

The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

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VaYera

18 Cheshvan, 5779

The Uncomfortable Guest

Being a guest can be awkward. Of course it's fun not having to wash the dishes. Or cook. Or clean up. Or do laundry or take out the garbage or pay the bills or put the kids to bed or answer the phone or do any of the things or take any of the responsibilities that come with being in charge of the house.

Being a guest in someone's home differs from being a guest in a hotel. There, we pay for the gratuities and amenities. The kindness may not be forced or artificial, but it's bought and contingent. Staying at a hotel, we feel neither guilt or gratitude. Nor do we have to temper our demands. (We have to be polite because people need to be well-mannered.) At a hotel, we pay for what we get.

Being a guest, we're on our best behavior. We don't spread the newspaper out over the whole table; even when the host gives us permission and says 'help yourself,' we still ask beforehand or inform afterwards.

As a guest, we're dependent on others. We're dependent on them materially - for a bed, for amenities and utilities. We're also dependent in an emotional or spiritual sense. We can be a guest, but unwelcome. The host can provide food, a room, all the appropriate accommodations, but make us feel like an intruder, almost like a thief. Someone else creates an atmosphere of security, of inclusion, of belonging - we feel almost like a part of the family.

But no matter how pleasantly we lodge, we live tentatively. A guest has a temporary lease, his stay always contingent. There's nothing unconditional about life as a guest; guests stay with restrictions, provisions, conditions.

Being a guest in someone else's home is sort of like, well, being a soul in a body. The soul's lodging is temporary. It has a metaphoric room and board, but in a sense the body isn't home. The soul can't be completely comfortable in the body. After all, it has to share the body with the animalistic. The selfish, material side has first claim on the body's resources. It belongs to the animal in us and is subject to the urges of the physical.

In fact, we might even say that G-d is a guest in this world. Those who live here don't always act according to His Will. His Presence isn't always felt; even when It is, It finds Itself in the background. The Divine Presence in this world too often resembles a guest at the dinner table - invited to eat, allowed to participate in the conversation, but not the center of attention.

But everything changes when Moshiach comes. Then we'll have transformed ourselves into a home for the soul and the world into a dwelling place for G-d. The guest room ceases to resemble a hotel suite and looks like part of the house. The soul becomes content within the body and G-d becomes comfortable in His world.

Maybe that's why the Sages say that *hachnasat orchim* - welcoming guests - is greater than greeting the Divine Presence. True hospitality - a trait inherited from Abraham - does more than make the guest feel at home. It transforms our house into His home.

(by Dovid YB Kaufmann obm from <http://www.lchaimweekly.org/>)

Was Avraham a Hypocrite?

In this week's Parsha, we learn more about our forefather Avraham - a paragon of kindness and giving, a man totally dedicated to the rejection of polytheism and acceptance of the one G-d.

His kindness is evidenced when he is found sitting at the door of his tent, three days after his own Bris Milah, his circumcision. The Medrash tells us that G-d deliberately brought out a hot sun that day, so that travellers would not go out. He gave Avraham the chance to rest and recuperate.

Avraham, however, was not happy to have a break. He had built his tent with four doors, facing North, South, East, and West, only in order that guests always find an open door facing them. Now, he was upset that no guests were coming through those doors, even though the pain of his Milah was at its most intense.

G-d saw that Avraham was upset, so he sent angels, dressed as men, to be Avraham's guests - and Avraham went running to serve them. This was Avraham's dedication to kindness towards others, and friendship to all.

Avraham's hardest test comes at the end of the Parsha. After demonstrating his kindness for so long, he is told to be cruel ... to his own son.

(continued on the other side)

Not only Avraham's kindness was tested; we must also imagine what a laughingstock Avraham would have become. From an early age, he had rejected idols and promoted monotheism. He had even audaciously smashed his father's idols — for which he was thrown into a furnace, only to emerge unscathed. And he had made his life's work spreading kindness, charity, and monotheistic belief in G-d. Throughout, he had been "pounding the pulpit," telling people that sacrificing their children is wrong. It's immoral! It must stop! And now ... what would have happened if he himself sacrificed his son? All his life's work would be destroyed. He'd be a public joke. The Name of G-d would (ch"v) be a joke. Idol-worship would blossom as never before.

Furthermore, G-d promised that He would make Abraham into a great nation — not through Yishmael, not through any of his other children, but specifically through Yitzchak. It was Isaac who carried forward the same beliefs and dedication to G-d. Now G-d is asking Avraham to kill that same Yitzchak. Did G-d lie, ch"v?

But what happens? When G-d calls, Abraham says "Hineni!" "Here I am!" G-d tells him what to do, and he jumps out of bed — "And Abraham arose early in the morning..." No questions, no debates, no worry at all — G-d told him what to do, and he's running to do it.

The message is clear: Avraham did what was right — not what was popular, or what he himself thought would produce the best result. He knew that G-d demanded something contrary to his own thinking, contrary to what people might have wanted, and his priority was to do that which is good, that which is G-dly. Had he decided to be popular, he would have remained an idol-worshipper. Had he decided to remain popular — to run his new synagogue like a good business — he would have refused to sacrifice Isaac, and never would have become "the Beloved of G-d."

We are often called upon to do what is right, rather than what is popular. In the merit of our forefather Avraham, we should always merit to pass that test!

(by Rabbi Yaakov Menken from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

Community Information of Interest

October 27: Democracy, Peace, and its Discontents: The State of Israel and the Jewish World in the late 1970s. Lecture by Rabbi Dovid Katz. *A Democratic Earthquake: The Israeli Elections of 1977 and its Consequences.* This lecture will begin at 8:30 p.m. and be held at the Congregation Shomrei Emunah.

Yahrzeits This Week:

Sara Itzkowitz 20 Cheshvan - Sunday night/Monday for mother Toba bas R' Dov Rimler

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Davening and Shiurim Schedule

Friday, 10/26 — 17 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Candles — 5:53 p.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:55 p.m.

Shabbat, 10/27 — 18 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.
 Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 10:07 a.m.
 Berachot Gemora Shiur — 4:40 p.m.
 Minchah & Seudah Shilishit — 5:40 p.m.
 Ma'ariv — 6:54 p.m.

Sunday, 10/28 — 19 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:50 p.m.

Monday, 10/29 — 20 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:50 p.m.

Tuesday, 10/30 — 21 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:50 p.m.

Wednesday, 10/31 — 22 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:50 p.m.

Thursday, 11/01 — 23 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:50 p.m.

Friday, 11/02 — 24 Cheshvan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Candles — 5:45 p.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 5:45 p.m.