

An Open-Door Policy

אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך

*"If it pleases you that I find favor in your eyes, please pass not
from before your servant."*

(Bereishis 18:3)

R' Chaim of Kosov's holy teachings focused on reminding his fellow Jews to love one another, to open their homes to guests, and to give charity with a full heart. When friends came to see him, he would question them: "Where did you sleep on your journey? Where did you eat?" And if it came to light that one of his own followers had behaved stingily or lazily in the matter of *hachnasas orchim*, R' Chaim would rebuke that man strongly.

In a certain peaceful village there lived a tax collector. A group of men were once passing through the village on their way to see the Kosover Rebbe when the night turned cold and rainy. They went to the tax collector's home, knocked on the door, and asked for permission to stay there for the night. He refused to let them in. With a steady rain falling on their heads, the men were forced to continue on their way.

In the morning, they arrived in Kosov and were brought into the Rebbe's presence. As was his habit, he questioned them about their journey. They told him about the cruel tax collector who had refused them shelter on a stormy night.

"In the end, he will need a *Kohen*," the Rebbe said. He was referring to a Rashi that says, "If you withhold a *Kohen's* gift, be assured that you will need to come to him" (*Rashi, Bamidbar 5:12*).

Not long afterward, that same tax collector came to R' Chaim in great distress. It seemed that the lord of his village had ordered him to leave in three months. All the man's efforts to change the decree had not helped a bit.

“Actually,” said R’ Chaim, “it has always bothered me to see a tax collector like yourself living in a village far from any Jews, *davening* without a *minyan*, unable to answer ‘Amen’ or say ‘Kedushah’ or ‘Barchu,’ not hearing the Torah reading. How are you fulfilling your obligations as a Jew?”

R’ Chaim continued, “The primary reason you were permitted to live there was the concept that ‘*hachnasas orchim* is greater than receiving the *Shechinah*.’ By fulfilling the mitzvah of welcoming travelers into your home, many lacks were compensated for. As long as you observed the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* properly, its merit stood to your advantage and you could not be harmed.

“Now, however, people came to you, but you were cruel to them and did not let them in. In that case, what business have you living in that village? Live in a city together with your fellow Jews, *daven* in a shul morning and night, and raise your children to learn Torah!”

The tax collector burst into tears. “But how will I earn a living?”

“From this day forward,” R’ Chaim said, “resolve that your home will be open wide to all. Then Hashem will return you to your former position without any damage done.”

The tax collector accepted this resolution immediately. Hashem softened the village lord’s heart and the man was allowed to remain in his home and keep his job.

Royal Treatment

וְאֶקְחָהּ פֶּת לֶחֶם וְסַעְדוּ לְבָבְכֶם אַחֲרֵי תַעֲבְרוּ כִּי עַל כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל עֲבָדְכֶם

“I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may nourish your heart. After, you shall pass, inasmuch as you have passed your servant’s way.”

(Bereishis 18:5)

Hachnasas orchim was bred into R’ Isser Zalman Meltzer, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Yeshivas Eitz Chaim, from birth. Whenever he heard a knock on the door, he would hurry to answer it himself.

Members of his household asked, “Why do you trouble yourself so?”

“A poor man may be standing in the doorway,” he would answer.

"I must hasten to supply what he lacks!"

Once, after midnight, there was a knock on the door. R' Isser Zalman got up to answer it, as usual, but someone else in the house got there before him and called out, "Who's there?"

R' Isser Zalman grew angry. "So late at night, you ask, 'Who's there?' It may be a case of *pikuach nefesh*, a life in danger, and there's not a moment to lose."

Another time, a member of the household ran into the house gasping, "The Brisker Rav is coming!"

R' Isser Zalman jumped up, put on his Shabbos coat in honor of the special guest, and ran at full speed to the outer stairs to welcome his visitor.

A few minutes later, his family was astounded to see the *Rosh Yeshivah* bring a simple Jew into the house! There was a resemblance to the Brisker Rav, but it was clearly not the great Rav at all!

R' Isser Zalman seated the man at the head of his table with unusual honor and asked in a warm, humble voice, "How may I honor my important guest? Would you like a cup of tea, or perhaps a pastry? Or maybe you would like to wash your hands and enjoy a full meal?"

The stranger blushed and apologized for troubling the *Rosh Yeshivah*. He explained that he was about to travel overseas. His daughter had reached marriageable age, and he needed to collect funds for her wedding. He had come to request a letter of support for his cause.

At once, R' Isser Zalman took paper and pen in hand and composed a glowing recommendation, and immediately handed it to the man. He blessed the man with many heartfelt wishes for his success. Then he rose to accompany his visitor out, descending the stairs to the street and watching the man continue on his way.

Upon his reentry into the house, his students and family surrounded R' Isser Zalman, all asking the same question: "Why give all that honor to a simple Jew?"

R' Isser Zalman explained. "In truth, *hachnasas orchim* is a great mitzvah and so is the mitzvah of treating others with respect. Really one should treat every Jewish person, whoever he is, the way one would treat an outstanding *talmid chacham*. Avraham *Avinu* treated his guests royally when he thought they were Arabs. But we, for our sins, are careless of this mitzvah. We make distinctions between one Jew and the next.

"Today, I intended to welcome and honor an important figure. Was

I to refrain from doing that good deed just because my visitor turned out to be a simple Jew? Is there even such a thing as a 'simple Jew'?"

A moment later, he added, "If Heaven has decreed that this Jew receive special honor — honor worthy of the Brisker Rav — then in the end that honor must come to him!"

