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AN ESSAY ON THE CONCEPT OF *HOSPITALITY* IN TURKISH CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

The aim of this paper is to show the concept of *hospitality* in the Turkish culture and language. Proverbs see, to be the best carrier of culture, as they have transmitted cultural content from generation to generation for centuries. These shortest literary texts, which since its creation have not changed, still exist in the language. On the other hand, the society in whose language they appeared, lives according to the principles contained therein.

Hospitality is one of the distinguishing features of the Turkish society. Both good neighborly relations, as well as receiving guest and respect for them are the subject of a number of proverbs. Among the most important elements are: providing guests with the best, responsibility of the host for the well-being of their guests, complete dependence of the guest on the goodwill of the host, brevity of the visit which should not exceed the three days, and the conviction that a guest brings good luck to a home.

Proverbs also name the responsibilities of the guest and the host. The guest should accept what the host offers him, and he should also return the favor by means of a suitable gift. The fact that the contents of these proverbs is still part of the Turkish culture is confirmed in everyday life in Turkey, which can be experienced by every visitor to this country.

Key words: Turkish Culture and Language, Turkish hospitality, Relation Host – Guest

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TÜRK KÜLTÜRÜNDE VE DİLİNDE MİSAFİRPERVERLİK KAVRAMI ÜZERİNE BİR DENEME

Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk dilinde ve kültüründe misafirperverlik kavramını göstermektir. Atasözleri, yüzyıllardır kültürel içerik nesilden nesile iletimi sağlayan, kültürün en iyi taşıyıcısı olarak algılanır. Kuruluşundan bu yana değişmemiş olan bu en kısa edebi metinler, dilin ayrılmaz bir parçasıdır. Öte yandan, ortaya çıktığı toplum, atasözlerinin içerdiği esaslara ve ilkelere göre yaşamaktadır.

Konukseverlik, Türk toplumunu belirleyen özelliklerinden biridir. Her ikisi: iyi komşuluk ilişkilerinin yanı sıra misafirleri ağırlaması, onlara saygı göstermesi bazı atasözlerinin konusudur. Bunlarda en önemli altı çizilmesi unsurlar şudur: misafirlere her şeyin en iyisini sunması, konukların refahı için konağın sorumluluğu, misafirin ev sahibinin iyi niyetine tam bağımlılığı, ziyaretin uzunluğunun üç günü geçmemesi, konuğun eve iyi şans getirdiği inancıdır.

Atasözleri hem konuğun hem de ev sahibinin sorumluluklarını belirtmektedir. Misafir, ev sahibinin ona sunduğunu kabul etmeli, ev sahibine uygun bir hediye vermelidir. Atasözlerinin içerdiği anlam, misafirperverlik hala Türk kültürünün kalıcı bir parçası olduğunu, Türkiye'ye gelen her ziyaretçinin günlük yaşamda gözlemediği bir gerçektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk Kültürü, Türkiye Türkçesi, Konukseverlik, Ev Sahibi – Misafir Arasındaki İlişki

Hospitality is a distinctive feature of many nations. In the Turkish community hospitality assumes a specific form. In proverbs, which reflect the culture and the unwritten law which regulates the life of the community, there can be found all characteristics of Turkish hospitality.

Turkish people are very hospitable. In a traditional Turkish house there was always a special guest room, and a place where someone could spend the night. According to a Turkish custom, during the visit the host cannot eat, but the guest should be offered everything that is best in the house.

In the old days, when traveling caused more problems than it does now, no one could be left without a roof over his head. Someone had to take him in at night to their own house and offer him a meal and a place to sleep. The lifestyle of the new generation is changing: the place and conditions of life in the big city – living in blocks of flats with less rooms than formerly, the fact that almost everybody has different working hours, additionally there are hotel chains and catering services which make the older forms of visiting obsolete and not always possible. However, visiting in order to celebrate holidays, birthdays, ceremonies, as well as visiting the sick or elderly family members are still practiced.

