

## Marc's Journal Entry 11-26-18

### Hospitality and Inclusion

I have been fortunate as the recipient of hospitality many times. As a summer intern living in Alexandria, the rabbi of the local Conservative synagogue invited me for lunch after Shabbat services. Similarly at a synagogue in Florence Italy on erev Shabbat, and again at a synagogue in Frankfurt Germany on erev Shabbat just a few years ago, Annette and I were welcomed to a Shabbat meal. And several times as a newly arrived resident of Washington, DC in the 1980s.

If I think about it hard enough, I could probably name a dozen more instances in which, just because I was a Jew and a bit needy, other Jews offered me hospitality. It felt great each time. In foreign lands, it felt especially great, an opportunity to interact with local Jews, to know a bit about them and the community, to make a connection. Not to mention the warmth of companionship and the sating of my hunger. So many positive feelings and lasting memories from such a simple act.

*Hakhnasat orhim*, or hospitality to guests, is a fundamental Jewish value. We read the story of Abraham a few weeks ago, in *parashat Vayera*, in which Abraham (Genesis 18) is communicating with God when he sees visitors approaching his tent. Abraham breaks off with God to welcome these visitors as guests! In one [interpretation](#), Abraham actually interrupted God as He was about to speak, asking Him to wait while he attended to the visitors! Our Sages cite this story to emphasize the importance of *hakhnasat orhim*, of hospitality: “Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence” ([Talmud Shabbat 127a](#)).

Have you ever wondered why we recite Kiddush at synagogue both on erev Shabbat and at Shabbat morning services, even though many families return home and say kiddush at home? According to [MyJewishLearning](#), “Some Jewish communities of the past institutionalized the practice of offering hospitality to wayfarers by establishing a furnished home for such temporary guests. Others offered them lodging in the communal synagogue. The Diaspora tradition of reciting in the synagogue the kiddush prayer at the beginning of a Shabbat or holiday evening — a prayer usually offered where the festive meal is eaten — has its origins in that use of the community’s gathering space.”

I find this Jewish value of *hakhnasat orhim*, hospitality, to be quite beautiful, meaningful, and important. Maimonides places this with the Golden Rule: I show hospitality to others because I would wish that, in similar circumstances, others would show hospitality to me. When Annette and I were in Frankfurt, it was so meaningful and beautiful to be welcomed to a communal meal, and so we at Kol Shalom need to think about how we can be more welcoming in concrete ways.

The wonderful book, *Blessings of a Skinned Knee*, [discusses](#) how to teach *hakhnasat orhim* even to young children. For example, our tradition teaches us to greet guests at the door and escort them inside. “If children are to learn this tradition, it means that when the play date arrives your four-year-old does not have the luxury of staying in her room playing with Duplo but must come

to the door to greet her friend. If your child is very absorbed when the friend is due to arrive, give advance warning.”

*Hakhnasat orhim* also reflects our teaching that all people are created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in God's image. All, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, learning style, whatever. This extends to all synagogue activities, not just meals. If we want to have a relationship with our heritage, we will continue seeking more and better ways to welcome guests and to be inclusive.

I am so proud of the work that Ruth Szykman does in KSTT to welcome and accommodate students with different styles of learning. Our synagogue leadership is discussing ways that we can welcome people in many aspects of synagogue life, from prayer services to learning to social activities to social action work. I hope that we continue discussing this important topic, and that we continue and increase our actions reflecting this important Jewish value.

How can our members continue to create an atmosphere of warmth, and to offer hospitality in a way that marks us as a *kehillah k'dosha*, a sacred community?

I want to be in dialogue with you. You can click [here](#) to send me a message, or you can email me at [mplieber@ymail.com](mailto:mplieber@ymail.com). I am thrilled to hear from you, to get to know you better, and to hear your suggestions on continuing Kol Shalom's growth and value to you.

Thank you for your help and for your part in our *kehillah k'dosha*, our sacred community!

Marc Lieber, President