

Hospitality – a Great Command

I was quite surprised, when I discovered the ancient rabbis regarded the main reason for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not the debauchery which had gripped these licentious communities, but the lack of hospitality displayed to visitors. This analysis is derived from Ezekiel 16, where we read, *The crimes of your sister S'dom were pride and gluttony; she and her daughters were careless and complacent, so that they did nothing to help the poor and needy. They were arrogant and committed disgusting acts before me; so that when I saw it, I swept them away.* (Ezekiel 16:49,50) In just a moment we'll explore how important hospitality is in Adonai's economy.

Pray for Adonai's helping us understanding the value of hospitality in the sight of God and man.

Unfortunately many of us have a rather narrow view of hospitality and quite understandably. Our society views this concept as being comfortable in our own homes and welcoming friends and family; however, the biblical definition of hospitality is much broader. Derived from the Hebrew, Hachnasat Orchim – welcoming guests, the concept focuses on anyone who comes within our neighbourhood, be it to Kehilah or our homes. In Job 31, we are shown the extent of our hospitality, as - *No stranger had to sleep in the street; I kept my house open to the traveler.* (Job 31:32)

There are four sins which prevent us from showing hospitality to others, pride, gluttony, carelessness and complacency. If any of these sins exist within our hearts, we will not have the room to show genuine hospitality to strangers. And just why is that important? Hermann Cohen, possibly the greatest Jewish philosopher of the 19th Century, said about hospitality - *The discovery of the*

stranger is the discovery of humanity. So what does this mean? The concept of the stranger, in Hebraic thought, ranges from those who feel strange within the community but wish to belong, to those who live within the community but have not become Jewish, to those who have converted to Messianic Judaism. The bottom line here is – a stranger is one who has a desire to be part of the community. The discovery of such a person requires us to extend ourselves forward in welcome, since this is the exercise of maintaining our humanity.

Why is there such an emphasis on the right treatment of strangers? Torah speaks to this issue many times. For example, in Exodus 22, we are told - *You must neither wrong nor oppress a foreigner living among you, for you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt.* (Exodus 22:20) and, just in case we don't believe this passage from Torah does not apply to us today, must I remind you how Adonai Yeshua, the greater Moshe, delivered us from sin's grasp, the Egypt of our lives, through His sacrifice. If we don't recognize this, then we are not of Him.

Then, in Leviticus 19, we are commanded to *love your neighbor as yourself.* (Leviticus 19:18) As we recited earlier this morning, this is one of the two great commands given to us by Adonai Yeshua. So, let's explore just what hospitality entails.

In Deuteronomy 10 we find, *For ADONAI your God is God of gods and Lord of lords . . . he loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing.* (Deuteronomy 10:17,18) Hospitality, then, is an attribute of Yahovah and, therefore, becomes one of the strongest ethical positions we can hold. There were and still are many within believing communities who do not feel they belong. Some of these, because they have no family, have difficulty making friends, are somewhat

different from others in their habits and approaches to others, often are and do feel alienated. I realize this is not what we want to hear but we are commanded to show love to those who we often consider unlovable and wish they would just disappear.

That, beloved, is not how Yahovah works. Did Adonai Yeshua give-up on Shimon Kefa, knowing he would betray His Lord? And what about Y'hudah Eesh Kiroth, better known as Judas Iscariot? Would Adonai Yeshua have welcomed him back into the family, if he had repented of his betrayal? If He did give up on Shimon Kefa and if He would not have forgiven a repentant Y'hudah, then every one of us would be outside His grace and love. Each one of us has a quirk, one or more behaviours which turn others-off and alienate us. Those who see beyond the apparent rudeness, the abrupt behaviour, behaviours which are often beyond the conscious control of some, function as agents of Yahovah by extending a hand of friendship and love. Sometimes, there is a need to rebuke, in love, when the behaviour shown is oppressive and a violation of His ethics; however, we are told to deal with the behaviour and not attack the person. Where does this command originate?

In Luke 17 we are told, *If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.* (Luke 17:3) and how many times are we to accept our brothers' or sisters' repenting – look no further than verse 4 of Luke 17 - *if seven times in one day he sins against you, and seven times he comes to you and says, 'I repent,' you are to forgive him.*" There are times, though, when those who offend us or by whose behaviour we feel oppressed, do not realize they have violated an ethical standard. How do we approach them? Here is where Yahovah's command to forgive is relevant. In Matthew 6, for example, Adonai Yeshua shares with us, *For*

if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

(Matthew 6:14) But does forgiving others mean they must reciprocate? No it doesn't. Forgiveness is not for them; forgiveness is for us, guiding us towards His high ethical standard of hospitality and keeping our minds and our hearts focused on Yahovah and His high standard of ethical behaviour.

We have some very clear examples of hospitality shown to strangers in Torah. For example, Abraham, who, three days following his circumcision, say the rabbis, 'ran' to meet the three strangers who came upon his camp, in the wilderness. Perhaps you know how painful this must have been for our Patriarch. However, this was Yahovah's ethical standard and Abraham showed honour for Adonai by being hospitable, even in the midst of pain. By this, Abraham displayed His trust in Yahovah.

Our father Abraham also showed us, through his attitude towards others around him, the imperative for us to mirror Yahovah's values; just focusing on meeting His value expectations of us allows us to claim we are set apart, Kadosh, for Him, as He commands us in Leviticus 19: You people are to be holy because I, Adonai your God, am holy. (Leviticus 19:2) Notice how Abraham's heart was eager to show hospitality to three strangers who suddenly appeared in his camp. He welcomed them into his camp and he washed their feet, in itself a defining act of hospitality. It is considered an affront to not allow visitors to your home an opportunity to wash-off the dust from their feet; however, Abraham went further and, by washing their feet himself, made himself lower in status, than he perceived his guests. What do we do today, when guests or even strangers enter our homes? Do we invite them to freshen-up, before gathering for a meal or

even coffee? Do we show deference to visitors, making them feel welcome and honoured?

