

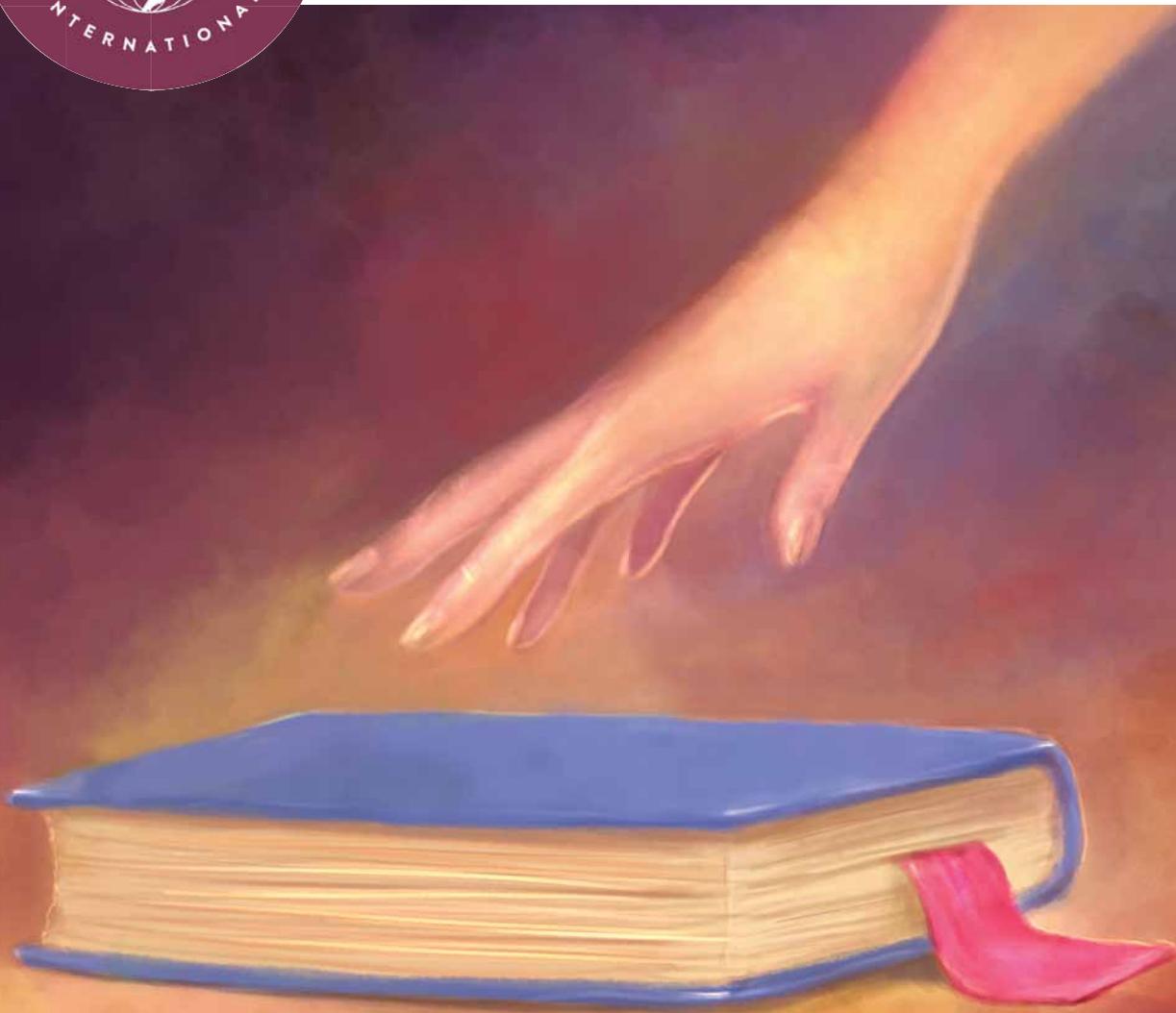


SPRING 5782

ב"ה 3, Issue 3 Volume 3

# EMBRACE

*Uniting and inspiring the worldwide community of Bais Rivkah Alumnae*



”שיהיו דברי תורה  
חדשים עליך כאלו היום נתנו”

HATE IN IRAN,  
LOVE IN CROWN HEIGHTS:  
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CHOOSE LIFE  
ONE MOTHER'S STORY

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### MAKING KEILIM

*Making vessels for the Aibishter's brochos to flow into.*

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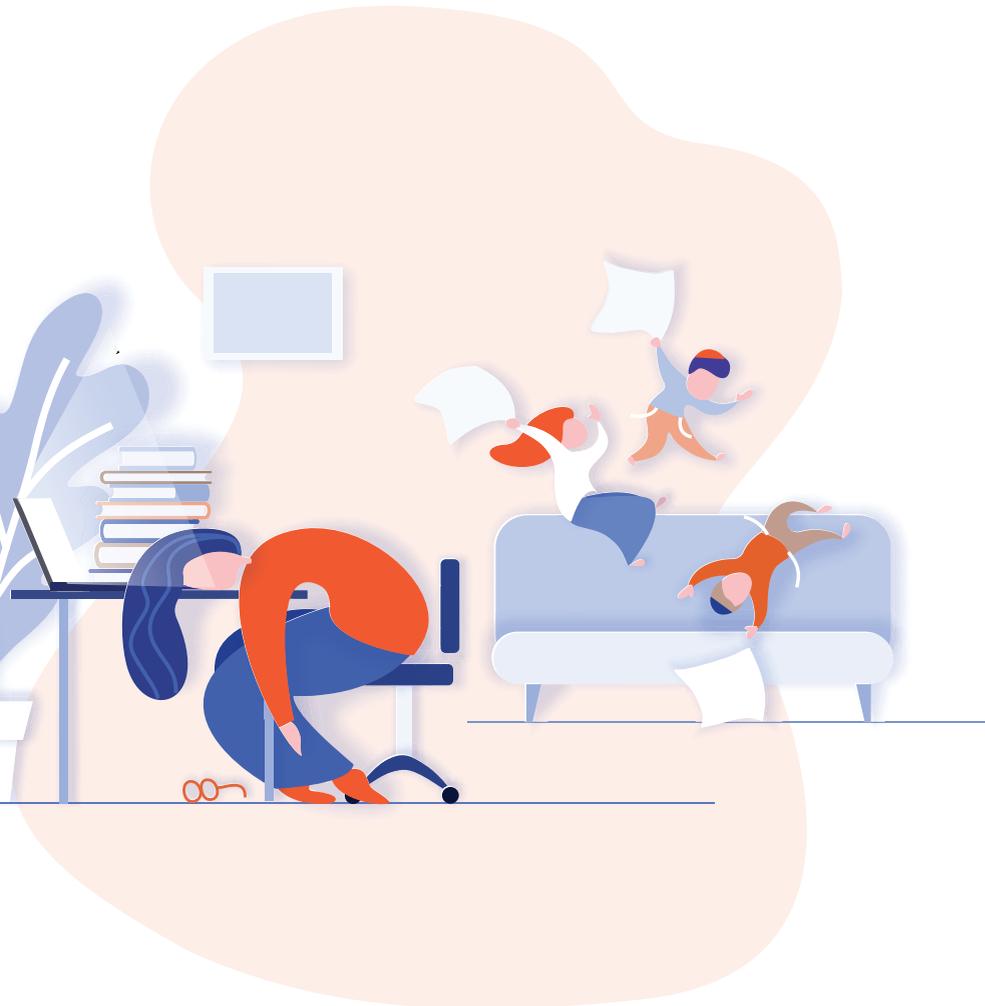
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ב"ה



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# TREASURES FROM THE VATICAN

Sara (Kravitsky) Blau, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5766 (2006)*



I went with my kids on a quick trip to Plaster Master, a sweet little plaster place in a basement in Flatbush. As my kids finished up and Mr. Srour was spraying their artistic creations, he good-naturedly asked them their names. My second son answered right away “Moshe Blau.” The Yid’s eyes lit up and he asked, “Are you related to the Lubavitch

Blau that had a photographic memory and remembered manuscripts that he saw in the Vatican?”

*There is a legend that exists that my grandfather indeed was in the Vatican and saw the manuscripts.*

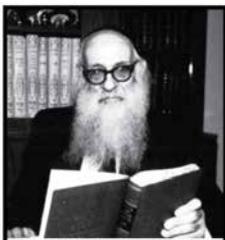


*My sons choosing their plaster molds with Mrs. Srour.*

We smiled and said that yes, we were related to the Rabbi Moshe Blau that got manuscripts from the Vatican, but before I could continue the story, Mr. Srour went on, “Wow! I’ll never forget when your grandfather sold the seforim of newly discovered manuscripts written by the Rishonim. I was a yeshiva bochur then in Ner Yisroel and the excitement of new seforim by the Rishonim rippled throughout the entire *beis medrash!*” He was smiling from ear to ear.



There is a legend that exists that my grandfather indeed was in the Vatican and saw the manuscripts. What actually happened was that he was once studying in a library in New York City, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, when he met a priest



**THE COHEN AND THE PRIEST**

Rabbi Moshe Yehuda HaKohen Blau got access to the Vatican Library through a fortuitous meeting with a Catholic priest in a Jewish Library. Complete story on pages 4-5



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 "When the Rebbe is with Chassidim, I can not leave him."

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**WE HAVE COMICS TOO!**

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Erav Shabbos	Motzi Shabbos
7:43	8:48
Gut Shabbos	

Crown Heights Community Newspaper featuring an article describing my grandfather's story.

working on his thesis for his doctorate. He was struggling with the design of vowels used in Sephardic manuscripts a thousand years ago, and this research would award him a job promotion in the Vatican. My grandfather was an expert in the field and helped him out. In exchange, the priest mailed him microfilms of manuscripts written by Rishonim that were in the Vatican that my grandfather was able to publish. This led people to believe that he had been to the Vatican and seen them, committed them to memory, and then prepared them for print.

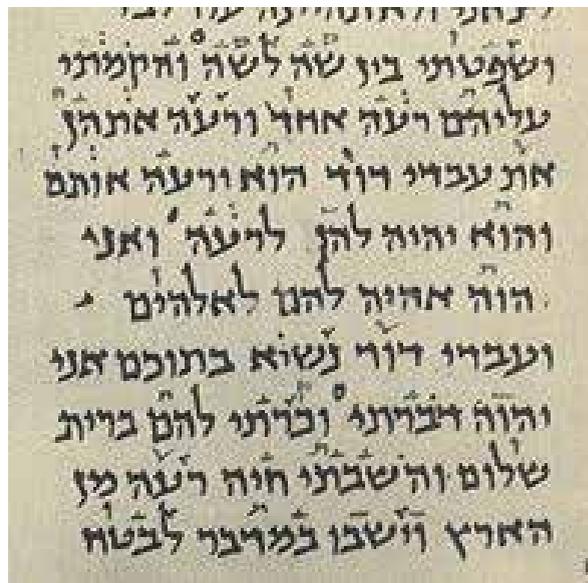
I didn't actually tell Mr. Srouer the entire story — but there was something I couldn't get over. He was as excited today as if the manuscripts were newly discovered. It must've been sixty years ago — but he was experiencing the discovery of new manuscripts to learn, right here and right now!

A light went off in my head. This is a living example of what it means to be excited and passionate about the giving of the Torah as if it was given today.

In the days leading up to Matan Torah, the Torah

*It must've been sixty years ago — but he was experiencing the discovery of new manuscripts to learn, right here and right now!*

says,<sup>1</sup> “In the third month of Bnei Yisroel's departure from Egypt, on *this* day they arrived in the desert of Sinai.” Rashi explains that it says this day and not *that* day, to teach us that the words of Torah should be as new to us as if it was given on this day. New news becomes old news very quickly. Torah is timeless — relevant and new as ever.



One of the microfilms with the manuscripts of the Rishonim.

Join us as we hear from fellow alumnae what that looks like in today's day and age — how we women can have passion and excitement in our Torah learning, and find it relevant as ever.

