



BADERECH

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Vayeira: Welcome!

The revered Rav of Slutzk and Rosh Yeshiva of Eitz Chaim in the Holy City, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, was once learning with his students when one of them glanced out the window. Excitedly, the *talmid* cried out, “Rebbe! The Brisker Rav is heading this way!”

In a flash, Rav Isser Zalman jumped from his seat. As befits greeting a *gadol b’Torah*, he donned his Shabbos coat and hurried to the door to welcome the honored guest. But when the man entered, it became clear: this was not the Brisker Rav at all, but a simple Yid. A worn traveler who arrived to meet the Rosh Yeshiva.

Unfazed, Rav Isser Zalman welcomed him with warmth, offering refreshments and treating him with great *kavod*. Embarrassed, the man said softly, “Rebbe, I don’t deserve such honor... I only came to ask for a favor.

I must travel to America to raise money for my daughter’s wedding; having a *hamlatza*, a letter of recommendation from you would certainly help in my efforts to collect *tzedakah*.”

Without hesitation, Rav Isser Zalman wrote the letter. Then, to the amazement of his talmidim, he escorted the man out of the building and even accompanied him down the road a good distance.

When he finally returned, the students, still puzzled, asked: “Rebbe, once you realized it wasn’t the Brisker Rav, why did you continue treating him with such respect?”

Rav Isser Zalman smiled. “To the contrary! *Hachnasas orchim*, welcoming a guest, is a great mitzvah. In truth, every visitor deserves the same *kavod* we would give the Brisker Rav himself. Sadly, our vision has become dulled; we see differences where Hashem does not. Today, I was sent a gift from Above. I was given the chance to treat a fellow Yid properly—as if the Brisker Rav had indeed come. This time, I was privileged to fulfill the mitzvah as it is meant to be fulfilled.”

While Avraham Avinu sits at the entrance of his tent, post-op, recovering from *bris milah*, Hashem Himself comes to visit him—and yet Avraham suddenly notices three simple wanderers in the distance. With breathtaking humility, Avraham turns to Hashem and says, “*My Master, please do not pass from me...*” (Bereishis, 18:3). He runs to greet the guests, personally serving them



Mazal Tov to



**Devra & Gidon Ariel and family
on the birth of their
granddaughter**



and to



**Akiva & Rivkah Ariel and family
on the birth of their niece**

food, water, and comfort.

Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, zy'a, frames the specific act of kindness of *hachnasas orchim* as an expression of our partnership with Hashem, and as our desire to emulate His Divine ways:

The Almighty is the great *machnis orchim*. His hospitality made it possible for humanity to exist, for the world to come into being. "To be" means to share in the infinite being of the Almighty. The Almighty, like Avraham, invites people to partake in His boundless existence. Creation is an act of *hachnasat orchim*... We are just strangers whom the Almighty has invited into His "tent," which is the universe. How beautiful is the doctrine of *tzimtzum*, of contraction. What is creation if not withdrawal by God in order to make it possible for a world to emerge in space and time? Infinity steps aside and finitude is born. What is *hachnasat orchim* if not withdrawal by the master from part of his home so that a stranger can occupy the empty part he vacates?

Extending ourselves to serve others cultivates humility, compassion, and an awareness of Hashem's presence in every human being. Chazal learn from here that "Hachnasas orchim is greater than greeting the Shechinah itself." The greatness of Avraham—and of Rav Isser Zalman—was the recognition that the Divine Presence rests in every guest. Showing respect to a simple wayfarer, a Jew who turns up at our door or whom we meet *baderech*, is *kavod* given to Hashem Himself.

May we channel the alacrity of our grandparents, Avraham and Sarah, and emulate the model of Hashem's own *hachnasas orchim*—and *tzimtzum*, making room for others, whomever they may be. ■

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