Not every guest has the same status, and therefore in Turkish culture we deal with several types of guests and visits:

Yatılı misafirlik – boarding guests (name referring to a guest spending the night at the house of the host);

Günübirlik misafirlik – daily stay guest – name referring to guests who do not spend the night at the host's home;

Belli saatler için misafirlik – hosting the guest at certain times (tea time, morning coffee) – name referring to guests who come at a certain time of the day;

Akşam misafirliği – evening guests;

Akrabalar arası misafirlik – visits among family members (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children);

Dostlar arası misafirlik – visits among friends.

Visits have their special rules that give evidence of good manners and culture of both the host and the guest. Some of these rules and principles are still discussed on different social media and forums. A few of the most common regulations still now in force now are: 1. Visits without announcement are unwelcome. 2. While paying a visit one should bring some present. 3. The outfit should match the occasion. 4. Guests should be punctual. They should not come either too early or too late. 5. While paying the family a visit on Sundays and public holidays one should not disturb their program of activities. 6. Shoes for change (slippers or knitted socks popular in Turkish culture) should be taken by the guest¹. 7. The host should tell everyone who is invited in order to avoid a situation when people who are at odds with one another meet at the same time and place. 8. If among the invited guests there are people that do not know each other, the host should introduce them with a few words of explanation². 9. The host should always be kind, attentive and smiling³. 10. During the visit nobody should: gossip, lead to confusion, cry, complain, disclose family secrets, humiliate others or do anything that could cause someone to become upset and confused⁴. 11. During the visit, selfishness

¹ The custom of taking off shoes outside the house or immediately after going in through the door is so obvious for Turks – but not for everybody visiting Turkey – that there are no proverbs referring to this custom. Sometimes Turks allow foreigners not to take off their shoes, but among Turks it is impossible.

² It is not enough to say their names. Turks are very inquisitive, but this feature is a sign of one's good manners. In Turkish culture questioning someone is seen as showing interest.

³ But smiling in Turkish culture is not as common as in the western world. A smile is devoted only to one's friends and family members; smiling to strangers can be understood as an invitation or considered as an attempt to make acquaintance. But smiling when visiting a Turkish family is perceived as positive behavior.

⁴ Comparing this rule to the most common type of visit it is obvious that paying a visit in a Turkish house requires self-control and understanding of the moods and the characters of all gathered people.

should not be shown e.g. by cutting off from the others to watch TV, or asking to change the channel when you do not like a particular program, while the others are interested in it. 12. No one should rearrange things or suggest other decor; brag too much; prove to someone that he had lied or interrupt when the host is speaking. An important cultural element is admiration of the decor in the house⁵. 13. Guests should always thank for the invitation, meal/ snack. In Turkish there are special expression to say "thank you" to a host, especially to the one, who prepared a meal: *Ellerinize sağlık! / Elinize sağlık!* – 'Let your hands be healthy', 'Health to your hand', which expresses appreciation for the hostess. 14. The host should not push the guests to eat everything prepared. They should eat as much as they want. According to TCK [Turkish Penal Code] causing stomach cramps is punishable (*Misafirlik adabı*; <https://eksisozluk.com/misafirlik-adabi--942157?a=nice> [28.11.2016]). 15. Conversation at the table should be chaired by the host, who is watchful to anything that can lead to an argument. In such case he gently passes over a particular subject or changes the topic of conversation⁶. 16. At welcome and farewell the traditional washing of hands with cologne must not be forgotten. 17. In the event when someone does not keep in touch for a long time, one should call him and ask about his health. If all contact broke off, to explain the cause of such state, an honest and open sincere conversation must be organized. 18. When leaving the house the guest should invite the host home. This invitation should be confirmed no later than one week before the expected visit, unless the visit was arranged for another day. 19. Some behaviors which are normal in the western world are considered extremely rude in Turkish culture. For example blowing nose during meals, even discreetly (*Local Customs and Culture in Turkey*; in: <https://www.gapyear.com/countries/turkey/visas> [28.11.2016]). 20. The basic principle of customary visits in Turkey is not to weary the hosts. The host must have the position of a host and the guest must behave like a guest⁷.

⁵ Of course, praise is welcome, but it should be overdone, because the host may feel obliged to offer us an object for admiration.

⁶ The conversation just as the best places at the table are devoted to the older ones. In one proverb is said: *su küçüğün, söz (sofra, yemek) büyüğün* – At mealtime the children should be the ones who get water first, but the adults should be the first ones who begin to eat and converse.