Enjoy! ■

1. Parshas Yisro 19:1

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# From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

## In the Present Tense

B”H

21 Iyar, 5711  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

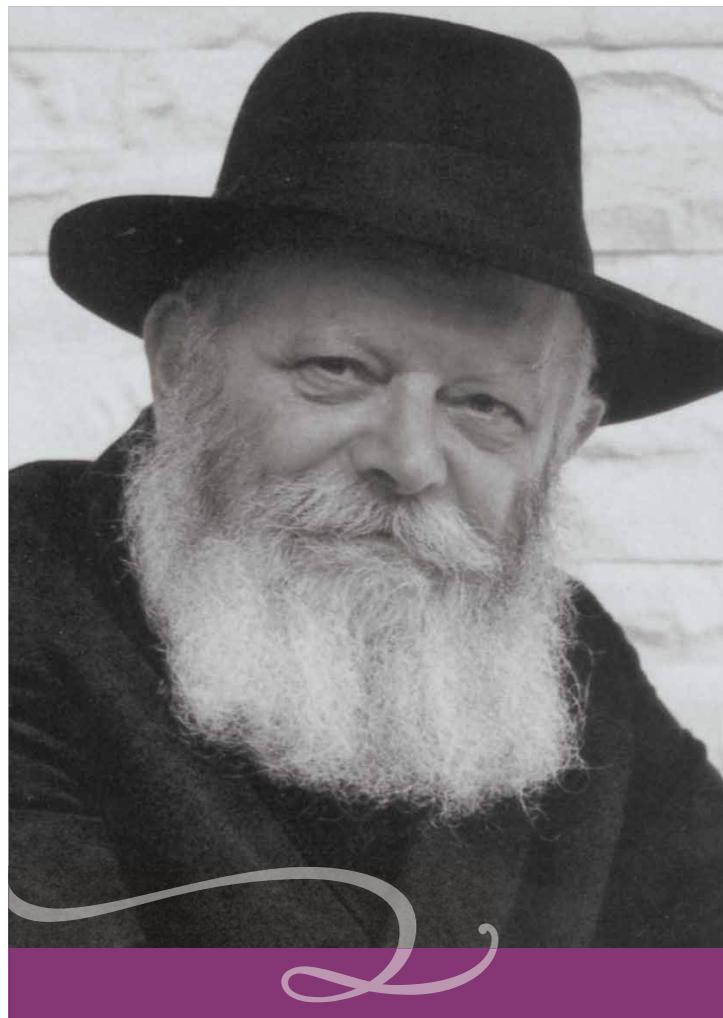
**T**here is a well-known teaching of the Sages on the words, “Make known to your children... [what your eyes saw] on the day that you stood before the L-rd your G-d at Chorev, [i.e., Sinai].”

The Sages say: “Just as at that time [you stood] with dread and awe and trembling and quaking, so too here, {i.e., in all places and at all times,} [you should study Torah] with dread and awe and trembling and quaking.”

The AriZal spelled this out as follows: “Dread (*eimah*) is experienced in a person’s mind; awe (*yirah*) is experienced in his heart; trembling (*reses*) is experienced in his internal organs; and quaking (*ziya*) — in his external organs.”

This means that when a person reads the Written Torah or reviews the Oral Torah or studies [any branch of the] Torah, his entire being — his mind and heart, his internality and his externality — ought to be in the same state in which he was when the Torah was given at Chorev.

One might ask: At that time “they saw the sounds



and the flames...,” and “G-d spoke with you face to face.” How, then, can every individual draw such an awe upon himself at any moment?

This is possible when one internalizes the realization that the Torah he is presently studying derives from supernal wisdom, in which there abides and is *revealed* [G-d’s] infinite light which by far transcends

*That phrase means “the Giver of the Torah,” and also describes G-d as “the One Who gives the Torah,” in the present tense.*

the bounds of *Hishtalshelus*, before which “darkness is the same as light.” On that infinite level, there is no



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distinction between above and below; and spirituality and materiality are equal. When a person attains this realization, he can fulfill the above injunction of the Sages: “Just as at that time [you stood] with dread and awe and trembling and quaking, so too here, [i.e., in all places and at all times, you should study Torah] with dread and awe and trembling and quaking” — [because from the Divine perspective,] all levels are equal.

We spoke above of reaching a point at which, while down here in this world below, one hears from the mouth of the Emanator Himself in an utterly revealed manner, “I am the L-rd your G-d,” exactly as one heard it at that time. The possibility and the ability to do so were granted at the time of the Giving of the Torah when the initial Divine decree that the higher realms remain Above and the lower realms

remain below was annulled, and accordingly, “G-d descended upon Mount Sinai,” and “He said to Moshe, ‘Ascend to G-d.’”

This empowerment is aroused and renewed every year during the festival of Shavuot, “the time of the Giving of the Torah,” by the *Nosein HaTorah*. That phrase means “the *Giver* of the Torah,” and also describes G-d as “the One Who *gives* the Torah,” in the present tense.

In preparation for that empowerment, every one of us, every man and woman, is obligated to undertake to fulfill the promise, “We shall do and we shall understand,” specifically in that order. This theme is discussed in depth in the teachings of Chassidus.

*The Rebbe's Signature*

# Message from the Chairman

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov שיח"י

---



**E**steemed Alumnae, תחיינה,  
I would like to begin by thanking the Aibershter for all of His brochos these past few months and all those of you that took the time to add in your tefilos and maasim tovim on my behalf.

As we prepare ourselves for זמן מתן תורתנו, when we remember and relive Matan Torah, we are reminded once again about the centrality of the role of the Jewish woman at that most significant juncture in our history.

This dynamic continues to be the secret of our survival to this very day. Bais Rivkah was founded not as an afterthought, א"ח, nor as a concession to modernity; Bais Rivkah was and is a crucial component in the overall mission that the Rebbe זי"ע entrusts us with: the very revival and development of Klal Yisroel, preparing it and the world at large for Geula. Just like *Geulas Mitzrayim* came about thanks to the women of Moshe Rabeinu's generation<sup>1</sup>, so too, the Geula from the present Golus will become a reality thanks to the special strength and influence of the women and girls<sup>2</sup> of this generation, *Dor Hashvi'i*, the generation connected to and led by the *Shvi'i*.

The Rebbe teaches us how to appreciate the unique powers of Jewish women in general as well as the power of each woman as an individual, and how to understand and deal with specific challenges that may arise in the course of fulfilling their special roles.

*Bais Rivkah was founded not as an afterthought, א"ח, nor as a concession to modernity.*

I would like to share with you one example, especially relevant to Bais Rivkah Alumnae.

At the onset of the summer vacation season of 5726, there was a special address to the graduates of Bais Rivkah and camp counselors<sup>3</sup>. The Rebbe referenced the story documented in the Parsha of that week, Chukas, regarding the histalkus of Miriam and the subsequent lack of water. As elucidated by Rashi, this sequence is one of cause and effect: the well that accompanied Bnei Yisroel, supplying them with specially blessed healing water during their forty-year journey in the inhospitable desert, was thanks to the merit of Miriam.

The Rebbe pointed out that the very clearly identified result of Miriam's special merit helps us gain insight into the specific nature of her righteousness as well as her specific role in the leadership — together with her brothers Moshe and Aharon — of the nascent Jewish People.

The Rebbe went on to focus on two functions of water:

The reason we drink water is not in order to nourish ourselves, but in order to distribute to all of the organs of the body the necessary nutrients provided by the food that we eat.

Immersion in the waters of a Mikvah has the ability to purify, cleanse and free us of the impurities that may have attached themselves to us.

Based on the above, we can better appreciate the special nature of Miriam's leadership role:

The impact of Moshe Rabeinu's teachings and Aharon Hakohen's Avodah in the Mishkan needed to reach every Jew, without exception, no matter how simple or far he or she might be, both in the literal sense as well as with regard to their level of understanding and comprehension. Miriam's main role was to ensure that whatever was provided by Moshe and Aharon would reach *every* Jew in accordance with their specific level and needs, so that it would be received and absorbed and become an integral part of their personal life.

A Jew, by definition, is one who belongs to the **גוי קדוש**. This is an unconditional characteristic of every Jew, no matter who or what. As a result of our interaction with the world at large, however, it is possible that attitudes and behaviors that are foreign to holiness attach themselves somehow to one or more of us. This leads us to Miriam's second function: cleansing and freeing the affected individual from the foreign attachments and their negative influence.

The Torah tells us these details about Miriam because she is a role model for every woman.

Women have the natural ability to teach children, both in the literal sense as well as adults whose Jewish education is minimal or incipient. It is not the content of the message or objective that they adjust, but rather, whilst remaining true to the teachings of Moshe and Aharon, the woman can use her special gift of communication to ensure that they are properly administered in order to reach and nourish those that would otherwise not be able to do so on their own.

Lest one think that Miriam was an exception, and therefore not a practical example for most of us to follow, the Torah teaches us that Miriam's successful efforts to benefit the Jewish People began when she was but a five-year-old girl living in Egypt!



*The woman can use her special gift of communication to ensure that Moshe Rabeinu's teachings are properly administered in order to reach and nourish those that would otherwise not be able to do so on their own.*

The lesson here for us could not be any more compelling: every Jewish woman and girl has the natural ability to positively affect *hafotzas haya-hadus* and bring Torah and Mitzvos wherever a Jewish body or soul may find itself.

There is an additional lesson that we can glean from the story of Miriam, especially empowering and inspiring when we feel discouraged by not seeing immediate tangible results of our efforts:



It was only after forty years (!) that the Yidden realized Miriam's special merit and accomplishments. In today's day and age, results are usually seen much sooner; when one dedicates oneself fully to his or her mission, Hashem crowns those efforts with success and one does not have to wait too long before seeing tangible results.

The Rebbe completed the message by teaching us how, inspired by Miriam's example, every woman and girl can feel empowered to see the challenges of vacations and tznius as opportunities for discovering and utilizing their unique strengths and to welcome them with joy.

These lessons are but one example of how the Rebbe empowered us to be able to take an active part in making Geula a reality.

We must always be cognizant of and thankful for the great privilege we were blessed with by the Rebbe sharing with us heretofore unrevealed dimensions of the gift and mission that Hashem

bequeathed to us at Har Sinai 3,334 years ago. Whatever topic or issue we or anyone we know might have to deal with, on any level, we can confidently turn to the Rebbe's teachings to find fresh and refreshing perspectives that will guide, inspire and challenge us in unprecedented and disruptive ways; truths that have been waiting since Matan Torah to be discovered, activated and implemented at the right time.

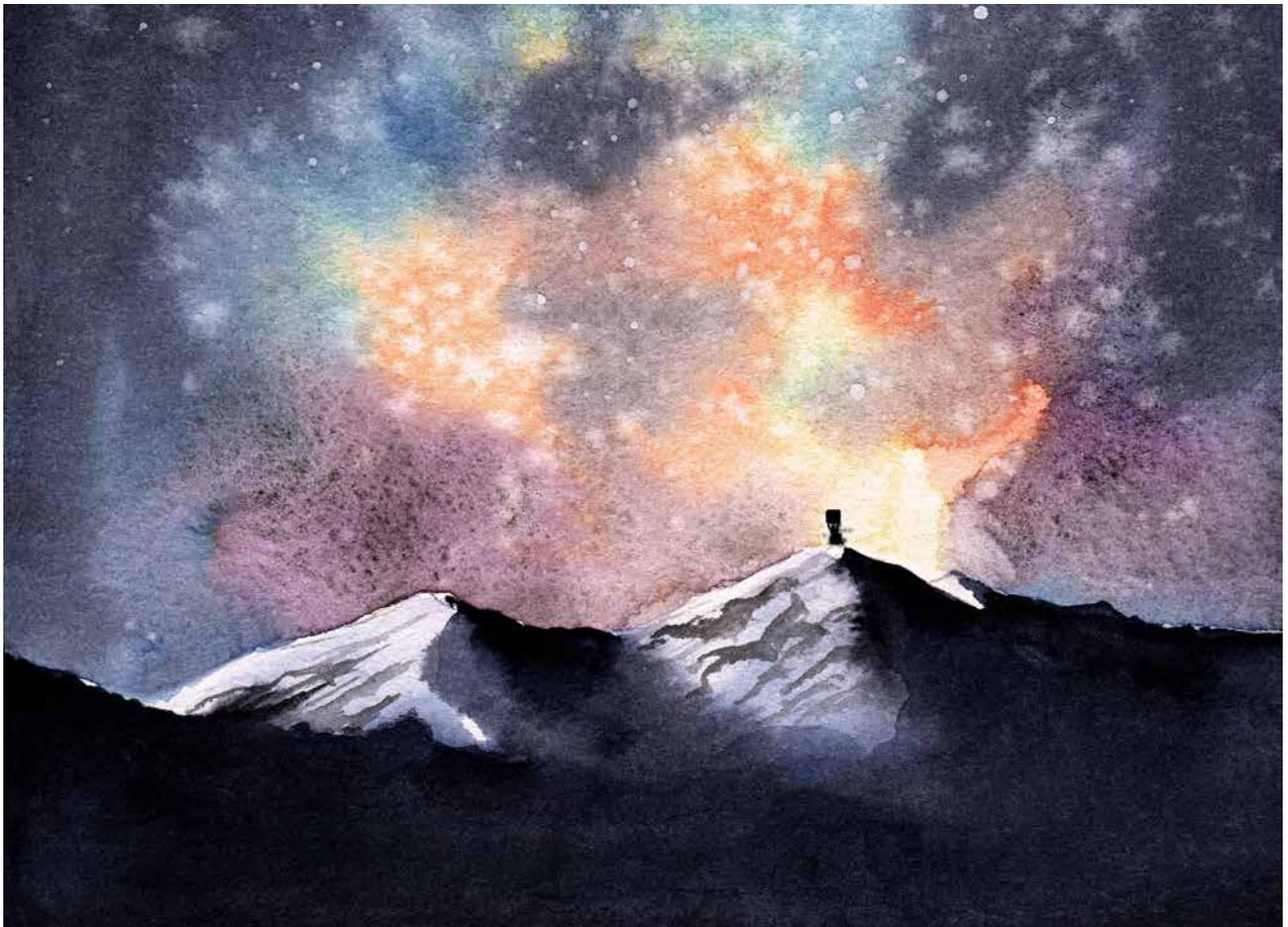
אשרינו, מה טוב חלקנו, ומה נעים גורלנו!

