

How Do We Say Goodbye to Shabbos?

Based on Rav Eliyahu Wolf, *Me'at Min Ha'Or*, Parshas Vayeira, "How to Welcome a Guest."

Let us begin with four questions.

First: Avraham interrupts his encounter with the Shechinah to welcome three travellers. Chazal learn from him that welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. But these visitors were malachim. They did not need his food! How can hospitality to beings who do not need to eat teach us the greatness of feeding guests?

Second: The Rambam teaches that escorting guests is greater than bringing them in. Surely the meal is the main event. A traveller comes hungry, and we give him food. He needs a place to rest, and we provide it. What can a few steps at the end possibly add that is greater than all of that?

Third: Why should hospitality take precedence over receiving the Shechinah? Avraham's action establishes the priority. But what does that priority teach us about closeness to Hashem?

Fourth: We are sitting at Shalosh Seudos, with Shabbos drawing toward its close. Soon comes Melaveh Malkah, the meal with which we escort the Shabbos Queen. But Shabbos does not need our food either! What does our little meal accomplish for a guest who cannot eat it?

Why feed angels?

Why is the escort so important?

Why does hospitality take precedence?

And what are we giving Shabbos when we see her off?

These questions belong together. To understand them, we have to ask what a host really gives a guest.

More Than Something to Eat

There are two things that can happen when we help someone. We can supply what he needs, and we can show him that we care. Both matter. But they are not always the same thing.

A hungry person who receives bread has been helped even if the giver was distracted. The hunger has been relieved. The practical benefit is real.

Consider a striking example: a person loses a coin, and a poor person finds it and benefits. There can be a mitzvah of tzedakah through that benefit, even though the owner never intended the gift. The recipient was helped despite the absence of an act of generosity in the giver's heart.

With hachnasas orchim, the host's warmth reaches into the very heart of the mitzvah. A guest needs food and a place to sit. He also needs to feel that his presence is welcome. He should not have to wonder whether everyone would be happier if he had stayed home.

Imagine two Shabbos tables. At one, the food is magnificent. But the host keeps checking the time. The guest hesitates to take another helping. Every movement seems to say that the meal has gone on long enough.

At the other table, the food is simple. The host listens with interest, makes room, and notices what the guest might enjoy. There is no sense that the guest has become an interruption. He can relax.

At which table does a person feel that he has truly been received?

**A guest should leave feeling:
"They were happy that I was there."**

That feeling cannot be measured by the size of a portion. It comes from the host's attention, his interest, and his pleasure in the other person's company. The meal gives that care a form. The warmth gives the meal its soul.

This is why hospitality cannot be reduced to a transaction in which food changes hands. The guest himself must feel wanted.

What the Escort Reveals

Now the meal is finished. The guest has eaten. He has rested. He is ready to leave. At that moment, the practical business of hosting seems complete.

And then the host gets up and walks with him.

Those steps say something the food alone could not say. *I am still interested in you. Our connection did not end with the last course.* The host gives a little more time precisely when there is no longer a meal to serve.

The farewell also sheds light on everything that came before it. If I am happy to remain with you after the meal, you can understand how I felt while you were at my table. You were company I valued.

This helps us understand the Rambam's emphasis on *levayah*, escorting. It expresses the personal concern at the heart of hospitality. The final steps can reveal the meaning of the entire visit.

The Rambam also brings the severe statement that failing to escort is like shedding blood. Think of the humiliation of feeling unwanted. An abrupt dismissal can cast a shadow backwards over the entire visit: *Perhaps I was a burden all along.* The escort protects the guest's dignity as well as expressing affection.

ואברהם הולך עמם לשלחם

"Avraham was walking with them to see them off" (Bereishis 18:16). Rashi explains that he was accompanying them, believing them to be ordinary guests.

So yes, **Avraham did escort the malachim.** The Torah records his care at their departure as well as his efforts when they arrived.

The escort tells the guest:

"The food is finished. My care for you continues."

“Come With Me”

The malachim did not need food. But Avraham’s concern was complete: even while receiving the Shechinah, he noticed travellers who might need him. His hospitality began with that attention, before he served a single morsel.

Now we can return to the deeper question: why does hospitality take precedence? The **Me’or Einayim, Rav Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl**, gives us a beautiful way to understand Avraham’s request.

אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך

“Please do not pass away from Your servant.” In this Chassidic reading, Avraham asks to remain attached to Hashem while going to welcome the guests. He wants the mitzvah to be filled with that closeness, rather than performed as an empty external act.

