

A WELCOME HOUSEGUEST

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The innkeeper was despondent. The competition fabricated tales of his corruption, of how he swindled customers, of how he cheated the government out of taxes. They reported these allegations to the authorities, which accepted their word as gospel. The innkeeper was sentenced to spend the duration of his life imprisoned, subject to back breaking labor.

The innkeeper knew he had to do all that he could to have this virtual death sentence reversed. He hired the best attorneys and the most persuasive lobbyists to plead his case before the courts and the well connected. However, it was for naught, as the authorities steadfastly upheld their sentence against the innkeeper.

His friends and family gathered together to devise some method of saving this man from his terrible fate. After some time they had an idea. They informed the innkeeper he really only had one option: he must get an audience with the king himself. The king was known for being kind, reasoned, and equitable. He did not tolerate injustice. Perhaps if he personally heard the innkeeper's entreaties, the innkeeper would be spared.

However, it was not easy to get an audience with the king. It was even more difficult at this time of the year. Unbeknownst to his subjects, the king, on his yearly holiday, had a unique way of spending his time. He would dress up as a commoner. He would experience the sights and sounds of his kingdom as his subjects did. He would hear the word on the streets, the concerns of the common folk, and see how people felt about having him as their monarch. He would be on the lookout for unrest, for potential security breaches, and for quality of life problems. It was now time for the king to take his holiday, making the possibility of being granted an audience that much more impossible.

The king's travels took him to the countryside, to the inn of the very innkeeper who desired so greatly to speak with him. The king, incognito, lodged at the inn for a few days. He was not recognized, and he then moved on.

Not long after the king departed, word got out as to where the king had visited on his holiday. When the innkeeper heard that the king, in the flesh and blood, had been under the same roof as him for days, he became ashen. He shrieked. "I needed to speak to him! I needed to plead my case before him! Here he was, sitting at the same table with me, eating and chatting with me. I had this awesome opportunity to pour out my heart, to plead my case, to ask for mercy, and I lost it. A few days ago, he was right here, Now, he is in his palace, behind a moat with armed guards and ministers attending to

him. He is protected from all those who want to speak to him, from those who have not been called for an audience." And with that the innkeeper put his head down and sobbed uncontrollably.

The Chofetz Chaim said that this story is truly the story of the life of each and every one of us. When we are in this world, living our lives, G-d is present in everyone's home. When we have difficult times, trials and travails, He is there for us to turn to. By performing Mitzvos and studying Torah, we get His attention and He listens to us. However, there are many people who do not acknowledge His presence. They forget about G-d and His proximity. By the time these people get to His palace, in the World To Come, it is too late. The audience will not be so easily forthcoming.

"Seek Hashem when He can be found, call Him when He is near. Let the wicked one forsake his ways and the iniquitous man his thoughts; and let him return to Hashem and He will show him mercy" These words from the book of Yeshaya (Isaiah 55:6-7), our Sages tell us, refer to the present time period. Hashem, during Elul, during the Ten Days of repentance, is here, He can be found. He is in our homes. Let us not squander this remarkable opportunity. Let us make G-d feel welcome in our homes, so that He remains with us throughout the year, bestowing his abundance of blessings upon us.