Wishing you all a healthy and productive summer,  
Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

1. סוטה יא, ב. במדב"ר פ"ג, ו.

2. ראה יל"ש רות (רמז תרו בסופו) "אין הדורות נגאלין אלא בשכר נשים צדקניות שיש בדור". וראה כתבי האריז"ל (שער הגלגולים הקדמה כ. ל"ת וס' הליקושים עה"פ שמות ג, ד) דדור האחרון דגלות הוא גלגול דור יוצאי מצרים.

3. תורת מנחם, חמ"ז ע' 132



“Many of the ideas I talk about come from the N’shei Chabad Newsletter... it has depth and humor and is real.”

- Miryam Swerdlov



# N'SHEI CHABAD Newsletter



*We can take one favorite toy, one doll...*



*Time to leave our home and community.*



*Giving one last kiss to the mezuzah.*

*Praying to Hashem that we make it out safely and that this war will be over so we can come back soon.*

ונזכה זעהן זיך מיט'ן רבי'ן דא למטה... והוא יגאלנו



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**I** thoroughly enjoy reading the Embrace magazine cover to cover. I think it shows the honest, real struggles people have in this *dirah b'tachtonim* and how they rise to their challenges. As my children grow older, and some make choices that are not exactly the path I had hoped for them to take, I gain strength from reading the articles that show me that there are still people that are holding tight to the values of *chassidishkeit* in our community, and it gives me hope for things to improve. Thank you for a job well done.

– Anonymous

**I** want to thank you for your dedication to publishing such a high-quality magazine.

It is such a highlight when it arrives in the mail and it is one of the few publications that I read cover to cover.

Being an avid reader of publications from many circles, this magazine truly makes me proud to be a Lubavitcher. The contributors are, without fail, thoughtful and empowered. This does not only apply to the articles about shlichus or spiritual topics — the entrepreneurs, creatives, and other dynamic Chabad women who contribute to your magazine similarly reflect a sense of passion and purpose. We are so lucky to be plugged into a larger mission and view of the world, and this is reflected in the *toichen* pouring out of every page of EmBRace.

Thank you so much for curating such a wonderful publication, and I look forward to continuing to be inspired!

– Chanah Rose



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# Hate in Iran, Love in Crown Heights



Dovid Zaklikowski



*Mr. and Mrs. Hakakzadeh*



*Miriam and Sarah Hakakzadeh*



**F**rom exile in Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini kept a watchful eye on Iran, the country he was banished from in 5724 (1964) for denouncing the country's monarch Mohammad Reza. Known simply as the Shah, Reza brought stability to the country and permitted social influences from the West.

Khomeini, however, was known for his ruthless and radical leadership and had often fanned the flames of antisemitism by denouncing Israel, the solitary Jewish country in

the Middle East. While the Yidden in Iran lived relatively peacefully, and diplomatic relations with Israel existed, there were frequent antisemitic undertones that were apparent to the Hakakzadeh sisters.

On one occasion, as the family cleaned their home for Pesach, a Muslim friend of Sarah Hakakzadeh asked, “Is it really true that you’re going to drink blood on your holiday?” Sarah did not understand the question, and upon hearing what had transpired, her mother Tovah was visibly upset and prohibited the friendship.

Sarah’s older sister, Miriam, recalled trips to the bazaar, where their uncle, Yakov Zakaria, had a stand. Locals would place water in their stores for passers-by to drink. In some stores, Jews were not allowed to touch the water, and store owners would inform Jews that they are *najisin*, impure, and must stay away.

In 5738 (1978), winds of religious uprising began to plague the country. Khomeini had been gone — and largely forgotten — for over a decade, but was suddenly hailed as a hero by religious zealots and even many moderates. It began with protests that occasionally evolved into violence, but it seemed like a passing phenomenon.

However, despite the Shah’s efforts to quash the

*“Is it really true that you’re going to drink blood on your holiday?”*

uprising, he could not. It was hatred for the West, the Shah’s lack of strict religious practice, the open “sinning” of Iran’s citizens, the relationship with the United States, and, of course, the chief enemy perceived to be the root of all evil: Israel.

After much planning, in Av (August) of that year, two Chabad rabbis, Rabbi Hertzell Illulian, who had Persian roots, and Rabbi Sholom Ber Hecht, spiritual leader of the Sephardic Jewish Congregation in Queens, New York, landed in Iran. Their mission was to lay the groundwork for the possibility of opening a Chabad House in the country, and perhaps to recruit several older teens to return with them to study at a yeshiva in New York.

For the most part, the established Jewish community in Tehran greeted them with open arms. The two students visited many shuls, speaking about the importance of strengthening Jewish life in the country and

*Buildings in the city were burning, and rioters roamed the streets freely:*

building proper Jewish schools.

However, the duo soon realized that there was a rapidly deteriorating situation unfolding before their eyes. Buildings in the city were burning, and rioters roamed the streets freely. While it was clear that adults would not be allowed to leave the country in the event of a draft, there was an opportunity to help anyone under eighteen escape an increasingly volatile environment.

Rabbi Hecht returned to New York, and another Chabad student flew to Iran in his place. Back in New York, Rabbi Hecht, together with his legendary father Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda “JJ” Hecht, called on local activists and institutions to aid Iranian Jewry.

When no one took the reins, the senior Rabbi Hecht took it upon himself to provide I-20 student visas to Jewish Iranian teens via one of the schools under his umbrella organization, the National Committee for the Furtherance of Education (NCFJE).

Back in Iran, the Chabad students implored the Iranian community to send their children to New York, where they would be cared for and welcomed. Understandably, this was a frightening prospect for most parents and they were reluctant to agree.



Sarah Hakakzadeh



Miriam Finck (left) and Sarah Friedman (right) with their mother.

Miriam and Sarah's mother, too, could not fathom separating from her daughters. Her husband, Mordechai, had recently passed away and she could not cope with another loss. The girls' uncle, Yakov, beseeched his sister to release her daughters, but she could not. Months later, their brother, Shmuel Hakakzadeh, eighteen, was walking with Yakov when they witnessed protesters defacing a wall with the words "Death to Israel." Yakov tried to wipe it off. When someone spotted him, protestors began to chase the two men. While Yakov outran them, Shmuel was caught.

The crowd swept Shmuel off to a nearby university, while Yakov ran to get help. He approached a friend, an influential Muslim, and urgently told him what had transpired. The Muslim friend ran to the university and demanded Shmuel's release.

A short while later, they let Shmuel go. He exited the building without shoes or shirt, and it seemed that his captors had been imminently planning to torture him or take his life.

When the two arrived home, Yakov demanded that his sister send her daughters to New York. "They will have all their needs met," he said, "and receive a good Jewish education."

Their mother relented.

## An Idyllic Childhood

Growing up in Tehran, life had been peaceful for Sarah and Miriam. They had a nice shul, kosher butchers and bakeries, Jewish schools, and a tight-knit community. Their family was traditional. Miriam

*It was only after Sarah screamed at the top of her lungs, pulling her brother out of the chokehold, that the protestor let go.*

recalls that they kept kosher, with separate dairy and meat tablecloths, and even after having dairy, they would wait six hours before eating meat.

The Jewish school they attended catered to boys and girls, each sitting on separate sides of the classroom. They learned secular subjects in the morning, and in the afternoon, two hours of Hebrew studies ranging from language, Yomim Tovim, and the weekly Parsha. Then they studied two hours of French.

Despite the schooling, there was a lack of knowledge about basic Jewish practice. Their mother lit Shabbos candles, and they were barred from certain activities on Shabbos. The end of Shabbos would be marked by their mother Tovah returning home and saying a few words before turning the lights on. Years later, Miriam says, while she did not know what her mother uttered, it surely was not Havdola.

Their mother was a first grade teacher at one of the local Jewish day schools, and their father was a manager in a Jewish-owned factory. The factory was an hour and a half away, and Mordechai left early each morning and returned home late at night.

When they did see their father, usually on Shabbos, he would spend much of the time saying Tehillim and learning Chumash. While he did not go to shul on Friday night, he would always attend on Shabbos day. He was a no-nonsense person, demanded good behavior from his children, and encouraged them to make every effort to excel in life. But largely, their mother was the greater influence on the home.

While lacking basic knowledge, Miriam says, "We were still so connected to Yiddishkeit, and Eretz Yisroel was our country."

The revolution shattered all this.

One day, when Sarah and her brother were on line to purchase oil to heat their home, they were caught in a crossfire. A protestor grabbed Shmuel and used him as a human shield before the armed soldiers. It was only after Sarah screamed at the top of her lungs, pulling her brother out of the chokehold, that the protestor let go.

They knew it was time to leave.

## Visiting “Family”

When their visas were finally approved, direct flights to the United States were no longer available. They were first to fly to Italy, where they would undergo more formal vetting to ensure they were not enemies of the West.

In Adar 5739 (March 1979), the first group of teens left for Italy, and then to the United States. When word arrived that all had gone smoothly, more groups were organized.

Aside from a handful of Iranian Jewish leaders, including the chief rabbi, Rabbi Yedidia Shofet, no one really knew what Chabad was. However, with the encouragement of their local rabbis, including the enthusiastic blessing of Rabbi Shofet, the Jewish community in Iran placed their trust in an unknown organization based thousands of miles away in New York.

Miriam and Sarah were told by their mother that they were going to leave Iran, at least until there was a peaceful resolution to the uprising.

“We were kids,” Miriam says. “We were happy and excited to go to another country.”

*Within days of the meeting, countless children were placed, and despite the fact that many locals were struggling financially, they created space in their children’s bedrooms and in their hearts.*

Before their planned departure, the extended family gathered together for a goodbye party. Tovah gifted her daughters the little savings she had collected over the years.

The girls were given explicit instructions before their exodus. They were advised to speak to no one, including the other teens, until they were out of Iran. Clinging to their passports, their most critical possession, on Friday, the 24th of Adar (March 23), the sisters headed to the airport where they were interrogated. They were asked about discrepancies in birthdates between their passports and documents, where they were going, and when they’d return. The teens told the Iranian police that they were visiting

family in Italy and returning in two weeks. As their fear mounted, and after a long time, the teens were finally permitted to go.

In the sky, free from the shackles of Iran, the other Jewish children and teens aboard slowly began identifying themselves. There were sixty of them on the plane.

For Sarah, it was exciting to be on a plane for the first time, “but at some point, I became scared. We had left our family behind.” She said it was the assurance of her older sister that kept her spirits up.

After two weeks in Italy, they arrived at JFK Airport in New York.

## Open Homes

As groups of Iranian children flocked to Crown Heights, it became apparent that the space where they were housed was inadequate. These children had left behind comfortable and bustling family lives, and they were in need of warm homes. As the number of refugees swelled to nearly a thousand, an emergency meeting for local residents was called by NCFJE.

Several speakers spoke about the importance of opening community homes to the children arriving from Iran. Many in the crowd, mostly mothers, could not even locate Iran on a map. They were astounded to hear that Shushan, of the Purim story, is located in



Rabbi Yossi and Sarah Friedman

*“It was as if they were the children of a sister, as if they were blood relatives. Their pain became my pain, their worries became my worries, and their joys and successes became mine too.”*

Iran, and that Mordechai and Esther are buried there.

