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How to Make Your Home Guest Friendly: Properly Fulfilling the Mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim - Hospitality

At Anshe Sholom, our community takes hospitality seriously, and we all try to make our homes as welcoming as possible. Sometimes our guests are more religious, sometimes less religious, sometimes they may be great Torah sages, and other times we may have folks over who are being exposed to Jewish traditions for the first time. It is a challenge to make people feel comfortable; in some ways it's even an art. Below are some tips to help every home in Lakeview become part of a critical mitzvah.

1) When hosting, please be strict about community standards of kashrut. Even if the guest has different ideas - stricter or less strict - about what kosher is, if you keep to the community's standards, your guests will be assured that you are following well-accepted rulings. By following these standards you are creating a spirit of trust that will help put all your guests at ease. Please observe as well the standards regarding reheating dishes on Shabbat which are included in this mailing.

2) Many people are strict about community standards during meals, but then the liquors come out and they are not kosher. Whatever you drink on your own, please help your guests by being careful to stick to our community standards of kashrut even for dessert and after meals. Please speak to me if you would like more guidance as to the kosher and non-kosher liquors and liqueurs available. Our community does accept all Scotch whiskeys, based on the ruling of the London Beth Din.

3) Please use only MEVUSHAL wine when hosting anyone but family. Many wines are kosher but do not indicate that they are MEVUSHAL. People who are not halachically Jewish, or are in the conversion process, are an important part of our community: they will be offended if they are told that they cannot touch a bottle of wine because they will 'treif it up'. Additionally, non-Jewish staff cannot touch non-Mevushal wine; I have been in homes where non-Mevushal wine was served by someone not Jewish, and I had to stare at a full cup of wine in front of me that was not halachically permissible for me to drink. To make everyone feel comfortable, please be strict about always using MEVUSHAL wines, except with close family or your closest friends. It is a blessing that within our Orthodox shul many people who are not, or not yet, halachically Jewish are still able to feel comfortable. Please use our tradition in a way that is more welcoming, not less.

If you are hosting on Shabbat please be careful to check on the following:

a) Have you shut off the refrigerator light? Of course this is a regular halachik matter even if you are not hosting, but even if you are strict about kashrut and cooking on Shabbat, if a guest sees you have forgotten to turn the light off on Shabbat, suddenly they don't know what to think. When Blu Greenberg was our scholar-in-residence, and I

brought her up to the studio apartment where she was staying for Shabbat, the first thing she did was unscrew the light bulb in the fridge.

b) Have you provided your guests with either tissues or pre-cut toilet paper in the washrooms? One way to make a Shomer Shabbat person feel at home is for them to find that you pay attention to the same Shabbat details as they do, whether you are strict about them personally or not.

As a footnote, if you find yourself in the washroom without any torn toilet paper, the needs of "Kavod Habriot" - respect for human beings - allows you to use regular toilet paper, just try to tear it in a different way than you would during the week.

c) Have you provided liquid soap for those washing their hands? Ashkenazic Jews are not allowed to use solid soap on Shabbat, since you are creating a film and liquid out of a solid. Therefore, liquid soap is permissible, since it is just going from a liquid to a sudsy liquid.

d) Is the light on in the washroom? It may be necessary to tape light switches so that guests - Shabbat observant or not - do not inadvertently turn off your lights. Occasionally even people who are Shomer Shabbat slip up, and having tape, especially on washroom lights which are normally turned off upon exit, can save a lot of embarrassment and difficulty for the next customer!

e) If you live in a high rise, please make sure that people have access to the stairs - even if you live on a high floor, your guest may prefer to take stairs rather than having the doorman push the elevator button. Please alert the building's staff that they may have to push buttons for people who cannot ask them directly and cannot themselves do the normally simple act of pushing a button.

f) Not all your guests - even good friends - will necessarily know Hebrew well. So it is considerate to provide Benchers for Bircat Hamazon with some English - at least English instructions - if not transliterated or translated. If you cannot read Hebrew, then it is certainly permitted to bench in English. Also, take the time to announce the page of a zemer (song) before starting it and the page of benching before starting to say Bircat Hamazon. Remember, there might be that one, shy guest who will never let on that they feel uncomfortable, but who would appreciate the extra consideration.

These suggestions come to complement the main Halacha of inviting people to your home. Don't let them intimidate you: Just get people in the door, and try the best you can to make them feel comfortable. They will appreciate the gesture, and so will our community.

Rabbi Asher Lopatin