HACHNASAT ORCHIM

Hospitality has been a Jewish mitzvah (religious obligation) for thousands of years. In Hebrew, the term for hospitality is hachnasat orchim (literally, “the bringing in of guests”).

In the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, our ancestor Abraham runs to meet approaching strangers; Abraham and his wife Sarah offer their guests a sumptuous meal and help them rest and relax. So central is hachnasat orchim to Jewish life that the Talmud (the collection of centuries-old rabbinical writings on Jewish law and customs) identifies this active Jewish value as taking precedence over the study of Torah.

Passover is a perfect time to contact an assisted living facility or your local Jewish Federation. Ask to be put in touch with a person for whom a seder invitation from your family could brighten life in countless ways.

RELATED LESSONS

Encourage your children to think of someone with whom they feel they have little in common; help them list ways in which they are not only different but also similar; finally, discuss specific ways to practice hachnasat orchim with that person – and facilitate making it happen!

True hospitality involves paying close attention to people and noticing what they need – perhaps someone to talk to, a place to feel at home, or a little extra help. This story encourages us to focus on likenesses rather than differences – and then act.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

• Mrs. Josephson didn’t hesitate to invite Meyer Levy to her family’s seder. What would you have done in her place?
• What might Meyer have done if the Josephsons had turned him away? (Try role-playing this situation.)
• Can hospitality occur at places other than home? Where and how can we practice hachnasat orchim?
• How can this story from long ago help us live the practice of hachnasat orchim at a seder, a Shabbat meal – or a play date?