One Holocaust survivor spoke of the unique opportunity — the opportunity to save lives — that was being handed to them. These children, the crowd was told, were in need of more than a bed; they needed homes. “I was in a Displaced Persons camp after the war,” the survivor said. “These children should not feel like they are in one.” She explained that the crisis in Iran placed Jews, yet again, in imminent danger, except that this time there were Jews in the United States who could take part in saving their brethren.

A sheet of paper was passed around to those willing to open their homes. Within days of the meeting, countless children were placed, and despite the fact that many locals were struggling financially, they created space in their children’s bedrooms and in their hearts.

Chana Sharfstein, who welcomed two girls into her home just a short time after that meeting, recalls the challenge of those early days. While Lubavitchers were constantly opening their doors to others, the sacrifice entailed was typically short-lived. This time, there was no end date.

From the moment the girls entered their home and gave her a hug and kiss, Chana wrote in the *Yiddische Heim*, they became part of the Sharfstein family. “It

was as if they were the children of a sister, as if they were blood relatives. Their pain became my pain, their worries became my worries, and their joys and successes became mine too.”

Many of the children did not understand — or their parents felt they did not need to know — the danger they had escaped in Iran. They believed they were sent to New York in order to learn English and Hebrew, or to study in a local school. One teen told the *New York Times*, “I studied in a Jewish high school and my Hebrew teachers recommended to me that it is good to go study in Yeshiva.”

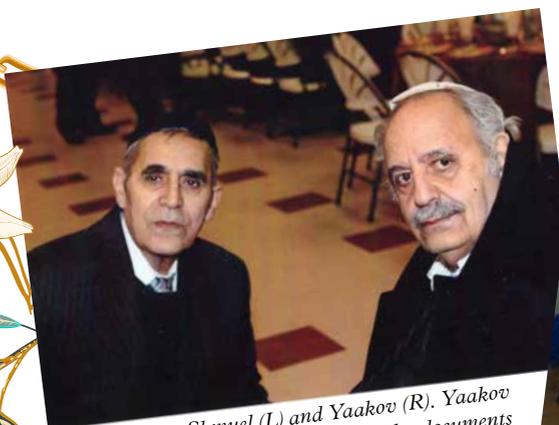
For Pesach, locals organized a grand seder, where seven hundred children and teens gathered in the Bais Rivkah lunchroom. The matza and the charoses were different, despite the efforts of the organizers, “It was so much better in Iran,” recalls Miriam. With that, there was rice and other familiar foods from home, and efforts were made to procure the Haggoda in Farsi.

“We had the greatest time,” says Sarah. “It was a very emotional experience.”

Miriam and Sarah were initially housed in a building on Eastern Parkway and Albany Avenue, but shortly after Pesach, the boiler of the building broke, and they moved in with their host family: Rabbi Moshe and Esther Goldman.

Mrs. Goldman recalls that they had no common language and all the initial conversations were “more sign language than anything else.”

She did not have any idea how to cook Persian food, but she made attempts to accommodate while laying down the ground rules. Considering the multitude of challenges, “I knew it was the right thing to do, and I was going to try the best I could,” says Mrs. Goldman.



Sarah's uncles, Shmuel (L) and Yaakov (R). Yaakov helped Sarah and her sister procure the documents that allowed them to escape.



Formally uniting the Goldman and Finck families.

The girls learned English slowly, one word at a time. Miriam recalls that they were constantly expressing their thanks to Mrs. Goldman, who would respond, “You are welcome.” Miriam once told her friends: “This lady is so happy that we are in her home that every second she’s welcoming us by saying, ‘You’re welcome, you’re welcome.’”

The sisters were slowly learning about Yiddishkeit in the Goldman home, from the basics of Shabbos to tznius dress. “It wasn’t hard,” Miriam says, “it was just an adjustment.”

## Building a New Life

NCFJE arranged for the girls to study at Bais Rivkah. Miriam says that while there were communication barriers, she felt welcomed. She fondly recalls walking to Bais Rivkah together with the Goldman girls and their friends from the block.

The Iranian students had special English language classes, which was a great struggle initially. In Iran, Miriam said, she had done well, but transitioning her studies to a new language proved difficult. That first year, she passed the History Regents Exam but not the English one.

The teachers, she says, were wonderful, caring, and invited her regularly for Shabbos meals. She made lifelong friends in the halls of Bais Rivkah, including her closest friend, Mrs. Esther Wilhelm. Classmates included them in activities, helped them with school work, and encouraged their acclimatization to life in Crown Heights.

The teachers pressed the girls to apply more effort in their studies. Miriam recalls telling her teacher that they know nothing and cannot learn. But the teachers, she said, “recognized right away that we knew more than we’d admit. They told us we could handle it.”

When the girls began to express to veteran principal Morah Teichtel that the pressure was too great, she reassured them. “Answer as much as you know,” she said.

Over time, they began to internalize the message that they were indeed capable, and soon excelled in their studies. Miriam loved learning Chassidus, and especially Tanya. Her friends took her to farbrengens with the Rebbe, and painstakingly explained the sichos to her.

The sisters lived in the Goldman home until they

were married. With the help of Mrs. Goldman, Miriam married Shmuel Finck, and Sarah married Yosef Friedman, both building large families with many children and grandchildren.

Today, the families are still deeply bonded, and Mrs. Finck’s children call the Goldman couple Bubby and Zeide. Their family connection was cemented in 5772 (2012), when Miriam’s son, Meir, married their granddaughter Mushka Goldman of Los Angeles.

*“It affirmed what I already knew,” she says. “Bais Rivkah is part of me; they are my family.”*

“I’m so thankful to the Rebbe for sending Rabbi Hecht to Iran,” says Mrs. Sarah Friedman. If not for them, “I don’t know what would have happened to us.”

## Community Ties

Today, Mrs. Finck is a proud teacher at Bais Rivkah. “I love it. Love is not the word,” she says. Every day, she marvels anew at the positive atmosphere of the school, and their steadfast goal to educate the next generation of Jewish leaders.

Three years ago, Mrs. Finck’s husband tragically passed away. She says that he had a heart of gold, and was constantly giving charity to others.

“I am still hurting, but Bais Rivkah was there for me,” she said. When she struggled deeply in the months after his passing, Bais Rivkah was supportive. No one said a word if she was late, left early, or didn’t come at all.

“It affirmed what I already knew,” she says. “Bais Rivkah is part of me; they are my family.”

Today, many large Lubavitch families in the neighborhood and beyond are the offshoots of those eighteen hundred Iranian children saved by Chabad in the 5730s (1970s). Some have chosen to uphold their unique customs from Iran, while others have opted to keep Lubavitch customs. In every respect, they have become part of the fabric of the Lubavitch community.

Looking back at the past four decades, Miriam says that in fact, they are not just part of the community, rather, “We *are* the community.” ■



# THE NEED FOR TEACHERS

*A tribute to Rebbetzin Chava Hecht, a”h, how she found Lubavitch, and the legacy she left behind.*

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Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine



**C**hava Lasker, a young teen, had heard through the grapevine about the Lubavitch community. She knew they had a Rebbe, a Chassidic rabbi living not far from her East New York neighborhood, and that his followers were active in educating Jewish youth in unconventional ways. Her friend, Edith Sklar (later Bloch), was from a Lubavitch family, and recruited Chava in organizing local Mesibos Shabbos groups under the auspices of the Rebbe.

When Chava was sixteen, Edith encouraged her to join a Simchas Torah gathering with the

Rebbe Rayatz, who had come to the United States a year earlier. After an hour's walk, they made it to Crown Heights, where the Rebbe lived, but were unable to see him. Years of hearing about the leader from Russia, but having yet to meet him, added to the mystique of the movement.

By 5704 (1944), when she got engaged to a Lubavitcher, she was teaching at a local Bais Yaakov, and in the afternoons, Chava taught in Bais Rivkah, which at the time was an afternoon Talmud Torah.

Just around her marriage in 5705 (1945), Bais Rivkah was transitioning into a day school, and its director, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, her husband's spiri-

*“You married a Lubavitcher, and we need teachers at the Lubavitch school. Please, you need to teach our students.”*

tual mentor, approached her and said: “You married a Lubavitcher, and we need teachers at the Lubavitch school. Please, you need to teach our students.”

Chava was caught in a dilemma. She held tremendous deference for rabbinic figures, as her family had instilled in her, and certainly for Rabbi Jacobson, but she still knew little about the Lubavitch movement. This seemed to be the ultimate initiation, and she did not know if she was ready for the training.

## UPBRINGING

Chava was born in 5686 (1926) to Elimelech and Esther Leah Lasker at a time when Jewry in the United States was rapidly declining. “America was much different than it is now,” Chava recalled. “I can count how many people had beards, how many ladies wore *shaitelach*, and I’ll have some fingers left over.”

Of her childhood, she had only fond memories. “I didn’t have a lot of the things that [children] have now, but nobody else had them, so we were happy,” she said.

Her parents were earnest people. Her mother had never gone to school, and her father left yeshiva at

*Thus, every week, he was fired from work for not agreeing to work on Shabbos, and at a young age, Chava learned what it meant to display *Mesiras Nefesh* for Yiddishkeit.*

the age of thirteen, when WWI began. Despite this, she said, when it came to Yiddishkeit, “whatever they did, they did with a full heart, and this is what influenced me and my brother and sister as we were growing up.”

While all of her aunts and uncles were not Shabbos observers, her parents were. Many years later, Chava asked her father, “How were you able to keep Shabbos?”

He responded simply, “*Mein kind*, my child, Shabbos is Shabbos.” It was simply not up to debate. Thus, every week, he was fired from work for not agreeing to work on Shabbos, and at a young age, Chava learned what it meant to display *Mesiras Nefesh* for Yiddishkeit.

While her brothers studied at Jewish day schools, there were none for girls, and Chava attended public school. After school, she would join many Jewish children at a Talmud Torah for two hours. When she



*Rebbeztin Hecht being held by her mother, Esther Leah.*

*“You learned to be a teacher here, and we need to pay you?!”*

would return home and inform her mother of a new halacha, “immediately my mother applied it.”

Once, a Jewish teacher in public school told her parents that she believes that Chava would excel if only she was wholly committed to her secular education. The teacher said, “In English, she writes one way, and in Jewish, she writes another way. Take her out of Talmud Torah.” While other mothers may have listened, Mrs. Lasker adamantly refused.

When Chava graduated elementary school, she went to high school in Downtown Manhattan. However, she was unhappy there, and when she heard of a newly established Bais Yaakov, she switched schools immediately. From that point in her life, she recalled, “My whole attitude toward everything [changed].” While her initial focus had been on a future career, she shifted her energies toward a Jewish future and building a Jewish family.

## *NEW LIFE, NEW JOB*

One day, her childhood friend Edith told Chava



*Rebbeztin Hecht as a teenager.*



*Rabbi Yf Hecht with his Torah Tmimah class.*

about a young man named Yankel Hecht, whom she felt would be a good match for Chava. Yankel, Edith had explained, was a teacher at the Lubavitch Cheder Torah Temimah in Crown Heights.

“But he lived in Williamsburg, and I lived in East New York,” Chava thought, “and the two neighborhoods were as different as the USA is to China.” Chava dismissed the idea.

A short time later, Rabbi Elya Sklar, Edith’s father, mentioned that his daughter claimed that Chava, indeed, wants to date Yankel Hecht. “What? I want to go out with him?” she exclaimed. “I don’t even know who he is.” After some discussion, she agreed to raise the prospect with her parents. “If he has a beard,” she told herself, “my parents will go crazy.”

Her parents supported the idea. The couple met, and as it turned out, he did not have a beard at the time.

During their long courtship, Chava was hired to teach at the newly-established Bais Yaakov elementary day school. It was a large school, and she was paid well there. She greatly enjoyed her new position.

Nonetheless, when Rabbi Jacobson approached her to teach in Bais Rivkah, she ultimately could not refuse him, despite knowing that the fledgling Chabad school was struggling financially. In fact, when Chava once asked to get paid, Rabbi Jacobson facetiously replied, “You learned to be a teacher here, and we need to pay you?!”

When Chava’s grandparents would travel to Florida in the winter, her grandmother fundraised for the

*On her part, Mrs. Hecht would say, education needs to include personal attention to the children.*

school by selling raffle tickets to her visitors. Upon returning, she would hand the earnings over to Chava, in lieu of the salary she was owed. Chava humorously recalled, “Those were the only times I was paid.”

