day or two, he was gone. I started looking around and found out he didn't like it there, so he checked out. I said to him, "What? Why did you move out? Why did you leave? You just came! What wasn't good?" He said, "Everything was beautiful, but there's no good transportation. I need transportation. I need a bus or something." So he left.

This is the hallmark of a Jew. Now, if you're going to do it and it's going to make you sick and nervous, then you don't do it. Mitzvos are not supposed to make you sick, nervous, and anxious. Mitzvos are supposed to give you simcha.

DOING HACHNASAS ORCHIM BRINGS CHILDREN

Mitzvos are supposed to be opportunities. The Chofetz Chaim (אהבת חסד ח"ג פ"א) writes that if a person does the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim and is muchzak in it – not that he does it once, but that it's something he does regularly – then he's going to be *zocheh l'banim*. He's going to merit to have children.¹

Like it says in the Yalkut Shimoni, Rebbi Yitzchak says, "Whatever the Torah tells us to guard, guard." You know why? You don't know which mitzvah you're going to be able to cash in on. There are some mitzvos that pay off right away, some mitzvos that pay off in the next world.² The Medrash Tanchuma (כי תצא פ"ב) elaborates: "Some mitzvos pay off with children, such as Sarah Imeinu, who hosted those orchim, and the ishah haShunammis, who was mekabel Elisha and made a place for him."

It's amazing, because to us it would seem that Avraham was the major player in the hachnasas orchim, but really Sarah was 100 percent his partner. And that's why the malach said, "I'm going to return, and your wife Sarah will be holding a child."³ And when the malachim left, you know what they said to him? They said, "We don't really eat or drink. We're malachim. But we're going to give you a brachah. Just as you made a mishteh for us now, so too, may you make a mishteh for the son that will be born to you."⁴ Unbelievable!

¹ גם זוכה עבור מצוה זו, אם הוא מחזק בה, לבנים, כדאיתא בתנחומא פרשת תצא (סימן ב'). וזהו מה שרמזה התורה במעשה דאברהם אבינו, שלאחר שאכלו, אמר המלאך (בראשית י"ח י'): "שוב אשוב וגו' והנה בן לשרה אשתך."

² מכל משמר נצור לברך כי ממנו תוצאות חיים. א"ר יצחק כל מה שאמרו לך בתורה שמור שאין אתה יודע באיזה מצוה אתה נוטל חיים, יש מצוה שמתן שכרה בצדה ויש מצוה שמתן שכרה לעתיד לבא ויש לשעבר. (ילקוט שמעוני על נ"ך תתקל"ז)

³ ויש מציאות שמתן שכרה בגנים, כמו שרה שארחה את האורחים, ושוגמית על שקבלה את אלישע. ויאמר שוב אשוב אליך כעת הנה בן לשרה אשתך ושרה שמעת פתח האהל והוא אחריו:

⁴ בראשית רבא מ"ח: "א"ה" – ויאמרו בן תעשה כאשר דברת, אמרו אנו אין לפנינו אכילה ושתיה, אבל אתה שיש לפניך אכילה ושתיה, בן תעשה לעצמך, כאשר דברת. יהי רצון שתזכה לעשות עוד סעודה אחרת לבר דכר דיתליד לך.

There's another Midrash Tanchuma in Shemos,⁶ too. There were two people who never had sons. They only had daughters. And they did hachnasas orchim for two tzaddikim. Because they did hachnasas orchim for tzaddikim, they were zocheh to have sons. One was Lavan, and the second was Yisro. About Lavan, Chazal say, if he had a son, would he have let his daughters go shepherd the sheep? That wasn't a girl's job; it was a man's job. But he didn't have sons. When Yaakov Avinu came to his house, he was blessed with banim. This is why Yaakov said, ויברכני ה' בגללך – Hashem blessed me because of you. (בראשית ל' כ"ז).

For Yisro, it was the same thing (Shemos 2:16). ולכהן מדין שבע בנות. The high priest of Midyan had seven daughters. You think if he had sons he'd let his daughters be the shepherdesses? No. The answer is that he didn't have any sons. And once he took in Moshe Rabbeinu, he had sons.

Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his sefer Kad HaKemach, has a section called Hachnasas Orchim. He writes there that you should know that mitzvos are like trees. Trees produce fruits, all kinds of different fruits. But the main thing is that the tree itself continues to exist even after it produces fruit. So too, mitzvos produce peiros in this world, but the ikkar schar, the main reward, is in Olam Haba.⁷

Now, we learn from this that different mitzvos produce different types of peiros. He says that for some mitzvos it's arichas yamim, long life; for others, osher v'chavod, wealth and honor; and for others, banim, children. And he says that we find that with the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, the fruit and the schar it produces are children. So anybody who's careful with it will be zocheh to sons. That's what we find by Avraham Avinu. At first, he was an etz yavesh, a dry tree. After many years—many years, decades of chesed—he was zocheh. And so too by the ishah haShunammis.⁸

SPECIALIZE IN HACHNASAS ORCHIM

I have a talmid, he should live and be well, who wasn't that comfortable having strangers staying in his own living space. So what did he do? He purchased a home right next door to his own, and turned it into a professional hachnasas orchim business. He maintains it nicely, keeps it clean, and makes sure the doors have locks. People call and make reservations.

He has an upstairs, a first floor, and a basement. It's amazing. He provides meals at convenient times for the meshulachim. There's food in the kitchen and the refrigerator, coffee, tea, drinks, some vegetables. Fully stocked, mamash!

And he was koneh a shem tov for himself. His name is synonymous with hachnasas orchim. Now, there are other hachnasas orchim places in the city, but in his neighborhood, he cornered the market. And he provides achilah, shtiyah, and levayah.

We have another talmid over here whose father spoke to me. He said, "You should know, I made two very nice apartments in my basement, and I give them out for free to people who come from Eretz Yisrael and need a place to stay."

But even if you're not holding by that, at least provide achilah and shtiyah. When a meshulach comes to your door, you should say, "Do you want something to drink? Do you want something to eat?" If you're afraid he may say yes, at least give him a drink. But you should keep in stock things they like to drink. Over the years, I've learned some of the unique tastes they have. They're not Americans.

Sometimes they like brewed coffee. I had a meshulach who would come every year. He said, "The kaffeh, the coffee from last year, *host noch*? You still have that one?" I said, "Oh, you mean with the flavor?" He said, "Oh, it was a geshmak mamash! I still taste it." I said, "Oh, it's coming up. Don't worry about it."

I have people who come especially for kugel Erev Shabbos. In Eretz Yisrael, there's a funny thing. I'm not sure why, but they give kugel with a pickle. I remember getting Yerushalmi food, and that's a kugel with a pickle. So I gave kugel with a pickle, and he said, "Mamash, you make me feel at home."

I don't give Yerushalmi kugel, but it's amazing what you can accomplish and what a *roishem* it makes on them. And it's nothing, no skin off your back. Just a little effort and a little thought. Think, what would they like to drink? Maybe they want orange juice. Some of them like orange juice. Some like sweet drinks, some like sweet drinks without sugar. Some like plain seltzer. Have whatever they're interested in.

This is something you have to train your household to do. Make your home a Jewish home, and bring yourself *brachah v'hatzlachah* and *kol tuv*.

⁶ מדרש תנחומא, שמות ט"ז – שני בני אדם קבלו שני צדיקים ונתברכו בשבילן. ולא היה להם בנים מתחלה, ומשנכנסו לבתיהם נתן להם הקדוש ברוך הוא בנים, לבן ויתרו. לבן, אפשר היה לו בן והיתה בתו רועה את צאנו? אלא שלא היו לו בנים. ומשנכנס יעקב לביתו, נתברך בנכסים ובנים, דכתיב: נחשתי ויברכני ה' בגללך (בראשית ל', כז). וכתוב: וישמע את דברי בני לבן. ויתרו, דכתיב: ולכהן מדין שבע בנות. אפשר היה לו בנים, ובנותיו רועות? אלא שלא היו לו, ומשנכנס משה לביתו, נתברך והיו לו בנים, דכתיב: ובני קני חתן משה (שופטים א, טז).

⁷ ד' הקמח אורחים א' – וידוע כי המצות כלן כדמיון האילנות שעושין פירות ופירותיהן חלוקין ושונים במיניהן ועיקר האילן שהוא הקרן קיים כך המצוה יש בהן פירות בעוה"ז אבל עיקר השכר אינו אלא לעוה"ב.

⁸ ד' הקמח אורחים ב' – וכן מצונו שמצוה הזאת של הכנסת אורחים שהפרי שלה והשכר בעוה"ז הם הבנים שכל הזהיר בה זוכה לבנים שכן מצונו באברהם כי מתחלה היה עץ יבש בלא בנים ואחר שנטע נטיעה זו שהמשילה הכתוב לעץ זכה לבנים ולכן נראה לו הקב"ה במקום אילנות זהו במקום אלוני ממרא ושם בישרו המלאך שישוב עץ לח ויהיה לו בן. וכן מצונו בשונומית שקבלה את אלישע ונערכה לו מטה ושלחן וכסא ומנורה כענין שכתוב (מ"ב ד) נעשה נא עליית קיר קטנה ונשים לו שם מטה ושלחן וכסא ומנורה.