Welcome!

N'SHEI CHABAD NEWSLETTER READER SURVEY ON

HACHNASAS ORCHIM

Once again, dear readers, you came through for us! Our first reader survey in 2012, on the topic of *mashpia*, generated a wealth of insights. We still receive reprint requests for our *mashpia* series. Your honest responses helped many to confront their fears about having a *mashpia* and clarify the importance of this directive of the Rebbe.

And so we decided to conduct a reader survey on the topic of *hachnasas orchim*, a *mitzvah* and a way of life for which Chabad is famous around the world. Everyone knows that if you're a stranded traveler or are hospitalized in a distant city *chas v'shalom*, you can call upon your local Chabad family and you will be welcomed like a long-lost sister. During Tishrei, families in Crown Heights open their homes for weeks on end to accommodate the streams of visitors who come from around the world.

For many of us, the mechanics of hosting week after week can be overwhelming. We asked our readers to explore some of the blessings and challenges of running an open home. We thank all the 120+ readers who participated in our survey.

We learned that hosts and guests worried about many of the same things. Many hosts said the hardest part of hosting was feeling "on display" all the time. Guests for their part are afraid of being in the way, of being a burden. Hosts worry about how the food will turn out, if there will be enough and if everyone will like it. Guests worry about what to say if they're really not hungry or can't eat what the host prepared. Hosts worry if the house is clean enough for guests; guests worry if they are creating too much of a mess. And both hosts and guests worry about their children's behavior and how it will be perceived by others. (Are we seeing a pattern here?)

Bottom line, we all have our fears and insecurities and worry about being judged by others. We all feel a bit shy and awkward making conversation with strangers, regardless of which side of the hosting table we're on. We all worry about inadvertently overstepping boundaries and making others feel uncomfortable.

Some responses were nearly unanimous: For example, all our respondents agree that it is sometimes okay to refuse guests, although people drew the line in different places. Some will refuse guests only in case of emergency, while others schedule regular guest-free Shabbosos. Everyone agrees that guests should offer to help, but some hosts really do mean it when they say you don't have to (offer anyway!). With many of the questions, though, we enjoyed a diversity of responses. For example, some hosts want no tangible gifts while others appreciate a small token; some prefer fresh flowers while others like edible gifts. The best suggestion might be to ask the host in advance what you can bring, though some hosts will have a hard time answering honestly. Also, while guests certainly appreciate deluxe accommodations, even simple homes can provide a stellar experience for guests. And we learned something about Israeli washing machines that would never have occurred to us before! –*Chaya Shuchat*

The Host's Perspective

#1 What is most rewarding about being a host?

- I was an out-of-towner and a guest for many years in others' homes. My husband and I both decided that after we got married we wanted a home where our guests would feel welcome and comfortable.
- I love seeing my children learn how to give of themselves with joy.
- I love the fact that I can fulfill a mitzvah even while I'm asleep.
- When our guests bless each other that they should have an open home and Shabbos table like ours one day.
- Having people tell me how comfortable and at home they feel in my home.
- There were times when I felt very insecure about my home or my parenting skills, and then a guest would compliment me on what a warm, chassidishe home we had. Seeing our home through our guests' eyes gave me a lot of chizuk and helped me through some difficult moments.
- It makes day-to-day life feel more purposeful and valuable, knowing the space in our house is not going to waste.
- The most rewarding part is that I know I am doing the Rebbe's shlichus (though I live in Crown Heights) and, in turn, I know my kids listen in on the long Shabbos afternoon discussions about covering hair, keeping the laws of tznius, etc., and gain tremendously from that.
- #2 What is the most challenging part about hosting?
- Seeing other kids be destructive or mean and not feeling like I have a right to tell them what to do. It's extremely frustrating when the parent is not taking care of the child.
- Some guests are needy and want to talk more than I want to.
- Managing guests and our children at the same time.
- It's annoying when guests don't offer to help clear up, set up or help in some way. I always accept help and don't like feeling like I'm just slaving away.
- Having food available for guests to snack on between the formal meals.
- When your guest gives your lock combination to his friend and tells his friend he can sleep in the bed designated for the guest when the guest isn't using it.
- Dealing pleasantly with people with serious emotional issues.
- My children's behavior during the meal–trying to keep them eating healthy, being respectful, and not fighting with each other,
- When we lived in Crown Heights we always had *a lot of guests until our family grew and we had no space. We had to move out of town to afford a house. Now we have the space* ***b"H*** *but not so many people coming and going that need a place to stay...*
- Israel isn't America and most people here [in Israel] don't have hired help. Preparing a variety of plentiful food alone, without help, is a challenge. The girls (and boys) who come for Shabbos have to sleep here so I always try to make a special effort to have a clean and inviting house for my guests.
- Keeping my kids under control and out of the guest's belongings.