⁷ It is interesting that recently even the distinction between the household and guests is slowly disappearing. "My family taught me that: unless the host wants help, the kitchen is not accessible, the fridge is untouchable to the guest. But lately I see that guests go to take their tea by themselves, without asking for permission try to help with the service, even try to put the dishes into the washing machine. It is unacceptable!"; in: *Misafirlik adabı*: op.cit.

In Turkey guests are always welcome. The guest is treated with the highest respect, with everything a particular family can afford. It is commonly believed that guests bring happiness and good luck to the house. The visit should not last more than three days. The host feels responsible for the safety and well-being of his guest. All of the abovementioned principles appear in proverbs. Proverbs referring to the concept of hospitality were divided into several groups according to the aspect they relate to⁸. Proverbs were divided into 7 groups relating to:

1. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – duties of the host
2. The guest as a symbol of blessing and abundance
3. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – the guest at the mercy of the host
4. Invited and uninvited guests
5. Frequency of visits
6. Duration of visits
7. Gift for the host

1. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – duties of the host

Adam adama yük değil, can gövdeye mülk değil. – A man is not a burden to another and the soul is not property of the body. [A caller won't stay forever in the same way as one's soul will not be with one's body for ever.]

Gelene „Hoş geldin” gidene „Uğurlar olsun” aç kapıları. – Say "Welcome" to those who are coming, say "Goodbye" and open the gate to those who are leaving. [Welcome the coming and hasten the parting guest.]

Konuğa hürmet eyle eğerci kafir olsa da. – Respect the guest even if he were an infidel.

Ev sahibi misafirin hizmetkarıdır. – The master of the house is the servant of the guest.

Misafirin umduğu ev sahibine iki öğün olur. – What the guest hopes to eat becomes two meals for the host. [A guest often hopes to be entertained more lavishly than is possible.]

Misafir misafir üstüne olur, ev ev üstüne olmaz. – A guest upon a guest (two at a time) may be welcome but a house upon a house (keeping two together) is not.

Misafiri horoz olanın, ambarında arpa kalmaz. – He whose guest is a cock will soon have no barley in his granary.

⁸ Proverbs selected from: Parlatur's and Aksoy's dictionaries and TDK online <http://www.tdk.gov.tr/> [26.11.2015].

Sofrana oturanın karnı doysun. – He who sits at your table must eat his fill.

Misafirin akıllısı / yüzüsü ev sahibini ağırlar. – A wakeful/ shameless guest increases his fortune by flattering his landlord.

Hamam suyu ile misafir ağırlanmaz. – You cannot entertain someone with bathing water. – [One, should accommodate his guests within his means.]

Düğün aşısıyla dost ağırlanmaz. (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr/> [26.11.2015].) – You cannot entertain someone with leftover wedding dishes.

Köylünün kahve cezvesi karaca amma sürece. – The villager's coffee-pot may be black and ugly but it's always put over a fire for visitors.

Bir yemem diyenden kork, bir oturmam diyenden. – Be aware the man who says "I do not eat", and the man who says "I do not sit".

Respect must be shown to every guest. They must be greeted when they come, entertained and said goodbye to when they leave. The host should be generous, and should not refuse anything the guest wants. On the other hand, someone who always entertains the guest cannot boast a full pantry because he brings food for his guests all the time. A clever guest using flattery and licking the host's boots can receive from him more than the host can really afford.

A good host always remembers the preferences of his guests, and does not invite anyone just because he has too much of something. Served food should include seasonal dishes, be suitable for the feast and appropriate to the time of the visit. All meals must be prepared specifically for the person or guests. It is unacceptable to use one occasion for the purpose of another, like in the proverb when one uses 'wedding leftovers' to feed his friends. The traditional Turkish menu during a visit consists of: a cup of coffee⁹, then tea, pastry or cake are served with the second cup of tea, with the third one nuts, drinking tea is ended by serving fruit juice. Juice is usually served with some sweets like baklava. Near the time of the guest's departure some fruit are served. In some regions of Turkey if the host says "it is time for watermelon" it means that the guest ought to leave (*Misafirlik adabı*; op. cit.)

