

A Universe of Chesed

by Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

Want to perform acts of chesed (loving kindness) but not sure of all the details?



Here's a handy guide to help you get started with some of the more common deeds we can do. *Please note that this guide is not a substitute for a thorough study of these mitzvos.*



How To HOST GUESTS

There is no explicit Torah commandment of *hachnasas orchim* (hospitality); rather, it is part of our general obligation to perform acts of *chesed*. Much of



our practice is modeled on Avraham Avinu, who asked God Himself to stand by so that he could attend to guests (Gen. 18:3). From this, the Gemara concludes that welcoming guests takes priority even over greeting God's Divine Presence (*Shabbos* 127a).

One should actively pursue guests and, when he finds them, he should welcome them enthusiastically. It's nice to host friends for a meal, but the intention of the mitzvah is to host those who truly need the hospitality, such as travelers and the needy. Of course, even if a guest is well-off, one can fulfill the mitzvah by welcoming him warmly.

Men and women are equally obligated in *hachnasas orchim*, but one should not invite a guest without their spouse's consent.

Guests should be provided with the opportunity to wash up and to rest. One should proactively show guests where the bathroom is because some people are too embarrassed to ask.

The host should attend to the guests personally, cheerfully providing them with food and drink. If no one else is available, the host should even forgo his regular Torah-study sessions in order to tend to his guests. If a guest declines food or drink, the host still fulfills his obligation.

Sleepover guests should be given the best accommodations, the quality of a guest's rest being of even greater importance than that of his food.



According to the Rambam (*Hilchos Aveil* 14:2), escorting guests upon their departure is a greater mitzvah than visiting the sick, comforting mourners, burying the dead or helping a bride to get married (among other acts of *chesed*). While previous generations escorted guests for much greater distances, nowadays it is sufficient to escort guests to the end of the property, or at least four cubits (about six feet). The Sages (*Sotah* 46b) had harsh words for those who neglect this responsibility!