#3 When do you feel it's right to refuse guests?

- Family comes first. If for any reason the guests will interfere with *shalom bayis*, guests should not be invited.

- If I don't feel it will be comfortable for guests–such as no space, or no time or energy to prepare properly for them. The exception is when they really need a place and can't find anywhere else to stay. In that case we make room but also make clear what we are able to offer–if they sleep on the couch they need to be out by 8 a.m.

- My husband is not always home at night so I can't have male guests when he is not home. We also refuse if the guest really has no plan to leave or has nowhere to go afterward.

- When we would resent them being in the house and would not fully be able to show them the *hachnasas orchim* they deserve.

- When it's been non-stop shifts of guests.

- If your gut says something is off or the guest is extremely rude.

- When the person is known to be a danger to children. My kids come first here.

- It is very important to have time as a couple without guests when first married. The frequency and duration of the alone time depends on the needs of the couple.

- If I have a guest who does not respect boundaries, by getting on my computer and going through private items, I will not allow her to come again.

- Some years, when the kids were all home and around our table, we had a rule that one of the *seder* nights was only for *v'shinantam levanecha*. It gave the kids a chance to share their *divrei Torah* to the hilt and get maximum attention from parents. The other *seder* night was for guests.



A boy who knows how to clean up fast before the guests arrive.

- It is fine to refuse guests when the guest is too demanding on your *kochos*. One guest kept me up talking until 2 a.m. and then resumed her conversation at 7 a.m. when I got up to nurse the baby. My husband wisely noted that this was too much for me, so after that Shabbos, I didn't invite her back for six months. He said if I had been firmer about my own needs, she could have been a more regular guest. She was the loser because I had ignored my needs. After that, I took his advice for future guests, learning to say, "I'm sorry, I can't talk now."

- Out here on *shlichus* we've only refused

overnight guests when we were still living in a two-bedroom apartment with three kids and it would have been uncomfortable for the guest to sleep on the couch.

- My husband isn't comfortable with large crowds or with more than one family at a time, so I have to respect that.

- We stopped hosting sleepover guests after our fifth was born, when we just could not squeeze extra people into our tiny apartment. Maybe other people would have still hosted under those circumstances, but I couldn't, so I didn't.

- It's always okay to refuse guests. There is no "must" to this. If you are not up to it, or in the mood, how can you make guests comfortable? It's your house, so it's up to you.

#4 How do guests affect the chassidishkeit of your home, and/or your children's chinuch?



Preparing the room for a guest.

- I invite all sorts of people of varying levels of *frumkeit*. My family knows we accept everyone even though we may not live the same lifestyle.

- Hosting helps our children learn how to properly host when they get older.

- The children learn to deal with different types of children, to see how my husband redirects conversations to Torah topics, and they learn to share their *divrei Torah* publicly.

- My children are part of our *shlichus* and the hosting role teaches them to influence rather than to be influenced.

- We try to arrange it so the guests don't have the opportunity to make anything *treif*.

- When a guest says or does something inappropriate, we speak to the children afterwards and use it as a teachable moment.

- It's good for children to know that there are all kinds of Jews and every one of them has a *neshamah* and something to share. At the same time, we parents must be vigilant and not naïve. We open our homes to total strangers without any kind of background check, but we cannot be "good" at the expense of our children. *Be careful.*

- I think my kids have learned how to explain certain *mitzvos*, which helps them clarify for themselves as well. They have also learned that we are not afraid of the world. It has made them stronger.

- Guests are a huge *brachah*. They are a chance to model for the kids how we care for others, teach them about Yiddishkeit, welcome them in, and have *ahavas Yisroel* no matter how needy the person is.

- The children behave with much more maturity when there are guests and they know they have to make a *kiddush Hashem*.

- In our home, even with guests, our boys keep their seats next to their father and do not get displaced, and make their own *kiddush* while everyone else listens. We also maintain our usual custom of each child sharing a *dvar Torah* or something from the week's experiences in the first course, before they are allowed to leave the

table (each depending on their age and ability to sit for a length of time). So, no matter what, the focus is completely on them and on the Shabbos theme at least for the first course. I also have a children's book of *divrei Torah* that can be used by any child who did not have anything prepared.

