



Center for Relational Judaism

How Good!

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד.

Psalm 133:1

Hinei ma tov u'ma na'im

Hey! Look how good and really pleasing it is....

Shevet Achim...

For people to sit/dwell/be...

Gam Yachad...

Together... really!

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Parashat Vayera

פרשת וירא

פרק יז

א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה, בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרָא; וְהוּא יָשָׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל, כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם.

ב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו, וַיֵּרָא, וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים, נֹצְבִים עָלָיו; וַיֵּרָא, וַיֵּרַץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל, וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ, אַרְצָה.

ג וַיֹּאמֶר: אֲדֹנָי, אִם-נָא מְצֹאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ--אֵל-נָא תַעֲבֹר, מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ.

ד יִקַּח-נָא מֵעֵט-מַיִם, וְרוּחְצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם; וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ, תַּחַת הָעֵץ.

ה וְאָקַחַה פַת-לֶחֶם וְסָעְדוּ לִבְכֶם, אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ--כִּי-עַל-כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם, עַל-עַבְדְּכֶם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה כַאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ.

ו וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה, אֶל-שָׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר, מַהֲרִי שְׁלֵשׁ סָאִים קִמַּח סֶלֶת--לוֹשִׁי, וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת.

ז וְאֵל-הַבָּקָר, רָץ אַבְרָהָם; וַיִּקַּח בֶּן-בָּקָר רֶךְ וְטוֹב, וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנֶּעֱר, וַיִּמְהַר, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ.

ח וַיִּקַּח חֲמֹאָה וְחֶלֶב, וּבֶן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וַיִּתֵּן, לַפְּנֵיהֶם; וְהוּא-עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ, וַיֹּאכְלוּ.

Genesis 18:1 – 22:24 – Va'yera

¹ The Lord appeared to him by the terebinths (oak trees) of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. ² Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, ³ he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. ⁵ And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" ⁷ Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

7 TIPS FOR GREAT GREETING

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the presence of the other
Don't ignore anyone.
Don't make a person feel like an "interruption."
2. **APPROACH** people with an attitude of welcome.
Be "enthusiastically friendly."
Make the first move.
Watch your body language.
Make eye contact.
Smile (or show empathy).
3. **GREET** the other with the appropriate greeting:
"Welcome!"
"Shabbat Shalom" or holiday greeting
"Mazel tov!"
"I'm sorry for your loss"
4. **HELP** the other with assistance and/or directions.
"May I help you?"
"The sanctuary is down the hall and to the left."
"I'm going there myself. Come with me."
"Here is the book we'll be using this evening."
"We're on page 15."
"Please take my book... We're on page 15 at the top."
5. **ANSWER** all questions with respect.
There is no such thing as a stupid Jewish question.
"I don't know, but I'll find out and get back to you."
Follow through with the answer.
6. **INTRODUCE** new people to others.
Connect a newcomer to at least one other person.
7. **THANK** people for coming.
"Thanks for joining us tonight."
"It was wonderful to see you here today."
Wave: "Shabbat Shalom... see you soon."
"Thanks for stopping by the office. Hope to see you Friday night, at the model Seder, at the social justice meeting..."

12 Principles of Relational Engagement

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

Shabbat shalom – You’re Doing It Wrong!

by Rachel Stern (www.myjewishlearning.com)



My family hadn’t been to synagogue in awhile. Even though I’m a Jewish professional myself, it happens—largely because while I love starting the weekend with a Shabbat evening service, I am married to a man who, despite being Jewish, could not be less interested in most Jewish activities like Shabbat services. But recently there was a service honoring a dear friend, and even my husband agreed that we needed to be there.

We walked in ready for services and to show the support of our friend. We found our seats and settled in for our worship experience, which I really was in the mood for this particular Shabbat. As soon as we sat down, an older man – a man we both know, and who sits on the executive committee of the board – leaned in to whisper something to my husband. At first, my husband smiled, sure he was about to be given a warm greeting.

I could not hear the words the man said, but I saw my husband’s face drop and then he quickly got up and grabbed a *kippah*. Instead of being wished a Shabbat Shalom or being told “nice to see you,” my husband was told that he needed to put a yarmulke on his head ASAP.

As he sat back down, he looked at me, now with a look of frustration, and said “This is why I don’t want to come to services.”

I could not blame him one bit!

Seriously, that is how we greet our fellow congregants? Is this the exchange we want members of our synagogue communities having with each other as we welcome Shabbat? Basically, the only words of welcome that were shared with my husband was letting him know that he was doing it wrong.

I immediately thought of the works of my friend and colleague Dr. Ron Wolfson, and how he brilliantly taught all of us how important the act of welcoming is, and how creating moments of connection and building relationships is vital to the survival of our synagogues. How could we know so much and still get it so wrong?

Now I know that we can't let one person's comments shape an entire congregation—yet it can, and it does, for many people. What if my husband was new and was stepping into the synagogue for the first time, hoping that it would be a place for him and instead of being greeted, welcomed or invited to dinner after services, he was merely told that he needed to put on a yarmulke? Would he come back? How would he feel about the community he encountered?

How does it come to be that congregants take on the role of gatekeeper instead of welcomer, greeter and connector? I in no way want to minimize the importance of ritual decisions that congregations make such as men wearing yarmulkes in services, but how can we share these customs in a mensch-y way? Are we really willing to put our customs ahead of our community?

In the Jewish education world we strive to create the balance of creating not only literate Jews but also Jews who feel comfortable being Jewish. And yet this instance describes a scenario in which other Jews are undoing the comfort and confidence we have worked so hard to instill in our members.

I watched my husband throughout the service, and he was disconnected and even seemed like he felt shamed. He was ready to leave the moment services concluded. The experience was ruined for me too. I was ready to be in the space and to pray and I just couldn't stop thinking about the situation. We were in the building for five minutes, and this one sentence completely shifted our experience.

So how do we fix this? All of our congregations have boards and staff and many of them talk about setting a welcoming tone but how many congregations have training for this? How many congregations really take the time to imagine the tone and vibe they want for their congregation and then create programs and experiences that make it happen... especially here in the South, where we're supposed to be known for our hospitality?

What would have really happened if my husband sat through services with no *kippah*?

Probably nothing.

But what would have happened if the man who leaned into to him whispered, "Shabbat Shalom. I'm so glad to see you here!"?

Probably everything!