With the encouragement of her husband, she invested herself in teaching, before taking on two more projects that became pillar stones of the Lubavitch community: The National Committee of Jewish Education and Camp Emunah.

“Lubavitch changed my life,” she said, “[I] grew into Lubavitch.”

Later, when Mrs. Hecht was pregnant with her first child, she stopped teaching in Bais Rivkah, but this did not mark the end of her teaching career. Years later, after her husband became Rabbi at Congregation Rabbi Meyer Simcha HaCohen, which also housed a Hebrew school, she asked the Rebbe about teaching there. She was eager to teach again, and it was local. Furthermore, “I knew I’d get paid,” said Chava.

The Rebbe replied that if she so wanted to teach, it should be in Bais Rivkah. She followed through and resumed her position in Bais Rivkah.

Decades later, Chava has had countless grandchildren who have both studied and taught in Bais Rivkah.



*Rebbetzin Hecht, left, with her Bais Rivkah students. Photo: Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad.*



*Rabbi יח Hecht as master of ceremonies at the 1951 Beth Rivkah dinner. Photo: NCFJE*

Frumah, a granddaughter, says that she shares the same drive to teach as her grandmother did, and has been rewarded tremendously. “If you invest in teaching,” she says, “and foster your own enthusiasm for the material, the results are apparent in the students’ excitement and curiosity.”

On her part, Mrs. Hecht would say, education needs to include personal attention to the children: “To make each individual feel important. This is an approach I try to apply every day.” ■

*As this article was being prepared for publication, the dynamic matriarch of the Hecht family, and longtime director of Camp Emunah, Rebbetzin Chava Hecht, passed away.*

*It is a great loss to many of the Bais Rivkah alumnae, current students, and to the Chabad community. May her memory be a blessing for us all.*



# The Song of Education

Rabbi Tzvi Meir Steinmetz & Bais Rivkah

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Sara (Lazar) Wilansky, Elizabeth, New Jersey  
*Elementary Graduating Class of 5737 (1977)*



*Rabbi Tzvi Meir Steinmetz is my maternal grandfather. Together with my grandmother Devora and three daughters, came to America from Hungary after World War II and settled in Crown Heights. My mother, Henya Yehudith Lazar, is their oldest daughter. My parents were sent by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to be Shluchim in Milan, Italy in 5720 (1960), where they still live. I grew up in Milan, and when I was twelve years old, my parents sent me to Bais Rivkah in Crown Heights, as there was no class for me at home. My older sister was already a student at Bais Rivkah for two years, as she had moved to Crown Heights when she was ten and a half. We lived with my grandparents and aunts there.*

In the summer of 5712 (1952), the Dean of Lubavitch's Bais Rivkah Girls' School in New York, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, was looking for a principal and teacher for the new high school division. An acquaintance of Rabbi Tzvi Meir Steinmetz (later to be known as the Hebrew poet "Zvi Yair"), introduced him to Rabbi Jacobson. As the two men spoke, it became clear to Rabbi Jacobson that the new immigrant before him was a Torah scholar with a warm chassidische neshoma and a knack for explaining deep concepts in simple words. He was "Hungar-ish," as were the families of many potential students living in the neighborhood at the time.

Rabbi Jacobson offered him the job on the spot. But Rabbi Steinmetz, a newcomer struggling to support his family, had just accepted a part-time teaching job in Yeshiva of Flatbush, a Zionist Orthodox school where the Judaic curriculum was taught in modern Hebrew. If he would be permitted to keep the other position as well, he told Rabbi Jacobson, he would happily accept the offer.

Rabbi Jacobson inquired at Chabad headquarters, and he relayed the response to Rabbi Steinmetz: "The two schools have very different philosophies. One cannot hold positions in both." Rabbi Steinmetz did not argue with him.

A few days later, however, Rabbi Jacobson called him back. The Rebbe had overruled the people at "headquarters," and had instructed that it would be okay for Rabbi Steinmetz to hold both positions. And that is how Rabbi Steinmetz became a teacher and principal in the Bais Rivkah High School.

"I had never heard of Chabad before I moved to Crown Heights," he recalled. "I once opened a Tanya but did not read past the first page. Had I read further, I might have begun my journey forty years earlier."

His first task upon accepting the position was to meet with the Rebbe. Decades later, he recalled the encounter with some embarrassment. He was not aware at the time that Chassidim considered it disrespectful to sit in the presence of the Rebbe. "He told me to sit, so I sat. We discussed problems in education, and I was deeply impressed by the Rebbe's approach and views. I was fascinated by the passion and excitement and the many innovations of the Rebbe."

Rabbi Steinmetz recalled that in their conversation he had mentioned to the Rebbe regarding the Maharal's approach to how Jewish education should be

*"I once opened a Tanya but did not read past the first page. Had I read further, I might have begun my journey forty years earlier."*

organized: Chumash and Tanach should be taught through the age of ten, the entire Mishnah through the age of fifteen, and only afterward Gemora, without commentaries at first (as set forth in the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos) — rather than the popular approach, whereby the students are introduced to extrapolations and novel approaches in the Talmudic text ("pilpul") when they are much younger and do not yet have good all-encompassing knowledge.

The Rebbe's response was, "But in the end, his approach was not followed." In other words, despite the Maharal's greatness, we should trust the traditional *Minhag Yisroel* approach in teaching Torah to children.

Rabbi Steinmetz described his relationship with Dr. Breuer and the philosophy of "*Torah im derech eretz*" — strict adherence to Torah observance along with engagement with the modern world. The Rebbe, however, did not feel that this approach was appro-



Rabbi Tzvi Meir Steinmetz

*Children today have a natural emunah and temimus, the Rebbe argued. If we give them the pure, unadulterated teachings of the Torah, they will follow them.*

appropriate for the current generation. Children today have a natural emunah and temimus, the Rebbe argued. If we give them the pure, unadulterated teachings of the Torah, they will follow them.

Rabbi Steinmetz started his multiple teaching jobs early in the morning. He taught classes in Yiddishkeit and Gemora at the Yeshiva of Flatbush. Then, he drove to Bais Rivkah, where he spent the rest of the day. He had bought a car for his commute and would take a brief nap in the parking lot before starting his second shift.

He was a passionate educator. At a parent-teacher event years later, he spoke about the crucial role of parents in their child's education: "Education begins even before the child is born, when the child is imbued with holiness from the parents' way of life. Parents are partners with the school in their child's education and have an equal share in the child's success or failure. One can never give up on a child even if there are many failures. Mistakes should be seen as a prelude to growth."

He would quote the fifth Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, who taught that just as one is required to don tefillin every day, a parent is obligated to think about the education of each of his children every day.

The tefillin are placed near the heart, the center of emotions, and on the head, the seat of intellect. Both of these faculties must be used to their utmost in education as well, he explained, in a balanced way. A parent cannot allow compassion and empathy to deprive the child of all limits and regulations. On the other hand, using intellect alone can lead to a cold and merciless way of parenting. There must be a healthy equilibrium between love and discipline.

Even as he was extremely devoted to his work, creating a curriculum for the girls' school and preparing for his classes beforehand, the position at Bais Rivkah was fraught with difficulties from the outset. The school accepted girls from all backgrounds, and the level of prior Jewish education varied dramatically. Some girls had come from public school and were used to amenities that the school could not afford, such as a gym or even adequate classroom space.

In a report addressed to the Rebbe, who was the official president of the school, the new principal worried that these deficiencies were contributing to the students' low morale. "Surely, when they are older they will realize that these are unimportant details, as they truly are. However, the current situation is creating a negative attitude to the institution and the staff. If we don't find a solution for the current situation, then



*My grandfather, Rabbi Tzvi Meir Steinmetz.*



*My grandparents with the Rebbe.*



chas v'shalom, the entire edifice could turn into dust.”

In the next report, the last from his time at the school, Rabbi Steinmetz wrote that he had hired additional teachers and a new principal, and things had improved somewhat. The students were in better spirits, though their varying levels continued to be a problem. “If there were funds, I would suggest creating a separate class for the more advanced students,” he proposed.

Rabbi Steinmetz held the position as principal of Bais Rivkah for only two years, but he later said that his time in Bais Rivkah profoundly influenced the course of his life. “I was teaching in a Chabad format, and I naturally took an interest in Chabad and the Rebbe.”

Years later, Rabbi Steinmetz taught in Yeshiva Ohel Moshe and took his entire graduating class of eighth grade boys to the Rebbe for Yechidus. Indeed, one of the participants has raised a Chabad family of Shluchim.

In 5739 (1979) he wrote to the Rebbe that the de-

cision to allow him to hold both teaching positions “...brought me under the wings of Chabad and its leader, and changed the direction of my life and that of my daughters. The Rebbe drew me close without me even knowing it.”

Indeed, Rabbi Steinmetz and his wife became totally devoted to the Rebbe, and their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are the Rebbe’s Shluchim the world over. ■



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# A Russian Girl in Bais Rivkah

*As a new immigrant to the foreign shores of America,  
it was Bais Rivkah that gave Mrs. Leah (Herskovits)  
Kahan the foundation for her new life.*

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Interview by  
Chaya (Mochkin) Goldberg, Atlanta, GA  
*Graduating class of 5772 (2012)*



**B**orn in 5717 (1957), Mrs. Leah (Herskovits) Kahan spent her childhood in the Carpathian Mountains in Russia, where she and her family lived until she was thirteen. It was during the communist regime, so although Mrs. Kahan received a strong scholastic education, Torah learning and Yiddishkeit were neglected.

The school she attended looked down on religion and pushed an atheist agenda, so Leah

had to hide her Jewish traditions. She recalls feeling fearful when school friends wanted to come over for a study session on a Friday night. Leah wanted to reschedule, but her friends were persistent; she spent the session praying they would avoid peering into the kitchen where the Shabbos candles sat glowing.

What would have happened if her school friends discovered the candles?

“I probably would not have gone back to school,” Leah responded.

In the late 1960s, because Yom Kippur fell on a Shabbos, Leah took off a day of school. Upon returning to school, the assistant principal stared down the three Jewish children in the class, “Hmm... all three of you got sick on the same day... so interesting,” she said with suspicion. Leah still remembers the fear she felt at that moment, even years later.

Her parents, Binyomin Dovid and Shifra a”h, played a fundamental role in instilling Leah with emuna in Hashem. Her father loved to learn and would teach his children at home. She was blessed with a happy childhood and her family was financially well off, which was especially important during the political climate at the time. As such, her father provided financial support for many of the Yidden in their community, emulating his father. Her mother was an amazing cook and would make challah, kugel, and delicious soups every week in honor of Shabbos.

Leah recalls one night when she was woken by her mother and instructed to stand outside in the summer heat. Her neighbors had experienced a death in their family and had called a pope to join them in saying goodbye to the deceased. Through the open windows, Leah could hear the family praying together with the pope as they mourned the loss of their loved one. “You see,” said her mother, “At school everyone makes it seem like they follow the communist beliefs, but they’re faking it. They all believe in G-d.”

When Leah was thirteen, her family moved to San Francisco, California, to join her aunt and uncle who lived there. Her aunt and uncle were instrumental in their moving process by arranging papers, setting up an apartment, and providing furniture. Rabbi and Rebbetzin Drizin helped Leah and her

*“Hmm... all three of you got sick on the same day... so interesting,” she said with suspicion.*

family navigate the new environment, showing them where to purchase kosher food and the shuls they could daven in. Leah was a pianist and her aunt helped her to continue her music education by setting up an interview in the conservatory of music which resulted in Leah receiving a scholarship and a new piano.

After six months in San Francisco, Leah’s father decided that the family would move to New York. Before she left, Leah asked her professor at the conservatory for a letter of recommendation to Julliard. He said, “I could write you a letter happily, but you are too nice of a person to live that kind of life.” These words resonated with Leah and when she arrived in New York she did not go to Julliard. Instead, she hired a Julliard graduate as a private teacher.



*Leah Kahan at age 14. Picture taken just as she arrived to America.*

*“Hmm... all three of you got sick on the same day... so interesting,” she said with suspicion.*

As a Jewish, Russian, fourteen-year-old girl in New York City, finding a school was a challenge for Leah. She was switching schools nearly every two weeks and beginning to get frustrated that none were the right fit. On Purim 5731 (1971), Rebbetzin Rosenfeld hosted a gathering for Russian girls and it was there that Leah met Shprinza (Friedman) Kavka, currently a Shlucha in Seattle, Washington.