- Our biggest challenge is hosting not-yet-*frum* grandparents. We're obligated to welcome them and show them respect, but it's very problematic to constantly change the subject when they enjoy discussing a recent movie. I asked a Rav for guidance and have implemented his guidelines.

- The Shabbos meal in today's busy, frenetic lifestyle is the most important teaching moment for our children that cannot be sacrificed, no matter how many guests we have. While they fully benefit by sharing in the hosting of guests, they need to be noticed and empowered at the Shabbos table.

- We usually try to put our best foot forward when we have guests, so guests tend to positively affect the *chassidishkeit* of our home and are generally good for our children's *chinuch*.

- We are *shluchim* on a college campus and the conversations between students around the table can be off-color, but we try to keep it clean and *chassidish*. I tell my kids they have to be *dugma chaya* and they're happy to show their school craft, say *divrei Torah* and sing. My husband and I are really comfortable stopping an inappropriate conversation at the table or making a remark when they use vulgar words. We have to teach the students just as we teach our kids. This is part of the reason we are there.

- We are all on our best or at least better behavior around guests so the more we have guests, the more it becomes a habit.

- We find that by trying to inspire others we ourselves become inspired. We watch our kids giving over what they know to others less knowledgeable than themselves, and the "*shluchim* instincts" come out, and they are very proud! But at the same time we try to protect them by explaining to them how we differ from other people and remove them from situations or conversations that are potentially harmful.



This baby is busy making guests feel comfortable.

- We live in Crown Heights. When *shluchim* come, our children are very proud of hosting the Rebbe's *shluchim*. When it's Tishrei it's the Rebbe's guests. People come to the Rebbe! By hosting them I feel I strengthen their connection to the Rebbe and Yiddishkeit. I still pull up memories of the myriads of people that my parents hosted over the years as an inspiration to push myself to have guests in my home.

#5 As a frum, busy Jew, what motivates you to keep hosting guests?

- When we got a bigger apartment we made a promise that it would be used for hosting.

- In our wedding video my *shver* blessed us to have "*ah Yiddishe shtub, ah chassidishe shtub, ah shtub fun hachnasas orchim....*"

- I was raised in a large family. We had two and a half bedrooms and there was always room for guests. It's in my blood. I truly enjoy it.

- I love the new conversation, I love my tablescape, I love my food (and seeing others enjoy it too!). I love having people around.

- I was not brought up *frum*. Before I got married, many people were extremely generous to me, hosting me for *seudos* and even overnight. I am very grateful and inspired by their example and I want to pay it forward.

- Hosting very much motivates me to get my house in shape, to focus on what's important and not be self-absorbed.

- We took this *mitzvah* upon ourselves because we didn't have children for many years. One time a very special rabbi came to stay with us who gave us a *brachah* to have kids and *baruch Hashem* we had children after that. I still keep that *mitzvah*.

- I strongly feel that if I was blessed with a beautiful home in the Rebbe's neighborhood it is my honor to open my doors for those who need a bed, temporarily.



This baby has been welcoming guests since birth.

- Our parents always had a lot of guests, and we feel that it's the *shlichus* of people living in Crown Heights.

- This is a relatively easy *mitzvah* for me. We have a large, comfortable and now empty apartment. Why should I not open my home to people in need?

- When I was very young [growing up in Crown Heights], we lived in a small apartment. I don't think I ever slept in my bed on a Shabbos. My permanent space was under the dining room table with a blanket and pillow and I was very happy listening to the sounds of my father's weekly Thursday night *shiur* with his friends and the sound of the air conditioner humming. Having guests and giving up beds for them is, to me, synonymous with a kid experiencing a secure and happy childhood. As an older child living in a bigger house, I'd go to 770 on Sukkos and bring home Israeli and French girls who didn't have places to go for Yom Tov meals. They became part of the fun of Yom Tov, the insane mixed accents. It was a blast!

#6 If you could give your guest one piece of advice that would improve your and their experience, what would it be?

- Don't be embarrassed to take seconds.

- Please ask where to sit. Don't just plop down anywhere. I have thought hard about whom to seat where to keep things *tzniusdik*, welcoming, and appropriate.

