

INVITING GUESTS PART 1

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the past few weeks we discussed one of the Mitzvot (commandments) that involve bestowing kindness to our fellow man. Another of those mitzvot is that of inviting and hosting guests in one's house. A person who does this mitzva (having guests is known as hachnasat orchim in Hebrew) does in fact fulfill more than one mitzva; it is included in the mitzva of 'love thy neighbor like yourself' because we would like others to offer us meals or lodgings at times of need.

It is also a fulfillment of the mitzva to 'go in the ways of G-d', which teaches us that we should strive to emulate G-d's character traits and actions. Although there is no specific incident in the Torah in which G-d, so-so-speak, hosted people for a meal, it seems that Hashem is constantly hosting the entire world, offering us a place to sleep and food to eat! Thus, being hospitable to others is a way of emulating G-d.

This mitzva is considered so great that it is placed on an equal level of going early to learn Torah. Learning Torah is, in many ways, the most important mitzva in the Torah because it enables us to keep all the mitzvot and to develop a relationship with G-d. Nonetheless, having guests is considered as great a mitzva as getting up early to learn Torah!

Moreover, the Rabbis teach that having guest is even greater than being exposed to the Divine Presence! We learn this from the behavior of Avraham Avinu when Hashem visited him after his circumcision.¹ In the midst of reveling in Hashem's exalted presence, Avraham sees three strangers approaching. He suddenly excuses himself from Hashem's presence to speak to the strangers and offer them a meal! There is no allusion in this incident that Avraham did anything wrong, and therefore this teaches us that it must be greater to have guests than communicate directly with G-d! The reason for this is that, being like G-d is an even greater way of connecting to Him than speaking to Him!

In the coming weeks we will discuss the details of this great mitzva.

¹Parsha Vayeira