*Leah Kahan on her wedding day.*

Shprinza sat across from her, and they chatted, laughed, and discussed what they were up to. Leah explained that she had tried out multiple schools and that she was struggling to keep up with the

classes taught in Hebrew. Shprinza excitedly suggested that she join her at Bais Rivkah, a Lubavitch school that had special classes to accommodate Russian students.

Soon after, Leah attended an interview with Morah Horowitz in her home. She was accepted into Bais Rivkah and joined the ninth grade mechina class.

She describes her classmates as being warm, inclusive, and accepting. She was appointed head of the orchestra and played music with the girls, still speaking fondly of memories of kumzitzes and singing together. Being included by the girls and feeling the warmth of the principals, she felt a sense of belonging.

Throughout her high school years, Leah slowly integrated into the regular class and graduated together with everyone. In seminary, she taught parsha to the new Russian high school school girls and spoke in multiple different cities about her experience in Russia, including Cincinnati, Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles.

*“Now I understand that a Yid has a responsibility to live as the Shulchan Aruch tells us to and that music is only the cherry on the top.”*

Leah spent her summers in Camp Emunah and was crowned Miss Emunah in 5734 (1974). She went on to work as a counselor in the Russian bunk and passionately taught them all of the things that she had learned.

Leah feels that her Lubavitch Bais Rivkah experience made a tremendous difference in her life and that it gave her a love for Yiddishkeit that she did not previously have. She shared that at the end of her first year in Bais Rivkah she wrote in her diary, “Now I understand that a Yid has a responsibility to live as the Shulchan Aruch tells us to and that music is only the cherry on the top.” Bais Rivkah gave her perspective and a long-lasting relationship with Yiddishkeit which she lovingly passes on to the next generation through her family and students. ■

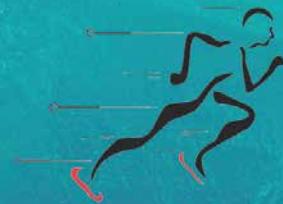


*Leah Kahan with her father in law, Rav Yossef Mordechai Kahan a"ch. He was the Rav of Munkach.*

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# Sister, Sister, Remember

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Kaila (Alevsky) Sasonkin, Akron, Ohio  
*Graduating class of 5744 (1984)*

Chani (Alevsky) Glitzenstein, Maaleh Efraim, Eretz Yisroel  
*Graduating class of 5742 (1982)*



*Bais Rivkah 12th grade graduating class of 1984.*

*In celebrations of eighty years of Bais Rivkah, EmBRace interviewed two Bais Rivkah alumnae, sisters who share their perspectives on shlichus and sisterhood — and how their time at Bais Rivkah still impacts life today.*

**EmBRace: How did Bais Rivkah impact your decision to go on shlichus so far from home?**

*Kaila:* I grew up on shlichus, in a home where everything was based on farbrengens and the Rebbe. All of my aunts were on shlichus, too, so it was kind of a “family thing.” Bais Rivkah’s inspired us to “follow the Rebbe’s advice,” which was easy because it surrounded us. We lived it, as opposed to being taught it and having to integrate it on our own.

*Chani:* I was very lucky to have the *zechus* of growing up on shlichus! Ever since I was a little child, I remember farbrengens and discussions surrounding our mission: to do what the Rebbe wants us to do. When I began attending Bais Rivkah High School, the understanding that our life is for the Rebbe was cemented.

**EmBRace: How are you similar to your sister, or how are you different?**

*Kaila:* Chani is a year and a half older than me, and we both work with similar things on our shlichus, although she probably does more, we are both outgoing and enjoy kids programming, teaching, and cooking.

Growing up she had a more adventurous personality, whereas I preferred to be in the kitchen cooking, Chanie preferred to be a bit more daring in the way she lived her life.

She’s also an author of the book, “מבט לעומק - הנישואין,” so she has greater knowledge and clarity of certain things. She is more studious and being able to write a book about *Taharas Hamishpacha* is an impressive accomplishment. She is more of a speaker, whereas I do not gravitate towards public speaking and prefer to address smaller groups. I learn from her all the time and take lessons from seeing her amazing work.

*Chani:* We do have a similar outlook about chinuch and shlichus programming, in that we both try to make it fun, exciting, and *lebedik*. Kaila is really my role model, and I think that many of our siblings feel the same way.

She is the epitome of a real Chossid, every minute of night and day, she is totally devoted to the Rebbe's shlichus. She is a living example of *ahavas Yisrael*, being totally selfless, and always ready to help anyone in need, both b’gashmius and b’ruchnius.

Something that I think is inherent and impressive in

*There seems to be a “Chassidische gene” as a result of the wonderful chinuch we were zoche to receive from our parents and grandparents.*

all of our siblings, is that there seems to be a “Chassidische gene” as a result of the wonderful chinuch we were *zoche* to receive from our parents and grandparents.

**EmBRace: What is something you do now that is the same as what was done in your childhood home? What is something that’s different?**

*Kaila:* Growing up, my parents' home had big Shabbos dinners, which we have, and I sing to my children as my mother did. From my parents, I’ve learned the importance of being strict on one hand but laid back on the other. I also find myself becoming more lenient with the younger ones than I was with my older children.

I was inspired by my parents' commitment to the Rebbe and to other people in their community. My mother prepared many “mitzvah meals” for families with new babies or those who were unwell and so I incorporate that into my Shluchus.

I also saw how respectful my parents were of their



Photo of the Bais Rivkah girls at the Ohio convention.

*We have to be bottul in front of every person that comes our way because they are experiencing such a challenging part in their story:*

parents and how they learned from them so we followed suit in following our parents' way.

Something that I aspire to bring into my house is telling stories the way my mother would.

*Chani:* As little kids, *shlichus* was the most exciting part of our lives. We were included in the preparations and went with our parents to be involved in all the programs. We try to do the same with our kids because we believe that by feeling included, they will be happy and proud to be a Shliach of the Rebbe. I remember going with my father to college campuses

to educate college students on Yiddishkeit. It made us feel part of the *shlichus*, and we enjoyed listening to all the questions about *hashkofa* that were raised by the college students. Also, while having a big family, including the children in *shiurim* is a good way to give each child one-on-one time. I try to take one child at a time and spend quality time with them. It is nice to spend time together on the drive and a parent can even make a stop at an ice cream store as an added treat. This way, they don't only feel a part of the *shlichus* but also get special attention from their parents.

### **EmBRace: Is there a book you've read recently that touched you?**

*Kaila:* *A Time to Heal*, by Rabbi Mendel Kalmen-son, because it helped me cope with the passing of my husband. It has a good explanation of grief and loss based on the Rebbe's explanations. It is clear, supportive, easy to read, and gives good tips and advice. It was a good grief counselor and really helped me through a lot.

*Chani:* I read a lot of books to find information to give over in *shiurim*. But, if I had to pick one, I feel that every single child and parent should read *Sefer Hazichronos* (Lubavitcher Rebbe's Memoirs). I remember reading it as a child and have since reread it to all my children. I feel that it teaches how to be a *mentch* and a Chossid.

### **EmBRace: Is there a moment when you really were touched by someone or when someone was really touched by you?**

*Kaila:* Once, we encountered a brother and sister who had not spoken to each other for fifteen years over a financial argument. Their father was passing away at the time so they had to decide where the services would be. The brother wanted it in our shul and knew that the father would have wanted the same, but he couldn't talk to the sister to communicate his father's wish. This was about two or three weeks after my husband passed away and before I went to visit their family I spoke to my husband and asked him to help me navigate this situation and help them make peace. I feel that the *Ai-bershter* together with my husband was the extra push that I needed. I played "Aaron" and really tried my hardest to make peace between them. In the end, the father's funeral was held at our shul and the brother and sister now talk every day.



*Kaila with her community in the early years of her shlichus.*



A more recent story occurred on last year's Purim when a woman, Nikki, was inspired by Sara Dukes sharing her story on Instagram. She was inspired to seek out *Yiddishkeit* and give her six-year-old daughter a Jewish experience. She reached out to Sara who connected her with our Chabad house in Akron and boruch Hashem she is still an active and inspired member of our community.

*Chani:* We have to be *bottul* in front of every person that comes our way because they are experiencing such a challenging part in their story. They are trying to change their lifestyle and they need to navigate relationships with their families that are not understanding of the changes they are making in their life. Every story that we have inspires me and makes me see how much *mesiras nefesh Am Yisrael* has in their desire to connect with Hashem.

When we first moved out to *shlichus* as a young couple, my three little children came home from kindergarten distressed and crying. I asked what had happened and they explained that a little kid had stolen my three-year-old son's yarmulka. Everyone told me to forget about the incident and that nothing good would come out of me confronting the child or parents. I knew the Rebbe would have said this has happened for a reason and that there must be something that we could learn from it. So, I gathered some courage and took my children to the little boy's house, despite my children's fear and reluctance. I knocked and the father of the boy opened the door. I said, "We came to invite your son to play with my kids because I saw that he was interested to see what yarmulkas are and we are happy to show him what we are all about." I understand that maybe he wants to learn more. My kids would be happy to play with him if he would like to come over." To make a long story short, eventually, this was the first family to become fully frum on our *shlichus*, boruch Hashem.

### **EmBRace: What is the most memorable moment from your time at Bais Rivkah?**

*Kaila:* The experiences that created outlets for me to express my creative self — beautiful rallies, production, working with floats for the Lag B'omer parade, and being G.O. president all stand out in my mind.

Also, I remember having the option to take algebra, geometry, or *Chassidus* class. It was amazing to have such a choice, and of course, I took the *Chassidus* class.

Lastly, Morah Piekarski would bring a "Mitzvah of

the Day" from *Sefer Hamitzvos* and it stuck with me so much that I've incorporated it into my Hebrew school curriculum.

*Chani:* My favorite memories of Bais Rivkah began before I was even a student. We lived in Cleveland, Ohio, and one of the first things that my parents did was launch "Camp Chabad," one of the first Chabad day camps. I remember that the first time we opened, about twenty Bais Rivkah girls came over and made the camp a memorable experience. When

*They were like a magnet — all the girls from the entire convention were drawn to the table full of Bais Rivkah girls.*

I think back on my memories of camp, I think of the Bais Rivkah girls and how they brought something that I had never felt or seen before — excitement, *chayus*, singing, and davening with song. This was my first recollection of what Bais Rivkah is all about.

Another memorable experience was at the Bais Yaakov Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. I was working at the convention as a waitress and remember the influence that the Bais Rivkah girls had on the event. They were like a magnet — all the girls from the entire convention were drawn to the table full of Bais Rivkah girls. The girls were singing and dancing and making the place *freilach*. They were the centerpiece of the conventions and all the schools went home with the song "We Want Moshiach Now" because of their influence! ■



*Kaila with the children in her Hebrew school.*

# MATAN TORAH:

## MAKING IT REAL

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Chanah (Poltorak) Rose, Pomona, NY  
*Graduating class of 5765 (2005)*



*This article first appeared on [mymef.org/blog](http://mymef.org/blog)*

**Z***man Matan Toraseinu* is upon us, the time when my toddler starts asking me: is Hashem going to give us the Torah again this year?

Indeed, we are meant to feel as if He truly does — which, as Chassidus teaches us, is really the case. But how do we inspire this feeling of receiving the Torah all over again in ourselves and our children?

The Frierdiker Rebbe said that every person must occasionally sit down, close their eyes, and imagine themselves standing at Har Sinai and receiving the Torah.

And there is so much to imagine! The sounds, the sights, and then the stillness, all preceding Hashem's voice giving us the infinite gift of "Anochi."

As educators, a primary goal of ours must be to capture our students' imagination in this way, forging a deep connection to Torah and Yiddishkeit. *Koach hadimyon*, the power of imagination, is a major theme in Chassidus. In Likkutei Diburim, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes:

“Not only do thought and imagination have the power to place a person in the distant past, to the point that here, in his present situation, he is enabled to experience things long since seen with the same sensations as he then experienced, but moreover, now that he is older and more experienced, with a certain lifetime behind him, he is able to view the same events more perceptively.”<sup>1</sup>”

The Frierdiker Rebbe then goes on to say, “In my thoughts and imagination I often relive sights which I first saw in Lubavitch at different times...”, and describes in great and vivid detail the heartfelt celebrations of the Yomim Tovim in Lubavitch of yore. As educators, how do we paint a picture of Yiddishkeit, and Chassidishkeit, for our students, that they can thoroughly identify with and will remain with them for life?



## 1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

One teacher I had the privilege to learn from was Morah Chaya (Estreicher) Friedman, then a first grade teacher. Before Shavuot, she took the Frierdiker Rebbe quite literally in taking her students outside to lie on the grass and close their eyes, listening to the silence, while learning about Matan Torah. That was surely a lesson to remember! On another day, her students held a mock court case to simulate the debate over whether Malachim or the Yidden should receive the Torah.