- I don't expect a gift, as our apartment is small and we don't have room to put extra stuff. But a note or word of appreciation is always nice. Even better is when you remember us years later.

- Bring a gift. Even a $5 *tchotchke* can mean a lot to a family who is sharing their living space.

I had guests who bought us day passes for our family to the JCM, which was beyond our expectations and very much appreciated.

- Leave when you said you were going to leave. DON'T ask for one more week, please don't.

- If you bring children, make sure to wake up in the morning when the children wake up. Don't put the host into the situation of doing *negel vasser,* serving breakfast to your children, and managing squabbles.

- Don't disturb the daily routines of the house. When it's dinner time let the kids eat, when it's bath time don't hype up the kids. When the house goes quiet, respect the silence.

- Don't follow me all over the house when I need to go get a diaper or something. Don't open my drawers. Be helpful on my terms, not what you think is helpful. Ask me. I'll tell you.

- If your host does not need help setting up, ask again at cleanup.

- Let me know in advance if there are any food allergies or special requests such as gluten-free, nut-free, etc.

- Please don't wait for me to ask when you are arriving and leaving for your trip. It's uncomfortable for us to ask and we need to have the room ready and need to know when we can expect the room to be available again.

- It's not your job to help raise the children, change the level of *frumkeit* or cause strife. Just enjoy yourself and be merry.

- Know when to leave. If it's midnight and the hosts are having quiet time in the kitchen while they pack up the fridge, you should not be there. You should be gone by now.

- When I offer you a drink or some soup or breakfast, don't refuse in order to be polite. I wouldn't offer if I didn't want to give and I am happy to serve you.

- Throw away your garbage. I don't care about stripping the sheets, but it's not *mentchlich* when people eat take-out and leave the garbage around, or purchase clothing or shoes and leave all the boxes and wrapping around.

- Please make it clear to me whether you want me to chat with you or leave you alone and give you privacy. It's hard to read new people, and I want to be as hands-on or -off as you would like in my hosting.

- Try not to accept an invitation if you don't intend to come. And if your plans change, let the host know. It is inappropriate to bring other people with you unless you ask first.

- I would encourage my guests to direct their comments and questions to all the family members at the table rather than holding private conversations.

- In Israel, offer to bring your own linen. Israeli washing machines and dryers are small, slow and very expensive to run. Washing the linens after having hosted four or five girls literally takes the entire day. Guests from America often don't realize what doing the laundry entails.

- We are all human and sometimes we say or do things that are not perfect. Please do not judge your host's *shalom bayis*, the way she raises her kids, etc. It's best to simply "not notice" what goes on in the house among family members.

- Please say the food is delicious, even if you don't like it!

- Don't talk politics at the Shabbos table.

- Be generous in your offer to help, especially if your host is cooking for you. That way you can avoid the buildup of resentment your host might have over the amount of work he or she is doing for you.

- Don't complain to me about other hosts. Don't make fun of other people's housekeeping standards, child-rearing, etc. in front of me. That makes me fear what you will say about us to others.

- Don't help me discipline my kids. It makes me discipline them all wrong and I usually regret whatever I say to them in front of you because you're watching and commenting. Stay out of it. If I'm pretending to have not heard a slightly iffy comment from my 11-year-old, please don't point it out to me. I wind up trying to please you instead of doing the right thing.

- Eat what you are given. If you have been given a much smaller portion than you are used to or it's *fleishig* and you would rather be *milchig*, don't make it difficult for your host.

- I haven't space or need for more stuff. If you would like to bring a token of appreciation, bring perishables only (food, flowers). If you think you see something the host could use (more towels, for example), buy it, but be sure to include a gift receipt for easy exchanging.

- The hardest part of hosting, for me, is putting my life on hold while I'm taking care of guests. Then when the guests leave, there's a pile-up waiting for me that can be overwhelming. I'm not on vacation even if my guests are!

The Guest's Perspective

#1. What was your most positive experience as a guest?

- When I was becoming *shomer Shabbos*, the *shlucha* where I used to stay never ever told me that I shouldn't be putting on make-up on Shabbos morning... she waited until I was ready to talk about it, and then I stopped doing it. That was in 1978, and I still feel so grateful. I even called her about it a few weeks ago just to say thanks!

- I was pregnant with my first child and had nausea from morning to night. I had to travel to be at the bedside of a sick relative and was stranded Erev Shabbos in a strange city due to weather. I looked up Orthodox synagogues in the phone book and the rabbi sent a cab for me and treated me like family.