The Uninvited Guest

וְהוּא עָמַר עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ

He stood over them beneath the tree and they ate.

(Bereishis 18:8)

R' Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, the rabbi of Lodz, was well known for the way he welcomed visitors to his home. Another rabbi, who spent two months under R' Eliyahu Chaim's roof, told this story:

"The whole time I was privileged to be in R' Eliyahu Chaim's house, we never said *Birkas Hamazon* after a Shabbos meal without a quorum of ten men at the table. There were always about twenty people for each meal.

"One Friday night, we were seated at the table enjoying the meal when, just as the soup was being served, the door opened and an uninvited guest walked in. He took off his coat and began to sing '*Shalom Aleichem*' out loud. While he sang he paced the room, hands tucked into his belt, like a man making himself at home.

"The Rebbetzin went over to him and asked him to hurry and make *Kiddush*, as the soup had already been served and his portion was getting cold. The man made *Kiddush*, but at the first sip of wine he began coughing dreadfully, until he nearly choked. He kept up this coughing throughout the meal.

"At the end of the meal, the Rav stood up to graciously thank the man for coming, despite the fact that he had come without an invitation. The man revealed that he was a visitor in town and that he suffered from some sort of ailment. Nobody else had agreed to host him — so he had come to the Rav's house.

"'In that case,' R' Eliyahu Chaim said, 'Come eat with us again tomorrow!'"



A New Twist

וְהוּא עָמַר עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ

He stood over them beneath the tree and they ate.

(Bereishis 18:8)

One winter day, when R' Simchah Bunim of Pesishcha was just 5 years old, visitors came to his father. The Rav prepared a meal for them. As they ate, he called over his son and said, "Go, my son, and find a *chiddush* (original Torah thought) on the topic of *hachnasas orchim*."

The boy went into another room. After a while, he returned to his father.

"Have you come up with a *chiddush*?" asked his father.

"Yes," said young Simchah Bunim.

The guests, who had already heard of the child's brilliance, thought that the father had no doubt asked him to say some novel halachic thought. After they had finished their meal, the Rav said, "Let us go together and see what *chiddush* my son has prepared."

They walked into the other room, and the Rav showed them the "*chiddush*" that his son had come up with regarding the "laws" of *hachnasas orchim*: There stood several beds, well supplied with pillows and blankets. The Rav bade them lie down and enjoy a good sleep.

The guests were astounded at the young boy's wisdom and goodness.



Quick Thinking

וְהוּא עָמַר עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ

He stood over them beneath the tree and they ate.

(Bereishis 18:8)

R' Shmuel of Shinov related the following:

"My Rebbe, R' Simchah Bunim of Pesishcha, very much admired

R' Akiva Eiger. He used to tell a story about how R' Akiva Eiger was hosting a guest in his home, when the guest accidentally knocked over a cup of wine, staining the beautiful white tablecloth.

"Immediately, R' Akiva Eiger took his own cup of wine and 'accidentally' knocked it over as well, saying, 'It seems that the table is crooked.'"

Through the Window

כִּי יִדְעֵתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְנֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָכָיו ד'

For I have cherished him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem

(Bereishis 18:19)

A man once came to seek the Gerrer Rebbe's advice. "I am considering buying a new apartment. Do you think it is worth buying?" And he went on to describe the apartment, with all its assets and flaws. The Rebbe stopped him and asked, "Tell me, which direction do the windows face? What will your children see when they look out the windows? Will they see good, instructive sights or, Heaven forbid, other things?"

The Rebbe continued. "In that neighborhood there is a youth center. If the apartment's windows face this center — don't buy it. If they don't, you can go ahead and buy it. Educating our children is the most important thing of all!"

Tzedakah the Right Way

לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט

Doing charity and justice

(Bereishis 18:19)

A poor man from a distinguished family came to the city of Ostrov wearing clothes that were tattered and stained. When R' Elyakim Getzel offered to outfit him with a new set of clothes, the poor man declined. "I have no need for that," he said.

That night, as the poor man slept, R' Elyakim Getzel summoned a tailor to sew a coat in the same measurements as the torn one. When he was done, R' Elyakim Getzel switched the ragged garment for the new one.

In the morning, when the poor man awoke, he searched in vain for his old coat. In its place, he found a brand-new one that fit him perfectly. He went to his host and told him what had happened.

R' Elyakim Getzel listened, then said, "If the coat fits you, it is a clear sign that Heaven arranged this."

The Meeting

וַעֲקַת סֹדֶם וְעִמֹּרָה כִּי רָבָה

The outcry of Sodom and Amorah has become great

(Bereishis 18:20)

When R' Levi Yitzchak accepted the position of Rav of Berditchev, he made one condition: The community must not trouble him to participate in every public meeting it chose to hold. Only when they desired to institute a new law or custom would he involve himself.

One day, the leaders of the community decided to create a new law in their town: Poor people would no longer be permitted to go from door to door collecting money. Instead, public funds would go to support the poor on a regular monthly basis.

Because this was a new law, the Chief Rabbi was invited to the meeting. Upon R' Levi Yitzchak's arrival, the community leaders presented him with their proposal.

With an astonished expression, R' Levi Yitzchak said, "But I told you when I became Rav of this town I did not want to be troubled to participate in meetings unless there was a new law to be enacted!"

The city council members were stunned. "But, Rebbe — isn't this a new law?"

R' Levi Yitzchak answered, "You are mistaken. This law is not new at all. In fact, it is an ancient law — dating from the days of Sodom and Amorah, who decreed that its poor could not collect from door to door."

The proposal, of course, was struck at once from the meeting's agenda.