True, sincere hospitality is shown in the proverb referring to a villager's ugly looking dish, which only testifies the fact that it was often used to prepare meals for guests.

⁹ The preparation and serving of coffee in Turkey can be a subject for another paper, because both the method of coffee preparation and the importance of coffee in Turkish culture should be discussed in greater detail.

One of the proverbs contains a warning addressed directly to the host, not to trust insincere people who can take advantage of his benevolence and kindness. Those who refuse food and accommodation may turn out to be the most burdensome guests. They will eat excessively and prolong the visit for longer than the appropriate three days.

2. The guest as a symbol of blessing and abundance

Eli ile getirir, ağzı ile götürür. – He brings with his hands and carries away in his mouth.

Konuğun rızkı ardından gelir. – The blessings of a guest come after him.

Misafirin ayağı uğurludur. – The guest's feet are blessed.

Misafir kısmeti ile gelir. – A guest comes with his blessings. [Guests bring good luck with them.]

Misafir on kısmetle gelir; birini yer dokuzunu bırakır. – A guest comes with ten blessings, he eats one, and leaves nine. [God will bless a hospitable man.]

Ahmak misafir ev sahibini ağırlar./ Misafirin akılsız ağırlar./ Şaşkın misafir, ev sahibini ağırlar. – The confused guest entertains his host.

In Turkey it is widely believed that the guest brings a blessing and happiness to the house. That is why every guest is welcome. Luck, that each guest brings exceeds the costs associated with meals and overnight accommodation. However, it is not correct to view these proverbs only in material dimension. Hospitality as a duty, albeit unrecorded in the civil law, of the host from the point of view of Islam is considered a duty and a good deed, too. "Muslims regard hospitality as worship. (...) Behaving according to the Quran they perceive the guest as a blessing and a prize. Hospitality, which is one of the most important features of Islamic morality, includes feelings of generosity, benevolence, sharing and charity. Feeding guests should be only in the name of the Right [God], not for any secular interest or income calculation." (Misafir ağırlamak dinimizde neden önemli?; in: <http://www.islamveihsan.com/misafir-agirlamak-dinimizde-neden-onemli.html> [29.11.2016].)

3. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – the guest at the mercy of the host

Misafir umduğu yemez bulduğunu yer. – A guest does not eat what he desires, but what he finds. [A guest can't be choosy, he has to accept whatever hospitality is offered.]

Misafir ev sahibinin kuzusudur, nereye isterse bağlar. / Misafir ev sahibinin devesidir, nerde bağlarsa orda durur. – The guest is like a lamp/camel; he stays where the host ties him. [The guest is dependent on the host.]

The guest during his visit at the house of the host is completely at his mercy. No matter what his expectations might be, everything depends on the financial possibilities of the host and of course his good will. The host, according to Turkish tradition, should give the best of what he has to the guest.

4. Invited and uninvited guests

Çağrılan yere erinme, çağrılmadığın yere görünme. – Go where you are invited, but stay away from where you are not.

Çağrılan yere git ar eyleme, çağrılmadığın yere gidip yerini dar eyleme. – Do not be ashamed to go where you are called but do not make yourself uncomfortable by going where you are not invited.

Çağrılmayan yere börekçi ile çörekçi gider. – Only peddlers go where they are not invited.

Akşamdan sonra gelene (gelenin aşı) ya bir soğan ya bir söğen. (sövgü) – Either an onion or a swear word for a guest arriving late in the evening.

Davetsiz gelen / giden döşeksiz oturur. – He who goes / comes uninvited sits without a mattress.

Davetsiz gelen mindersiz oturur. – He who comes without an invitation sits without a cushion. [An uninvited guest cannot expect a warm welcome.]

Misafire / Konuğa "Git" demezler, altına yatak sermezler. – They don't say "go" to the guest, but they don't put a mattress under him to sit on.

Köylü, misafir kabul etmeyiz demez, konacak konak yoktur der. ([http://www.tdk.gov.tr/\[26.11.2015\]](http://www.tdk.gov.tr/[26.11.2015]) – Villagers do not say 'We don't want you' to a guest, instead they say 'We have no place to put you in'. People often won't say no outright, they just say it indirectly.