- My son is allergic to chicken and we were invited to my sister for Pesach this year. She was so nervous about what he would eat since she planned to serve chicken for Yom Tov meals. In the end, she made a special batch of meatballs just for my son, and divided it up so he had his own portion for each meal. He was sitting at each meal beaming.

- Once I was a guest at a *seder* and the family kept lots of *chumras* that I was not aware of. In my effort to help clear the table, I stacked the dishes to bring them to the kitchen. When I got there, the hostess looked horrified for a split second, but then calmly told me she would take them and they would be fine to finish the clearing, giving me the impression that I should go sit down. After she put the dishes safely aside, she came to explain that due to the risk of *matzah* crumbs which might have gotten on the table, they never stack dishes. She had put those dishes aside for next year, but she wanted me to know that it was not a problem at all. I felt bad and tried to apologize. She stopped me and sincerely said words which I have tried to emulate ever since: "It is more important that we fulfill the *mitzvah de'oraysa* of *hachnasas orchim* and focus on the feelings of our guests properly than to keep our *chumras* properly! We really don't mind!"

- I had to be in New York and my *shluchim* gave me the number of the Kugels in Manhattan, who graciously hosted me. I found out later that the Kugels didn't even know my *shliach*! I would *never* have called asking them to host

me if I'd understood that my *shliach* didn't really know them, out of shyness and out of the worldly sensibility that one doesn't impose on a stranger (i.e., invite oneself over to be their guest!) other than in an emergency.

- I remember being at someone's house in seminary. I can't say that I especially connected with the host as a person, but I do recall her sending my friend and me off after Shabbos with *chumus* and cucumber sandwiches. It was such a thoughtful and nurturing gesture. I still remember this almost 20 years later.

- We arrived in her home in LA straight from the airport, 17 people for a *chasunah*, and she sat us down to a table full of food on Friday morning. I live in Crown Heights and I find it is very difficult for me to provide food for guests except on Shabbos.



We learn to cook in large quantities.

- An Israeli woman who spent a Shabbos with us reciprocated by inviting my husband and me to her home. She wanted her anti-religious husband to meet a nice *frum* couple. At that point he would cross the street when he saw a *frum* person walking in Manhattan. Now he is a good friend.

#2 Who is your most ideal host/hostess, and why?

- A *shlucha* who took me in at age 18 after being stranded at the airport in the middle of the night. I was petrified and super shy but she made me feel like I was her own child.

- My sister-in-law! Our house was being painted and ended up needing unexpected repairs, and she took us into her (small) house for a week.

- The Bernaths of Chicago who supplied an amazing hospitality breakfast and lunch for many guests for a *chasunah*. They offered all sorts of food and teas and I was amazed when Mr. Bernath suddenly appeared with a fork which he had noticed I was missing.

- My sister-in-law for all the love she puts into each meal, from planning each person's favorite dish to setting the table with care. Her joy in seeing her loved ones so happy and cared for creates indescribable warmth.

- Our Rabbi once asked us to host a man who needed to attend a meeting on Shabbos within walking distance from our home. It was the first time we ever hosted someone we didn't know or hadn't spoken to or communicated with before he showed up at our door. Our guest was extremely grateful for our hospitality and very much enjoyed the visit and the easy walk! It seems very simple but to us it was a learning experience at that time.

- The woman who welcomed me when I was a seminary student and had no place to eat for Shabbos lunches (especially with the very short break between *davening* and *farbrengen* in those days). She became like a second mother to me and even helped me with many details of my wedding.

- I was a very quiet and shy seminary girl with no relatives in Crown Heights. I liked going to homes with a wide range of guests where I felt I could blend in and not feel awkward.

- My parents are *shluchim* and have hosted everyone from *frum* people on vacation looking for kosher food to secular people they never met before. I spent countless nights on the couch when my bedroom was given to our guests. They took (and still take) the concept of an open home to a new level!

- My parents, of course. Because by hook or by crook, whether they had the time and money or not, their house was open to guests. All kinds of guests, not just the fun, easy ones. I mean the very needy in-your-face-sitting-in-your-kitchen-until-midnight-and-then-again-at-6am-for-breakfast kind.

#3 How do you feel about being asked favors from your host while you're a guest in their home?

- As a professional it happens all the time. My response? "Please understand: I don't discuss anything related to my business on Shabbos."