The Gemora teaches us, “ערוכה ברמ”ח איברים שלך, משתמרת”. Literally, this means that if it [the Torah] is embedded in your two hundred and forty eight limbs, it lasts. Figuratively, we can take this to mean that the more parts of us we involve in the learning, the more it “sticks.” At all age levels, in almost any lesson, the five senses can be involved. Common techniques might include: a picture put on the board for students to discuss; props brought in for the students to see and manipulate; building 3-D models or creating illustrations about what was learned; students doing particular motions at a particular part of a story or lesson; acting out a scenario as, or after, it is learned, and a teacher — or students — in costume. (One has to weigh for the individual students or lesson, as well as the teacher’s classroom management style, as to whether the costume or similar will be overly distracting.)

*Koach hadimyon, the power of imagination, is a major theme in Chassidus.*



## 2. STORIES DONE RIGHT

Stories are powerful, as most teachers will tell you, but looking at stories through the lense of *koach hadimyon* gives us a new understanding of their capacity to teach and inspire. When we tell a story, we are not conveying something to our students — *us* giving something over to *them*. On the contrary, as the Frierdiker Rebbe illustrates, when we tell a story we are *inviting our students into* a new experience that we are *creating* for them.

We do this by telling stories carefully and intentionally: Focus on details and savor them, asking students to stop occasionally to imagine a scene or sensation. Use terminology students understand (and if there are any words or phrases that students need to know, explain them before the story, or if necessary take a pause to ensure that everyone is with you before continuing on). Bring in props or pictures for unfamiliar concepts or time periods, or ask students to retell or discuss how they would feel at different parts of the story. Slow down!

Stories are not babysitting — when done right, they are teaching. Reb Elye Chaim Roitblatt, a legendary mechanech, used to tell his students two stories daily. Once, he had to punish his students, so he took away one of the stories. But one story had to remain, because to him, a story is chinuch.



## 3. WRITING

Journals are a powerful tool. When used in focused ways, they can fit into a variety of subjects and formats, all serving the same purpose — to help stu-

dents internalize their learning. This can range from one sentence (even dictated) and/or a picture in first grade, to comprehensive essays in older grades.

In fourth grade, my students kept a Tefilla journal. After learning about the translation as well as deeper meanings of a tefilla, students wrote what that tefilla made them think about. Some of their entries were profound, some were more simple, and some students drew pictures or comic strips instead of writing — but all of them were enthusiastic and sincere.

In my eighth grade, students kept a Chassidus journal. Every week, they chose one idea from our various subjects within Chassidus — Tanya, sichos, etc. — to write about how they can apply it to their lives. Again, entries varied, but the requirements were few and therefore students expressed themselves freely. The key with journals is to provide a few specific and undemanding requirements to give students a framework, and keep positive feedback flowing. Students can have the option to fold over a page and keep it private every so often.

As we learn in Hayom Yom<sup>3</sup>, “*u’kney lecha chaver*” can also mean “your pen (*kaneh*) is your friend.” Writing helps us experience what we learn emotionally, not just intellectually, enabling us to internalize it in a lasting and personal way.



## 4. READING

Reading is an activity which many children escape into, entering a world of their imagination. We can harness this by providing students with reading material that invites them into worlds of Torah and Chassidishkeit.

Whether through Hei Teves book reports, summer reading incentives, or other ways, there are so many opportunities to provide students with reading material that can both capture their imaginations and ignite their neshomos! The Frierdiker Rebbe’s writings, published in his Memoirs, The Makings of Chassidim, and similar, beckon students into the world of Chassidus. Older students, especially those who love to read, can be introduced to Likkutei Dibburim.

*Focus on details and savor them, asking students to stop occasionally to imagine a scene or sensation.*

One of the first endeavors of Lubavitch in America was publishing books for youth and children, and Rabbi Nissen Mandel, a brilliant thinker and prolific writer, was instructed to focus his prodigious talents on works for children! Our Rebbeim well understood the need to capture a child’s heart for Yiddishkeit, as well as the way to do so.



## 5. NOT JUST A TEST

Finally, if we hope that the learning sticks as we are teaching it, then we need to check afterwards if it was absorbed as deeply as intended. Spit-back and factual tests or quizzes are necessary for assessing concrete knowledge. However, in order to see if something was absorbed deeply and fully, we need to ask our students to reproduce it *in their own way*.

When a student is asked to summarize something in their own words, either orally or in writing, they show that they have understood the concepts and have made them fully their own. For other students, creating an artistic depiction is a better representation of their understanding. The ability to express a new idea in original terms is stressed in numerous sources in Chassidus, including about the power of speech: we are taught that someone who explains something to another, understands it much more deeply than before.

These kinds of projects and assessments are also called “assessments for learning,” instead of just “of” learning, as they take the learning itself to a new level. In order to ensure that real learning is taking place through a creative project, as opposed to just a fun activity (which also has its place), ensure that there is a rubric in place to guide the students as to which elements of the learning need to be represented in the project, and how it will be evaluated. For example, “the diorama should include at least three points from the Rashi and Meforshim that we learned,” etc.

*However, in order to see if something was absorbed deeply and fully, we need to ask our students to reproduce it in their own way.*

## BESIMCHA UBEPNIMYUS

All of these techniques help students internalize the learning, b'pnimiyus. In the Friediker Rebbe's bracha for the Yom Tov of Shavuos — to have a *Kabolas HaTorah besimcha ub'pnimiyus*, with joy and inwardness — we find the beautiful lesson that it is pnimiyus, internalization and integration, that leads to true simcha. When Torah is truly internalized, it reaches every part of us, dispelling any angst or discord, and we can approach life with clarity, calm, and true joy.

Let us use all the tools of our Rebbeim to give our students the gift of Simcha and Penimiyus, and turn

our students' hearts and minds fully on to Yiddishkeit. As educators, we have the power to make sure that our students really experience Kabolas HaTorah as their own, *b'simcha ub'pnimiyus*, on Shavuos and every other day of the year. ■

1. *Likkutei Diburim*, volume 1, p. 237
2. *Eiruvim 54a*
3. *Hayom Yom Yud Daled Menachem Av*

*Mrs. Chanah Rose is the Educational Director of Menachem Education Foundation (MEF), where she works to support educators with tools and inspiration to bring the best possible Chinuch to every child. Having taught and crafted curriculum for nearly every grade level from K-12, she also facilitates workshops and farbrengens for teachers worldwide, while teaching whenever possible in her local schools in Monsey, NY. Chanah's writing on Chinuch and other topics has appeared on Chabad.org and the MEF blog, and she can be reached at [c.rose@mymef.org](mailto:c.rose@mymef.org).*



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# #MAKINGKEILIM

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Batya (Wolvovsky) Rosenblum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
*Graduating class of 5752 (1992)*



**M**y kids recently brought me a mug and a sweatshirt that said “#makingkeilim” on them. They say if you want to know what you're passionate about, ask your kids. Well, it seems like I'm passionate about making keilim, then.

What is “making *keilim*” all about? When it comes to shidduchim, we know that Hashem has decreed “*bas ploni l'ben ploni*” forty days before a child is born. The date is already set on the calendar above. But then it's up to us to do our part and make efforts for the shidduch to happen. It takes a lot of emuna and bitachon on this journey and it is crucial that we support each other along the way. Making keilim is about making vessels for the *Aibishter's* brochos to flow into.

When I entered the parsha of seeking shidduchim for my own children, I had the guidance of my dear mother, Mrs. Raizel Wolvovsky a”h, who made many, many shidduchim. I had a family to turn to with aunts, uncles, and cousins who knew me and my kids well. And even with all that, there were still challenges. It made me think about the others in my kids' classes, lovely boys and girls who did not have that kind of network. What about them? What about the post-seminary girls I learn with?

What can be done for them and for their mothers to help make the process a bit easier?

And so, our local #makingkeilim group was born, with three goals: to support each other with *chizuk*, practical tips, and the Rebbe's advice on the topic.

The *koach* of *achdus* is powerful. The main point is that we don't stop.

Over time, our group has got together to hear from shadchanim, dating coaches, and a Shlucha who married off many kids ka"h. When Mrs. Chaya Teldon came to Pittsburgh to farbreng with us for Vov Tishrei, she suggested that we send in a communal *Pan* with the names of all the single men and women in the city. When my mother came to town for our community's annual women's event, we asked her to share practical tips and wise advice with our group. When local simchos bring shadchanim to town, we make an effort to meet them and glean from their advice as well.

To break it down into bite-size, doable efforts that everyone can adopt:

## MACHSHOVA

Think about others. Think of classmates, neighbors, and fellow Shluchos. Think of your kids' classmates. Time and time again, when I reach out to someone to mention a name, the first reaction is almost always, "Thank you for thinking of my daughter/son!" Regardless of *yichus*, family status, or financial ability, everyone appreciates you thinking of them. One step in #makingkeilim.

## DIBBUR

Speak and network on behalf of your fellow Shluchos, classmates, and friends. Say words of Tehillim and tefilla and mention the names of the single men and women as you daven. Our class divides the Tehillim to say after *licht bentchen* each week in honor of those we know looking for a shidduch.

## MAASEH

Be active on behalf of others. Take the initiative to reach out. Pick up the phone and ask, "How is it going? Anything I can do to help?" Share names of

*They say if you want to know what you're passionate about, ask your kids.*

those you know or have heard of. Check in, simply and sincerely.

Be a shoulder for them to lean on if things are tough. When I hear that something just ended while checking in, I say, "I hear you. You're one step closer." Sometimes just knowing that you can relate is helpful. Recently, when speaking with someone whose child was ending something, I could hear her choke up with tears. It's not chas v'shalom tragic, but it is very disappointing. I cried too and shared *chizuk*, knowing that I'd been there too.

Maaseh can be getting a call from a friend who would like a name presented to a mother in your community. When I got such a call, I asked the one suggesting, "Why don't you?" She responded, "Because she will take it more seriously from you." I did not know the girl at all, yet I made calls to find out more about her. That way I was able to present the name, armed with more information.

Maaseh can simply mean sharing resources — online classes, ideas, etc.

Each and every one of us can be an active part of the process of making *keilim* for others. No one can say, "It's not for me," or, "I don't know any boys or girls." We are all obligated to be proactive in this process, it's as simple as that.

I shared the following at my daughter's Sheva Brochos



Batya's learning group with post-seminary girls, where they learn from *EternalJoy*, a compilation of the Rebbe's teachings on the topic of shidduchim.

*Regardless of yichus, family status, or financial ability, everyone appreciates you thinking of them.*

which was hosted by dear friends of our #makingkeilim group:

In Parshas Beshalach we learn of the Yidden leaving Mitzrayim and the miracles of Krias Yam Suf. The Gemora teaches us that shidduchim are “*Kosheh k’krias Yam Suf* — as difficult as the splitting of the sea.” There are many explanations for this. One of them is that Hashem created water with the nature to move and flow. At Krias Yam Suf, Hashem asked the waters to go against their nature and stop. Similarly, when it comes to shidduchim, there are times when we may feel pulled down. That’s when we have to be like the Yam Suf and go against our nature — as the Rebbe writes in *Eternal Joy*, “It must be done with simcha and bitachon.” And then we come to the other side of the Yam Suf amidst great joy, singing and rejoicing, especially the women with their *tupim* and *mecholos*. From there, we move on to Parshas Yisro where we experience Kabbolas HaTorah, the ultimate marriage of Hashem and Bnei Yisroel.

It is vital to hold on to bitachon and simcha. The Rebbe encourages this in many letters. The more we read and learn them, the more we can fortify ourselves with these concepts.