Rav Sha'ul had something very important to say about this, in Hebrews 13, when he advises us, don't forget to be friendly to outsiders; for in so doing, some people, without knowing it, have entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2) To say there is a high premium placed on hospitality shown to strangers is an understatement. At every opportunity hospitality is to be shown to strangers, particularly during Shabbat and the Festivals. We show that deference to visitors each Shabbat, when we ask them not to contribute food for the Oneg and be the first to fill their plates with food. Unfortunately I am still seeing regular attendees violating this ethical standard of hospitality by cutting in front of visitors to receive their food first. They are showing the condition of their hearts, which can only be interpreted as greed.

We find the command to be hospitable to others, particularly strangers, throughout the Apostolic Scriptures. For example, in Romans 12 we find, *Share what you have with God's people, and practice hospitality.* (Romans 12:13) All too often, we find those who want to share from their surplus and, if there is no surplus, they refuse to share; that is a violation of Yahovah's command to be welcoming and hospitable. Late in the summer of 2014, Chantal & I had the opportunity of traveling to a small congregation in North-Western Ontario, about an hour's drive north of Kenora, close to Sioux Lookout, where I had been invited to preach. While there, we stayed with the Assistant Pastor and his family. Much like communities north of the Interlake region of Manitoba, food is expensive and salaries are low. The family, with whom we stayed, were 11 people, 9 daughters ranging in age from 2 to 25 years. You could tell the family knew about being

frugal, in order to make every penny count; however, when it came to hospitality, there was no skimping. Here was a godly family who knew the importance and value of being hospitable to strangers. They made us feel at home and warm, even if they had to do with a little less to ensure we were well-fed and comfortable. This was an evident practice of the family and I assume they received many blessings, as a result.

The Apostle Kefa shares with us, in 1 Peter 4, *Welcome one another into your homes without grumbling. As each one has received some spiritual gift, he should use it to serve others, like good managers of God's many-sided grace.* (1 Peter 4:9,10) What a message this passage has for us, today, beloved. Each one of us, within Kehilah, has been given a gift from Yahovah, through the Holy Spirit, and we are required, in love, to use these gifts to uplift and serve each other. This is service in love, without grumbling or complaining; this is where we pitch-in and use our gifts generously, be they gifts of manual labour or gifts of music, instrumental and vocal or gifts of teaching. I do see some of us jumping-in where we are needed but I see, unfortunately, many more who do not. These come to be fed but not to feed and this is where I personally have a problem. From surveys across North America, the vast majority of believers perceive their congregation to be the place where they are served and not to provide service. This puts the understanding of hospitality in the wrong position. What do I mean by that? Adonai Yeshua told us quite clearly, in Matthew 23, *The greatest among you must be your servant, for whoever promotes himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be promoted.* (Matthew 23:11,12) From my observations of Kehilah over the past year or so, I have seen more and more of us wishing to be elevated above others and not really wanting to elevate others,

enabling us to be humble servants. Whether this deals with tithing or offering, providing food, helping out with the set-up and clearing up or more obvious gifts, such as music, we do not have the luxury of sitting around and letting others do what is required in order for Kehilah to function the way Yahovah intended us to function.

The bottom line, beloved, hospitality is a willingness within us to share, with discernment, what Yahovah has given to us so freely. True hospitality comes with an attitude of stewardship, since We do not own anything – we are merely caretakers for the real owner – Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, the Lord God Almighty. We read of this clearly in Psalm 24 - *The earth is ADONAI's, with all that is in it, the world and those who live there; for he set its foundations on the seas and established it on the rivers.* (psalm 24:1,2) And, if Yahovah created it, He owns it.

To help stimulate discussion following this message, I raise the following questions for you to contemplate:

1. Where are our hearts? Matthew 6 tells us, *For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also.* (Matthew 6:21) Are we stingy with our hospitality, offering it only to our friends and family? Or, as good stewards of His creation, do offer hospitality to those who need it, as well?
2. Who among Kehilah are you able to invite to your home, in order for you to get to know them better? A good many of us who attend Kehilah regularly are really strangers to each other. We have formed little cliques and we tend to associate with them only, probably because we are comfortable. I urge all of us to go outside our comfort levels and invite those amongst us, whom you don't really know. Women invite women, men invite men and families invite families.

3. How are we exhibiting hospitality in our daily lives? Do we close ourselves off from others and only associate with those with whom we are comfortable? Winnipeg can be a very cold city – what are we doing to warm it up?
4. What can each of us do to develop a greater willingness to show hospitality, particularly to strangers and, by doing so, value others as God's beloved children? When was the last time you took a homeless person for a McDonald's meal or a cup of coffee at Tim's? I know that's uncomfortable; I know that is perceived to be a risk to our safety. However, I want to remind all of us of our Messiah's words to us - *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you made me your guest, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you provided them, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:35,36)* and then He provides us with the punch-line of this message: *whenever you did these things for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did them for me!* (Matthew 25:40) and *I tell you that whenever you refused to do it for the least important of these people, you refused to do it for me!* (Matthew 25:45)

Pray for our hearts to be softened, as we enter this new secular new year, extending our hospitality to those who really need a friend.

Now the floor is open for a discussion of the issues raised in His message today.