- When I was single I was all too happy. Now as a mother with small kids it's not so easy and I try to accommodate requests as long as it doesn't interfere with me keeping an eye on my kids.

- PLEASE DO! I usually cannot figure out what to do to help you, but if you give me a specific job or favor it makes me feel much better.

- Depends on who's asking, how it's asked and what the favor is. I'm happy to pitch in, wash dishes, watch the kids for a little while, etc., but mowing your lawn? Nope.

- I'm happy to help but please don't ask me to babysit your kids for hours. It puts me on the spot and I don't know how to manage your kids. I'd be glad to watch your baby for 10 minutes while you run out but not for longer than that. I prefer you send me to the store.

- As a new *baal teshuvah* it was nice being asked to help in the kitchen where I could learn *kashrus* and Shabbos preparations first-hand, which is very different than learning the laws in a classroom setting. They're both valuable but hands-on is crucial.

#4 What is most challenging about being a guest?

- It's hard to ask for things. When the host makes everything available and shows me around the house I feel more comfortable.

- When there seems to be strife between the husband and wife... I feel like running away!

- One of my children had behavioral challenges which means I had to follow him around and watch his every move. In general it's not easy being a guest with small children in a home that is not used to having children around. People sometimes forget what it is like with a bunch of small kids and don't realize how tired the mother is and what normal active happy kids are like.

- When the bathroom door doesn't lock.

- If you still have kids in your home, teach them to have *ahavas Yisroel* for the children who are guests and include them in play and be kind. It can be very painful for a child to be excluded or made fun of just because they don't go to the same school or aren't in the same social circle.

- Lack of privacy and autonomy–things we take for granted at home. Suddenly having a cup of coffee is a group activity.

- I still remember the horror of realizing I'd stuffed the toilet at my host's house and would have to tell them.

- Feeling like I don't belong or I don't know where to be, so I end up spending a lot of time in my room.

- When it's Erev Shabbos/Yom Tov and the stress level and volume goes up in the house. It's uncomfortable when host and spouse are clearly at odds about something or children are fighting.

#5 If you could tell your host one thing that would improve your and their experience, what would it be?

- When I was single it was the worst thing to be alone with all men at the table when the wife got up to put the kids to bed. Maybe have the father put the kids to bed, or give me a job to do in the kitchen.

- If you put out towels and extra blankets and have a fully stocked bathroom, I won't need to bother you for anything

- You don't need to keep me happy by talking to me all the time. Trust me, I'll do fine on my own.

- Explain a bit about your regular routine so I am aware of what I can do to make things easier as your guest.

- There is no point saying make yourselves at home and help yourself to the food in the fridge and cupboards. I am not going to open your fridge and help myself to your food, which may well be allocated for someone or something else. I suggest the host should set out or serve whatever food they want the guests to have.

- Tell me where to hang wet towels.

- If you can't provide A/C, or I'll be in a room with several children, that's okay, just let me know in advance that this is what you can offer.

- Please be honest if this is not a good time for you to be hosting; don't just say yes anyway, because everyone will end up feeling uncomfortable, no matter how hard you try to hide your feelings.

- Smile and clearly communicate any relevant boundaries rather than tolerating and possibly resenting something that makes you uncomfortable.

- Don't make us say *divrei Torah* on the spot, for those of us who have stage fright or need time to prepare.

- Remember that the guest is nervous to meet and be in your home as much as you are nervous about making their stay pleasant.

- Nothing. I'm beyond grateful that they're giving up their space to host me and don't feel they owe me anything beyond that.

- Give me privacy. Don't count what I eat and what I drink, and don't talk to me about other guests (how often they showered, how much they ate, that they asked for help carrying the suitcase up the stairs).

- Be straightforward with your guests. Not everyone is good at reading hints or body language. Tell them directly what you want or don't want them to do.

#6 What was a life lesson that you learned while you were a guest?

- Being a host/hostess doesn't depend on having a big fancy guest room, fancy gourmet food, etc. It's all about welcoming your guests with a warm smile and an open heart.

- Better not to bring flowers Erev Shabbos that require arranging in a vase.

- It doesn't matter if the house is clean and the food is amazing. If the host is stressed, no one is having a good time.

- Many people invite too many guests at once and can't give each family proper attention. Better invite one family at a time, especially when you're trying to get to know *baalei batim* to be *mekarev* them. Otherwise, it's like a cafeteria and people can't open up.