But if Avraham hoped to have both, how does this show that hospitality is greater? Because his present experience of the Shechinah was certain. Continuing to experience that same closeness while serving the guests was something he still had to ask for. Yet he was prepared to go.

“Greater” means that the mitzvah takes precedence even when that spiritual experience is not assured. Avraham prayed to retain his attachment to Hashem while doing it.

**“Hashem, as I go to do Your mitzvah,
may I remain close to You there as well.”**

What does that ask of us? There can be a difference between wanting the joy of feeling close to Hashem and wanting to do what Hashem asks of us. Avraham was prepared to act even without assurance that the same exalted experience would continue. We can learn from him to put Hashem’s will ahead of our own spiritual enjoyment. And then we can pray, as he did, for the closeness to accompany the action.

Avraham wanted to carry that relationship into the mitzvah. And that gives our farewell to Shabbos another depth: the hours of Shabbos end, but we can ask that their closeness to Hashem accompany us into the coming week.

Escorting the Shabbos Queen

Now let us bring this to our own table. All through Shabbos we have received a precious guest. We prepared for her arrival. We lit candles, made Kiddush, and sat down to special meals. Our homes took on a different atmosphere.

But a relationship is also expressed in the way we part.

When Shabbos ends, the weekday begins pressing in. There are messages to answer, things to arrange, and work waiting. We can slip straight back into it all. Or we can make a little room at the table and accompany the Queen as she leaves.

That is the language of **Melaveh Malkah**: escorting the Queen. Rashi explains the meal through the image of accompanying a king at his departure.

The Gemara in Shabbos 119b teaches that a person should arrange his table on Motzaei Shabbos even if he needs only a kezayis. The point is striking. He may have very little appetite. Still, there is a table to prepare and an honour to express.

לעולם יסדר אדם שלחנו במוצאי שבת

“A person should always arrange his table on Motzaei Shabbos.” The Gemara continues: even when he needs only a small amount to eat.

The Shabbos Queen does not need our bread. Just as the malachim’s lack of hunger did not empty Avraham’s hospitality of meaning, Shabbos’s lack of physical need does not empty our farewell of meaning. Our actions express how precious her presence has been to us.

**“Shabbos, you have been precious to us.
We want to honour your departure, too.”**

Melaveh Malkah can express more than reluctance to part. We want the holiness we received to accompany us into ordinary life: into our conversations, our patience, and the way we care for one another. *May what we experienced with Hashem on Shabbos remain alive in what we do for Him during the week.*

The Luz and the Promise of Renewal

There is a remarkable tradition associated with this meal. The Beis Yosef, citing Shibbolei HaLeKet, records that a particular bone receives nourishment from the meal after Shabbos. In the tradition of the luz, this enduring part of the body is associated with its future rebuilding at techiyas hameisim.

Why should the meal with which we escort Shabbos be associated with the body's future renewal? What might connect our farewell to Shabbos with Hashem's promise of techiyas hameisim?

Perhaps we can understand a beautiful middah k'neged middah here.

We accompany Shabbos as she departs. We show that our attachment continues beyond the time when her presence is immediately felt. And we place our trust in Hashem, Whose care accompanies us throughout our lives and continues even beyond death.

Hashem has accompanied us through childhood and maturity, through strength and weakness, through times when we could see His kindness and times when we struggled to understand. The promise of techiyas hameisim tells us that even the body's death is not the end of His care.

The body is destined for renewal. The tradition of the luz gives us an image of that continuing connection: the person is not forgotten, and the future has not been closed.

**We accompany His Shabbos at her departure.
He accompanies us through every stage of our journey,
even beyond this life.**

The message is one of enduring relationship: *a departure need not mean abandonment*. What we cannot see with our eyes can still be held within Hashem's faithful care.

And now a story can help us feel what it means to care for another person so completely that even the way a visit ends has been thought through.

The Guests Who Insisted on Paying

On the night of bedikas chametz in 5686, 1926, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld had finished searching his home in the Jewish Quarter of Yerushalayim. He sat down to study the halachos of Pesach. Then came a knock.

Four visitors from Budapest wanted to join his Seder: Rav Shimon Hirschler, a dayan of Pressburg; Reb Dov Kastner, a communal activist and benefactor; Reb Mordechai Meshulam Levin; and Reb Avraham Cohen.

They wished to hear his telling of Yetzias Mitzrayim and his Shir HaShirim. They also insisted on paying for their hospitality.

He agreed to receive them, and accepted their payment. That was surprising: he was known for refusing monetary gifts. One of the visitors put down banknotes, and he took them.