Gelirse hane boş, gelmezse daha hoş. – If he comes he is welcome, but if he does not come, it will be the better.

Misafir misafiri / Konuk konuğu istemez / sevmez ev sahibi ikisini de. – One guest loves not another guest; the master of the house dislikes both. [One guest dislikes having to put up with another guest, whereas their host would rather not put up with either of them.]

In Turkish culture it is inexpedient to intrude on someone and arrive unannounced or worse, uninvited. Because such behavior shows lack of self-respect and lack of respect for others. One should be invited to pay a visit. In one Turkish forum there were some complains that knocking on the door at an unexpected time is very disturbing. "If only I'd known that someone would come, I would have prepared myself for someone to come, I would have at least fixed the two pillows and taken the banana peel from the stool and thrown it away! (...) There are many situations where the unexpected guest is forced on the host." (*Misafirlik adabı*; op.cit.) According to the latest information on the website visits on Sundays are not allowed at all. 1) Do not pay a visit on a Sunday. 2) guests are not accepted on Sundays (*Misafirlik adabı*; op.cit.). In the Turkish language there is an idiom: *misafir basmak (bastırmak)* (Ayverdi 2010: 828) denoting the arrival of many guests at a quite unexpected time. Such a situation could put the host in a rather embarrassing situation because of a lack of sufficient amount of food. But, as has already been mentioned, the guest arrives with a blessing and abundance. So food can just "be found", and the visit proceeds in a manner appropriate to the Turkish culture.

Coming at the wrong time is not pleasant either for the host or for the guest. The host feels awkward, and the guests receive the worst place and leftovers.

Because according to Turkish tradition, each guest must be accommodated and it is not proper to refuse someone food, a poor or stingy host will wriggle out from this duty by saying that there is not enough place. It is not difficult to imagine the poor who cannot afford an expense they were not prepared for. A villager not wanting to break the principles of social coexistence cannot throw anyone away. But he can always use evasion, which is not necessarily inconsistent with the truth. Probably there is a lot of room at the proverbial peasant's, but it would not be proper to offer accommodation and not to provide nourishment. And such expense is already beyond the capabilities of the villager.

Another proverb shows the relations between different guests. There is a clear animosity among guests being jealous about the host's attention and commitment. The host in turn, contrary to the applicable rules of hospitality, is not satisfied with the coming of any of them.

5. Frequency of visits

Ayda gelen doğan olur, yılda gelen soğan olur. – He who comes once a month is like a falcon, and he who comes daily is like an onion. [Said of troublesome pertinacity].

Seyrek git sen / Sıkça varma dostuna, kalksın ayak üstüne. – Visit your friend rarely / Do not visit him often, he will get on his feet when he sees you.

Sık gidersen dostuna, yatar arka üstüne. – If you visit your friend often, he will lie down on his back when he sees you.

You should not overuse generosity and kindness of the host. Tips and advice on the frequency of visits contained in the proverbs advise to visit each other seldom. Then you are welcome. Do not bore anyone with your presence and do not overuse his good will and willingness to live according to the rules of hospitality.

6. Duration of visits

Balıkla misafir üç gün oluncaya kadar. – Fish and guests are good for three days.

Misafir üç gün misafir. – A guest is a guest for three days. [One can remain in a place as a guest for no more than three days.]

Misafirin hayırlısı: akşama ermeyeni, sabaha kalmayanı. – The best of the guests: does not sit till the evening, does not stay till the morning
Gelmek iradet, gitmek icazet (iledir). – For the coming "will", for the going "permission". Said facetiously when asking a guest to stay a little longer.

Gelmek misafirin, gitmek ev / hane sahibinin elindedir. – Everyone goes to visit a loved one or friend, but the duration of the visit depends on the interest shown by the host. If his interest is warm, friendly and sincere this period can be prolonged, if not – shortened.

Nerede akşamlarsan orda sabahla. – Wherever you stay until evening, there you stay also overnight.

The visit should not exceed more than three days. Such information is contained in the proverbs and in the Quran. "According to our beautiful religion, guests are welcome for three days. Hospitality and catering provided after three days, are regarded as alms. During the three days, and especially on the first day, the best meals are made, and for the next two days normal meals are served – the kind most people usually eat" (*Misafir ağırlamak ...*; op.cit.).