- Always respect the hosts' privacy and property. Leave things in as good (or better) condition when you leave as when you arrived.
- Never push people to eat when they say they don't want to.
- Not everyone has the money or the space to have guests so it's commendable when they do. Show the right amount of gratitude.
- People have different ways of running their house and family, and it works for them. My way is not the only right one.
- No house is ever too small to host guests.
- From hosting I learned what to do when I am a guest. Before I leave, I offer to strip the beds and I ask where to place the used linens and towels. This makes hosting much easier.

EILU DEVARIM: THESE ARE THE THINGS

These are the things that have no fixed measure... A person enjoys their fruit in this world, and still lives upon their principal in the World to Come, and they are: honoring one's father and mother; engaging in deeds of compassion; arriving early for study, morning and evening; welcoming guests...

THE UNUSUAL GUEST

The parents of the Baal Shem Tov, Reb Eliezer and his wife Sarah, were childless for many years. They lived in a village and earned a prosperous livelihood. They spent very little on themselves. Most of their money was used for hospitality to strangers. Every Shabbos they would host many guests in their home.

One time on Shabbos, a guest came after the second meal. In that small village, it was strange for a guest to arrive in middle of Shabbos. Nevertheless, Reb Eliezer did not ask any questions. He merely asked him if he had already made *kiddush*, and when the guest answered that he had not, he gave him wine as well as food and honored him like all the other guests.

When the guests observed this, they rebuked the host. How could he show honor to a person who had surely desecrated the Shabbos by traveling outside the *techum*? Even regarding Avraham Avinu, who excelled in hospitality to strangers, the *Midrash* says (*Bereishis Rabba 49:4*) that after the meal he would ask the guests to give thanks to Hashem, and if they refused, he would make them very uncomfortable.

The host was very upset from their criticism and he went into his room and cried; but he remembered that by his leaving, it would be even more uncomfortable for that guest, so he returned to the guest and honored him even more than before.

It was Reb Eliezer's custom that all the guests who came to him for Shabbos stayed until Sunday afternoon, and he did the same with this guest. He gave him a

good bed, and Sunday afternoon when the guest was about to leave, he escorted him out. On the way the guest said, "I am really Eliyahu Hanavi. I was sent from Heaven to test you and your wife. Now that you have withstood the test, you will merit to have a son. When your son will be two and a half years old, you should repeat for him this Torah: 'G-d Al-mighty, the G-d of heaven and earth—you shall fear Him. Fear no creature except for Hashem.' The guest bid Reb Eliezer farewell, and on Chai Elul in the year 5458 (1698), the Baal Shem Tov was born.

(Sichah of the Frierdiker Rebbe, first night of Sukkos 5697. Sefer Hasichos p. 161. See also Sefer Hasichos 5701, p. 41)

IN THE MERIT OF GUESTS

The Alter Rebbe married Rebbetzin Sterna in 5520. Fourteen years passed and they were not blessed with a male child (they did have several daughters).

When the Alter Rebbe was by his teacher, the Mezritcher Maggid, he asked him for a *brachah* for a son. The Maggid answered with a play on words on a verse in *Tehillim* (119:9): "*Bameh yezakeh na'ar—es orcho*. With what will you merit a boy? With guests!"

(Sefer Hatoldos Admur Ha'emtza'i)

IF I HAD ONLY KNOWN...

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra was traveling incognito and a certain Yid invited him in. He gave his guest a nice room and fine food, and treated him well.

Somehow word got out that the visitor was none other than the famous Ibn Ezra, so all the scholars of the town lined up outside the house to meet the great *gaon* and hear his teachings. When the host found out who his guest was, he fell before Ibn Ezra and asked forgiveness for not having treated him properly.

"Why are you begging forgiveness?" asked the *gaon*. "You treated me wonderfully!"

"Yes," said the host, "but had I known who you were, I would have treated you even better."

Hearing this, the Ibn Ezra raised his eyes heavenward and said, "*Ribbono shel olam*, I too must ask forgiveness for not having served You properly. Had I known Your true greatness, I would have served You much better."

