

THE ANONYMOUS HOST

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayera

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 303, Milk and Eggs In Halacha. Good Shabbos!

Wishing a special Mazel Tov to Baruch Yair, his Kallah and their families!

Hospitality: A Mitzvah For The Benefit of the Host

Parshas Vayeira is the paradigm of the Torah's mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim [hospitality]. Avraham our Patriarch excelled at this mitzvah. He was a master of kindness and the host par excellence. Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, offered a number of beautiful insights into the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim which can be derived from our Parsha, from the story of Avraham.

Rash"i cites the Rabbinic teaching that to provide Avraham some respite from guests after his recent Milah surgery, G-d made an exceptionally hot day so that no one would be travelling on the roads. However, Avraham was distressed that he had no guests to whom to offer hospitality. Therefore, G-d sent the three Angels in the guise of Arab guests. Angels are completely spiritual beings who did not need and in fact could not eat the meal that Avraham provided to them. However, they feigned eating the food.

If Avraham was so distressed that G-d had to 'change His mind' and send guests so that Avraham would have someone to feed, why did G-d send Angels who could not really eat? G-d could have

sent a thunderstorm that would have cooled off the temperatures. People would then have resumed their travels. A poor person would inevitably have come down the road and Avraham could have invited him in for a meal. This would seem more logical than wasting Avraham's supreme efforts preparing a gourmet meal for the Angels to **pretend** to eat!

This incident teaches us about the nature of hospitality. Contrary to what we may think, Hachnasas Orchim is not so much a mitzvah for the benefit of the guests or the poor person. Rather, it is a mitzvah for the benefit of the host! The mitzvah is directed at the giver, not the receiver.

More than the host does for the guests, the guests do for the host [Vayikra Rabbah 34]. G-d has His ways regarding charity and acts of kindness. If someone needs food, G-d will get it to him. If an individual or an institution needs money, G-d will ensure they are taken care of. He has His ways. The only question is who will have the merit of providing the charity.

This is why the premiere chapter of Hachnasas Orchim in the Torah is told about people who did not even need it. The lesson is that the host should always remember that **he** is the one who needs this mitzvah. He should not think that he is doing his guests such a big favor. Ultimately he is doing the favor for himself.

This is further illustrated by the expression "And I will TAKE a loaf of bread" [Bereishis 18:5]. It should have said "And I will GIVE a loaf of bread." Again the hint is that when one GIVES, he is really receiving - namely receiving the opportunity to do a kindness.

In the 6th Verse, the Anonymous Host Suddenly Becomes "Avraham"

The first five pasukim [verses] of the Parsha do not mention the name Avraham. In the entire narration -- in which Avraham clearly plays the primary role -- the pasuk only uses the pronoun 'he' or 'to him'. Then, the sixth pasuk suddenly says, "And Avraham speedily went to the tent of Sarah and said 'Quickly knead three measures of fine flour and make rolls.'" [Bereishis 18:6].

Stylistically, this seems strange. If it is important to know the main character involved in this narration, the Parsha should have begun with the words "And G-d appeared to Avraham" (rather than "And G-d appeared to him"). We would have expected the name Avraham to appear at least once in the first five pasukim. If, on the other hand, we can assume that we know who the protagonist is in this Parsha without mentioning his name, then why did the Torah need to suddenly mention Avraham's name in the sixth pasuk?

The answer is another lesson in hospitality. Guests should never be made to feel that the host is personally being made to serve them. When he began to serve them, it was not 'Avraham' - the famous 'Avraham,' the father of many nations - who was serving them. They did not even realize who their host was. The pasuk speaks anonymously because that is how our Patriarch Avraham acted. He did not want his guests to feel uncomfortable with the idea that he was serving them himself.

However, in the sixth pasuk, Avraham wanted to encourage his wife and children to get involved in the act. Therefore, he emphasized his personality. The Prince of Many Nations himself was running and enthusiastically participating in this mitzvah of hospitality in order that he might inspire his wife and children to do likewise. He thereby impressed upon his family members the idea that these guests are truly worthy of being served by an important individual such as himself -- and implicitly are worthy of being served by individuals such as themselves as well.

The lesson that the Torah is teaching is that a host should always "blend into the woodwork" rather than make it seem like he is going through great effort to accommodate his visitors. This is how Avraham conducted himself and we should emulate his behavior.

If Avraham Worries About Mustard, Then So Must We

Our Rabbis tell us that when Avraham served the Angels, he gave them tongue with mustard. Rav Pam, of Blessed Memory, once expressed surprise that Avraham had mustard available. We can understand that if we peek into the refrigerator of a 'normal' person, we will find pickle relish, sandwich spread, pickled artichoke hearts, and all similar type of foods. However we might imagine that if we looked into the refrigerator of an individual known for his righteousness and piety ('Gadol HaDor') we would find just the basics. We can assume that he would not be 'into' all the condiments that are available. If we would not expect to find pickle relish in the refrigerator of a contemporary Gadol HaDor, why did Avraham Avinu have mustard in his refrigerator?

Is this telling us that Avraham Avinu only ate his hot dogs with mustard? He was certainly beyond that. He was a holy individual! Why did he have mustard in the house?

Rav Pam explained that the answer is obvious. The bigger a person becomes and the more holy a person becomes, the more he becomes aware of the needs of others. Of course, he personally did not care to spread mustard on his piece of tongue. But precisely because he is in fact this giant among men, this giant of kindness, he knows that although he does not need mustard, the average guest coming down the road does want mustard. He therefore feels that he must have mustard in his kitchen to be prepared for that simple guest who does put more emphasis on the taste of his food. Not everyone is an Avraham Avinu.

We must always deal with others with kindness and with empathy. Furthermore, in doing acts of Chessed, we must remember that a primary responsibility for delivering kindness is in one's home. "From your flesh you should not keep yourself aloof" [Isaiah 58:7]. We must take the lesson of the parsha to heart -- it is our responsibility to worry about everyone's mustard.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayera are provided below:

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