After a period of three days, the guest should leave the house of the hosts. However, before leaving he should invite the hosts to his own house to repay for their great hospitality and generosity.

Though the duration of the visit is strictly defined, it mainly depends on the attitude of the host. In fact by creating a specific atmosphere he can cause the guests to lengthen or shorten their visit.

The duration of one's visit is the subject of a few proverbs. But this issue is discussed not only in private or in the proverbs but also in the social media. One of the answers given to a question about duration of a visit gives explanation according to the Quran. It shows that even in the Holy Book of Islam hospitality was a matter that ought to be discussed. One person asked: "According to our religion [Islam] what is the duration of one's visit?" In accordance with the answer no 31: Once a guest has used his three days entitlement, there is no need to go to the trouble for him. Because in this case he is no longer a guest, and what he eats and drinks after the third day comes from the loyalty and good heart of the host. Another question was: "Rasûlallah; How do you get your brother into trouble/ lead him to sin?" The Prophet (*peace be upon him*) replied, "By residing in someone's house when he does not have anything to welcome his guest" (Muslim, Lukata 15–16)" (Güler; *Dinimize göre misafirlik kaç gündür?*; in: <http://www.haber7.com/yazarlar/prof-dr-zekeriya-guler/761770-dinimize-gore-misafirlik-kac-gundur> [28.11.2016]). Although the principle of hospitality is valid to everybody, this does not mean that everyone is able to undertake the obligation to offer free room and board. Feed the one who believes in Allah and the afterlife. For him, the reward is one day and one night. The feast has to last three days. What he gets after this time comes from the charity [of the host]. (Müslim, Lukata, 15–16)" (Güler; op. cit.).

7. Gift for the host

Eli boşa "Ağa uyur" derler; eli doluya "Ağa buyur" derler. – To the caller who brings no present they say "The master is asleep", but to the one with a present they say "Welcome sir."

Eli dolu geleni buyur ederler. – They welcome those who come with full hands.

Değirmenden gelenden poğaçaya umarlar. (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr> [26.11.2015]) – Pastry is expected from one who comes from the mill. [Someone who makes a large amount of money through a successful venture is expected to give some of it to the poor.]; [A person who comes from the road is expected to bring a small gift from the heart.]

A person who comes to us from a place that is rich in certain goods should buy them before departure for several reasons; on the one hand to please, and on the other, not to disappoint the hope of the waiting

host. Giving trinkets is also not alien to other communities and cultures, but among the Turkish, the attention paid to this "gesture" has more importance than in other nations.

The best gifts are sweets and those things which are abundant in the area from which you come. Present should be selected for the donee. Sweets are always welcome, according to the saying: *tatlı yiye-lim, tatlı konuşalım* – lit.: 'Let's eat something sweet and talk sweet with each other'; so chocolate or other sweets are always good gifts to offer. Alcohol is not the best gift, because most Turks are Muslim and do not drink alcohol. But here are gifts Turks like more than others i.e.: clothes, toys, accessories, cultural gifts and as one person wrote in the forum: "It is better to buy non-edible, long-lasting gifts" (The Guide: What gifts to give Turkish people – Turkey Forum; https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowTopic-g293969-i367-k6746011-The_Guide_What_gifts_to_give_Turkish_people-Turkey.html [28.11.2016]). Even if the worst gifts were brought, Turkish hosts will be happy because, as it is clear from the proverbs, some – even the smallest keepsake – is expected from the guest. Souvenirs should also be light and not too big because it should be remembered that not in every house there is enough room to put them in a proper place.

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AN ESSAY ON THE CONCEPT OF *HOSPITALITY* IN TURKISH CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Summary

As a summary the most important to be said is the fact that in Turkey guest is always welcomed, but guests should remember to act according to cultural rules. All rules are the subject of some proverbs and can be divided into several groups: 1. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – duties of the host; 2. The guest as a symbol of blessing and abundance; 3. Status of the guest in the Turkish society – the guest at the mercy of the host; 4. Invited and uninvited guests; 5. Frequency of visits; 6. Duration of visits; 7. Gift for the host.