(Tal'lei Teshuvah p. 533; L'maan Yishmeu vol. 314)

A THREAD OF KINDNESS

A *chossid* of Reb Pinchas of Koretz was once traveling when he was suddenly overcome by strong hunger pangs. He stopped at an inn and asked the innkeeper to quickly bring him some food, as he was famished. "I'm sorry," apologized the innkeeper. "I cannot serve you because it is already three days that my daughter is in labor and having trouble giving birth. My entire household is in great turmoil. All I can offer you is some cake and *mashkeh*." The *chossid* took the cake and *mashkeh* and announced with great fervor, "You are now fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim*! And I am the recipient of the actual *mitzvah*, which means I am now close to Hashem. I therefore *daven* that Hashem immediately help your daughter!" No sooner had he concluded his proclamation than voices were heard happily calling out, "Mazel tov!"

When the *chossid* returned to Reb Pinchas, the latter said, "I see on you a 'thread of kindness,' the likes of *techiyas hameisim*!" The *chossid* revealed all that had happened. Reb Pinchas thanked him heartily. "*Yashar koach*! No *tzaddik* in this world has yet thought to give life to a child and his mother in merit of the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim*!" (*L'maan Yishmeu* vol. 162)

APPRECIATION

Rabbi Elazar, the *tanna,* faithful to his task as the *parnas tzedakah* of his community, would always have guests visiting his home. Once, returning from the *beis midrash*, he asked his family what had occurred while he was out. They told him that the people

whom they had just served had praised him highly. This left him unhappy. On another occasion, he was told that a group of guests, after being served food and drink, had spoken of him nastily.

He cheerfully responded, "Now we've received a good reward!" (*Yerushalmi Peah* 8:6. *L'maan Yishmeu* vol. 359)

CONSIDERATION FOR GUESTS

Heard from Rabbi Leibel Groner:
One year, at the end of Tishrei, there was a list of 1,500 guests, all awaiting their turn for *yechidus* before their return trip home. *Yechidus* in those days was on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

That Tuesday night, the Rebbe sat from 8 p.m. until 10 a.m. the following morning. Since we were worried for the Rebbe's health, I suggested postponing the next *yechidus* night to Thursday, so the Rebbe could rest one night.

The Rebbe replied, "There are guests here from Eretz Yisroel and Europe. If we postpone their *yechidus* to Thursday, they will have to stay in New York for Shabbos, since they cannot travel on Friday. This means they will not be with their families for another Shabbos, and the guests from Eretz Yisroel will lose another day's work, since they work on Sundays. And this will all be my fault..."

That Wednesday night, the Rebbe sat from 8 p.m. until 11:30 a.m. Thursday morning. (*L'maan Yishmeu* vol. 171)

YOU SHOULD THANK THEM!

Mrs. Tamar (Elberg) Pewzner shared this story in our readers' survey:

My parents, Rabbi Yaakov *a"h* and *tbl"ch* Mrs. Esther Elberg, were amazing role models of *hachnasas orchim* and merited to have direct instruction from the Rebbe on the importance of this *mitzvah*. My father and mother took great pleasure in serving their guests and would not eat themselves until each guest was taken care of.

My parents often refused to leave their home for Shabbos or Yom Tov despite our repeated requests to join us in the country or our home in Lawrence, fearful that maybe one of their usual Shabbos guests would have nowhere else to eat if their doors were shut for Shabbos, as most of their guests were walk-ins who came with no formal invitation.

In the 1980's, there was a delegation of mayors from Israel who came to the Rebbe for Shabbos. To make them completely comfortable, my brother Reuven Elberg and his wife Yocheved vacated their home and gave it to the guests for sleeping.

All the meals were eaten in my parents' home. A legendary cook, my mother outdid herself and made many delicacies in abundance. My father was in his glory at the Shabbos table, speaking words of Torah, telling inspiring stories from the *medrashim* and singing for hours. The mayors from Israel were very appreciative and enjoyed the Shabbos in Crown Heights immensely.

Mr. Maxim Levi, *a"h*, the mayor of Lod, invited my father as his host to join their delegation when it would pass the Rebbe at Sunday dollars.

As they stood in front of the Rebbe, Mr. Levi, a courteous gentleman, turned and introduced my father to the Rebbe as their generous host to whom they owed much thanks.

The Rebbe responded, pointing to my father, "*He* should thank *you*... and in fact, he should buy you a gift for giving him the opportunity to do the important *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim* which is greater than greeting the Shechinah."

My father heeded the Rebbe's advice and quickly bought a silver *kiddush* cup and silver candlesticks for Mr. Levi and his wife.

For more on the topic of hachnasas orchim, see "Tzippy Remembers When..." by Tzippy Clapman, in this issue.