He told the Rebbetzin, with a play on the words of the plague of locusts, that tomorrow there would be “four within your borders.” He was speaking of their four guests. He also explained that they had paid generously.

The Seder continued almost until dawn. There was meat, fish, choice wine, and good matzos. The guests felt free to ask for more: they had paid. Before they left, he asked where they were staying. It was the Amdursky Hotel.

**They thought that they had paid for a Seder.
He was thinking about how to make them feel at home.**

A Visit to the Hotel

On the second day of Yom Tov, Rav Yosef Chaim came to their hotel. The visitors from abroad were still observing Yom Tov; for him, in Eretz Yisrael, it was already Chol Hamoed.

Walking with his cane, he came into the hotel lobby and asked for the visitors. They were still davening. Afterwards, they received him in their room. He took an interest in their visit to Yerushalayim and their enjoyment of the Seder.

Then he took out their money and placed it beneath the tablecloth.

He returned it at a time when they could not handle it and press it back on him. The guests wanted to understand. Why had he accepted payment in the first place if he intended to give everything back?

His explanation revealed the purpose of the whole arrangement. He had wanted to host them wholeheartedly. But he also wanted them to eat comfortably, without feeling like needy people accepting someone else's charity. By accepting payment, he had allowed them to feel at home and conduct themselves freely at his table.

Now the meal was over, and he could return what he had never intended to keep.

Think about the care involved. A host can put beautiful food on the table and still leave a guest feeling constrained. These men had themselves asked to pay. He understood that accepting their money would help them enjoy what he wanted to give.

Then he made a personal visit to complete the kindness. At the table, he had protected their ease. Afterwards, he returned their money in a way that prevented an immediate struggle over giving it back.

**He made room for more than their hunger.
He made room for their dignity.**

We can hear the question behind such hospitality: **What will help this person receive the kindness with a full heart?** Sometimes a person needs a helping of food. Sometimes he needs the freedom to ask for that helping without embarrassment. A thoughtful host notices both.

The Food Is Finished. The Care Continues.

That is a fitting thought to take from this table into Melaveh Malkah. Avraham's care did not end when the food was served. He walked with his guests. Rav Yosef Chaim's care did not end when the Seder was over. He went to their hotel.

And our honour for Shabbos can continue into the moment of departure. We arrange a table, even for a little food, because the Queen has been precious to us.

Like Avraham's request to remain close to Hashem while doing the mitzvah, our farewell can carry a prayer: *May the closeness of Shabbos come with us into the week.*

As we accompany her, we can remember the One Who accompanies us: through all the changes of life, beyond what we can see, toward the renewal He has promised.

Shabbos is leaving.

Our love for Shabbos can come with us.

Sources and Story References

The central teaching: Rav Eliyahu Wolf, *Me'at Min Ha'Or*, Parshas Vayeira, "Keitzad Me'archim," printed pp. 35-38; discussion drawing on *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 25.

Avraham and the malachim: Bereishis 18:1-8, 16; Rashi to 18:16, "leshalcham"; Shabbos 127a, the greatness of hachnasas orchim. **The escort:** Rambam, Hilchos Avel 14:2.

Closeness to Hashem while welcoming guests: Me'or Einayim, Vayeira, sections 6-9, especially 8-9 (Sefaria numbering). This is a Chassidic reading of Bereishis 18:3; Rashi there explains the request as asking Hashem to wait. The application to accompanying Shabbos into the week is developed here.

Melaveh Malkah: Shabbos 119b and Rashi there; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 300. **The enduring bone:** Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim 300, citing Shibbolei HaLeket; Bereishis Rabbah 28:3; see also Elijah Rabbah 300:3. The proposed middah k'neged middah connecting our escort of Shabbos with Hashem's continuing accompaniment is the application developed in this class; it is not a claim that eating this meal determines a person's resurrection.

The Sonnenfeld story: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Chashukei Chemed*, Pesachim 107b, citing *Chochmas Chaim*, records the payment, the visit to the hotel on the guests' second day of Yom Tov, and the reason for accepting and returning their money.

The additional setting, visitors' names, Seder details, and wordplay appear in the Pesach 5786 collection *A Geshmake Vort*, pp. 25-26, citing *Bedor Tahapuchos*, p. 195. That biography page was not directly inspected. The story above paraphrases the published accounts; the reflections following it develop their application to the class.

[Me'or Einayim, Vayeira 6-9](#)

[Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim 107b](#)

[A Geshmake Vort, Pesach 5786 \(pp. 25-26\)](#)

[Melaveh Malkah and the luz: source discussion](#)