This should im yirtzeh Hashem lead us to smooth shidduchim with much clarity. Let us continue #makingkeilim, and may the joy we bring to our fellow Yidden hasten the Geula shelaima! ■

*Recently, while sitting shiva for my dear mother, we heard from so many about how she made their shidduchim, or their kid’s, or their friend’s, etc. She was proactive and on the lookout for all she knew — family, friends, and work acquaintances. She shared her wisdom and experience happily and in a sensitive way. In her zechus, I am working on carrying her legacy in shidduchim and I encourage you all to do the same. May the collective efforts lead us to the ultimate simcha, the marriage of Hashem and B’nei Yisroel, when we will be reunited with all of our loved ones. “עוד ישמע בערי יהודה ובחוצות ירושלים, קול” ששון וקול שמחה, קול חתן וקול כלה.”*

*If you connected to my dear mother in the area of shidduchim, please let me know at [batya@chabadsh.com](mailto:batya@chabadsh.com)*

*Written L’ilui Nishmas my dear mother, Odel Raizel bas Avrohom Dovid.*



*The mug Batya’s children gifted her.*



*Batya with her learning group.*



*Batya Wolvovsky (Right) with her mother, Mrs. Raizel Wolvovsky a"h.*



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# ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

FINDING THE  
BALANCE



DEAR CHAYA,

I don't know why, but lately, I'm finding that my fuse is so short. Despite my best intentions, small things set me off and I find myself getting so angry so quickly. Any real, practical, down-to-earth advice on how to manage my anger and regulate my emotions so that I can be the calm loving wife/mother/person I want to be?

Sincerely,

*A Short fused Mama trying to do better*



## DEAR SHORT-FUSED MAMA.

Anger is a difficult thing to manage, but kudos to you for taking the first step in acknowledging that there is a problem.

Sometimes we feel angry because of something very difficult and painful that we are dealing with, and that can take a lot of inner work to heal. However, you seem to be speaking about a different kind of anger, or as you say, a “short fuse.” It’s like you know your anger isn’t directed at anything major, and therefore doesn’t have a specific root cause. It’s just an automatic reaction to little things that go wrong, which trigger you, and then cause you to respond as if they are much more important than they actually are.

My first suggestion is to try to set yourself up in a way that will allow you to function more optimally and thus feel triggered that much less. Specifically two points:

### Take better care of your body.

Too many of us are so busy working, running, and helping others that we neglect to take care of ourselves. When we feel physically weak, we have much less strength to deal with and control our emotions.

When you’re feeling set off, ask yourself: “Did I sleep properly last night?” “When did I last eat something healthy?”

Work on getting enough sleep at night, and if that’s not possible, see if you can grab a twenty-minute power nap during the day to keep you going. Sometimes a little bit of shut-eye changes everything.

The same applies to food — it’s important to eat proper meals and healthy snacks to keep yourself nourished so you can function well.

### Stop trying to do so much.

A common trigger is when a child/event/mishap

*Despite my best intentions, small things set me off and I find myself getting so angry so quickly.*

interferes with our perfectly laid plans, causing us to feel out of control and therefore lose it.

The reality is that our “perfectly laid plans” are often unrealistic and don’t take into account the natural reality that life brings its own surprises, whether it’s kids needing attention or things simply taking longer than expected.

Space out your schedule more. Leave some downtime for the unexpected to happen, and recognize when it does happen that it isn’t personal, but a regular part of life that happens to everyone. When you don’t take things personally, it’s a lot easier to move on.

And most of all, remember that whatever you aren’t physically able to do clearly isn’t in Hashem’s plans for you. If it must happen, He will find another way. Breathe. There is no virtue in over-achieving while running over everyone in your life in the process.

When the inevitable happens and you do feel triggered, there are a few things you can do to help yourself avoid reactions that you may later regret:

1. Close your mouth and count to ten before you respond at all. This is a great first step when you aren’t in a place to completely modify your response yet. Sometimes you can then ignore the trigger and carry on, and sometimes you will be able to come up with a more appropriate response than lashing out in anger.
2. I put this last because it is the most complex in a sense, but perhaps it should really be first: Remember that everything comes from Hashem. And Hashem is good. He has set up your life to help you grow to become the best you. All of the triggers in the world are simply exercises to help you strengthen your char-



*Have a question you want to see addressed? Trying to figure out the balance in a specific area of your life? Send in your AFAF question to [embrace@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:embrace@bethrivkah.edu) to have an answer featured in an upcoming issue!*

*The reality is that our “perfectly laid plans” are often unrealistic and don’t take into account the natural reality that life brings its own surprises, whether it’s kids needing attention or things simply taking longer than expected.*

acter. Take a deep breath, close your eyes, meditate for a few seconds on how Hashem believes in you, and give it your best shot.

*Reprinted from Rebbe.org*

## Be Exceedingly Cognizant of Hashem’s Presence

One piece of proven advice to control your anger is to contemplate how the entire world is filled with the glory of Hashem, the King of kings, particularly as this [concept] is explained by the Alter Rebbe in chapter 41 of *Tanya* that, “Behold, Hashem [Himself] stands over him and scrutinizes him and searches his reins and heart..., [i.e., his innermost thoughts and emotions, to see] if he is serving Him as is fitting.”

When you remind yourself that you are in the presence of the blessed and exalted Almighty, and at this very moment [of your anger] He searches your thoughts and emotions, etc., then there is no room for your anger.

*(Igros Kodesh, Vol. XXIV, p. 124)*

## For Anger and Depression

*To a woman suffering from depression and anger, the Rebbe responded:*

*Give several coins to tzedakah — bli neder — every weekday; study the [section entitled] Shaar HaBitachon in the book Chovos HaLevavos; check the mezuzos and their manner of placement.*

*(Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XXXVI, p. 298)*

## Negative Effects of Anger

I received your letter ... in which you write about your disputes with ... regarding the business.

...With regard to this trait [of anger], I must add the following:

We veritably observe that anger regarding worldly

Most of all, don’t be discouraged. Struggling with emotions is a natural and normal part of the human condition, and while we must do our best to constantly improve, it is expected that we will sometimes fail. Recognize that even a small step in the right direction is important, and keep your eye on the goal: Progress, not perfection!

Wishing you lots of hatzlacha in your inner journey,

<3 Chaya ■



matters is not only not beneficial, but actually makes things worse.

This is particularly true with regard to interpersonal relationships, where when one person becomes angry it causes the other person to become angry as well and [at such times] the emotions overwhelm the intellect. Only later does the person realize that he shouldn’t have said that which he said, [but by then it is too late to take back his words]....

*(Igros Kodesh, Vol. VII, p. 36)*

## Overcoming Anger and Haughtiness

...Regarding the traits of anger and haughtiness about which you write [and which you would like to master]:

Like all matters [that are to be accomplished], this matter too can only be accomplished in an incremental manner. The first step is not to give voice to the anger or haughtiness; by doing so you reduce the intensification of this trait — as we verily observe [that giving voice to an emotion heightens its intensity].

Concurrently, when either of these emotions become roused within you, you should meditate on that which is written in the beginning of chapter 41 of *Tanya* until [the end of the second line on] p. 56b. It would be proper for you to review this passage frequently, and better yet, that you commit it to memory.

In particular [it is important to refrain from anger] in light of that which is stated in the writings of the *AriZal* that anger causes one’s soul to be exchanged. See also in the *sichah* of my father-in-law, the Rebbe, of blessed memory, of the 19th of *Kislev*, 5693, in which he explains the saying of our Sages: “Whoever is in a rage resembles an idolater.”

*(Igros Kodesh, Vol. XIV, p. 459)*

# שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאלו היום נתנו:

(שמואל א. א:ט"ו)

THE WORDS OF THE TORAH SHALL BE NEW TO YOU,  
AS IF THEY WERE GIVEN JUST TODAY.

(RASHI ON SHEMOS, 19:1)

*The Possuk is precise with its wording, stating that Bnei Yisroel reached Midbar Sinai “Bayom hazeh — on this day.” Rashi elicits from this a profound directive that shapes a Jew’s perspective: “The words of Torah should be new to you as if they were just given today.” When we view Torah as a novelty, the excitement and vigor will permeate our avodah. In the bustle of the daily grind, we can easily get distracted, following our “to-do’s” by rote. In the spirit of Shavuos, Zman Matan Toraseinu, we have asked several alumnae to share with us, **“How do you keep Torah exciting, enlivening, and feeling new in your life?”***



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# For Mommy, Too

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Chana (Krinsky) Vigler, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida  
*Graduating class of 5761 (2001)*



**L**ast year, Gimmel Tammuz fell on the exact same day as the Siyum HaRambam. The magnitude of these two landmark events coinciding lit a flame within me. In a completely spontaneous moment that can only be explained as divinely ordained (since I would never have done this in a moment of consciousness!), I announced to my social media following that I was going to start sharing the daily Sefer Hamitzvos.

Little did I know how much of an undertaking — and even less, how much of a gift — this would be for me.

My days are filled to capacity with all sorts of obligations, and I could easily be excused if I didn't study. But taking the time to thoroughly prepare and learn the daily mitzvah so that I could convey it to others has injected my days with a wholesomeness I didn't know I was missing.

Publicly broadcasting has held me accountable. I haven't missed a day (including Shabbos, which I post on Friday in double-portion form).

Sefer Hamitzvos has become a family affair and a household topic. My children are constantly hearing about my need to prepare, record, and upload the videos, as well as the actual mitzvah of the day which invariably always has something to do with what we are talking about!

The Rebbe wanted Sefer Hamitzvos to be learned by all. Clearly, he felt that at this time in our lives, it was something our family needed and he found a way to make that happen!

As parents, we must not be solely mitzvos-minded, but Torah-minded as well. The Torah is a living guide that provides direction in every single aspect of our lives. And it's not just for Tatty, it's for Mommy too! I love that my kids can see that Torah is for everyone and no one is too young or too old to learn.

They recently asked if we could show my lessons at the dinner table so that they could hear what I share with the world, too! I was flabbergasted, but also flattered, and mostly, fulfilled. I had thought I was doing a service for others, when in fact, I have been the greatest recipient. ■

*The magnitude of these two landmark events coinciding lit a flame within me.*



Chana Vigler



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# Discovering *the* Daf

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Minna (Caplan) Hershcopf, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5764 (2004)*



*Sample of a page of the Koren Gemara*

**S**imilar to many other busy Jewish mothers, taking care of five young children, k’ah, and working full time had made any kind of learning routine fade from my life. Yes, I listened to Torah podcasts while cleaning my kitchen here or there, but that was the extent of my learning.

One Shabbos afternoon, when my youngest two (twins) were two-and-a-half, I finally had a chance to open a sefer. I know they say not to judge a book by its cover, but my parents' (and neighbors') newest set of books caught my eye. They were the Koren Gemoras with beautiful translucent covers complete with intriguing Mishnaic era artifacts gracing each cover. I opened up the first sefer in the set, Masechas Brochos, and the interior did not disappoint! Along with the original Hebrew and Aramaic, there are meforshim in English by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Additionally, notes on the side contain other

explanations, historical background, personalities, photographs of objects from Mishnaic times, and most practically, the actual *halacha* that is practiced today.

I took the sefer upstairs to my apartment hoping to get to learn more “when I had time.” The Gemora had been sitting in my house for a day or two when the text went out on our family WhatsApp: “Did anyone borrow Gemora Brochos?” I responded affirmatively, which is when the comments began: “Talmida chachama!” “Lol,” I responded. “That’s the goal. It may take seventy years though.” I answered jestfully. However, I started to think seriously about my “joke.” Why can’t I make this a goal and consistently try to learn Gemora? So I decided to try it; I’d learn one daf a week, which if I can successfully keep up, I’d be on track to complete the Talmud at eighty seven years old. At the time of writing this article, I’m currently 37/2711 dafs in.

Learning the daf has become the highlight of my week. I stepped into another time, a time when the second Beis Hamikdash was standing and/or had just recently been destroyed. I followed the discussion of the Tanaim (mishnaic period) and Amoraim (post mishnaic/Talmudic period). I learned sources for the tefillos we say today and followed along with the chachamim throughout their daily routines during this fascinating time period. Interspersed between the discussion of *halachos* are Aggadatos (stories). Most are absolutely fascinating; stories of everyday life and of other-worldly events. For example: “*Ze’iri went to an inn and left his money with the young innkeeper. That night, she died leaving Ze’iri uncertain as to where his money was held. He went to the cemetery and asked the innkeeper where he could find his money. She disclosed its location and then asked him to request that her mother send her eye makeup and comb the following day with another woman who would die the next day.*”

This story intrigued me: What did this mean? With no English explanation in the Koren edition, I’d have to look it up in the Artscroll. There, I found Rashi’s explanation: by asking for her eye makeup and comb, she was lamenting the fact that she had died at such a young age. (Of note, Aggadatos often have deeper meanings that meforshim and even Chassidus will sometimes explain.)

Another thing I really enjoy about learning Gemora is that you are looking at the source, process, and context behind *halacha*. As a person who always wants to know why, this is a game changer. I now have a clearer picture of the source for the reason that women don’t wear tzitzis: Tzitzis are a time-bound mitzvah only required during the day. Since women are absolved from time-bound mitzvot, this is a mitzvah that does not apply to them.

## *The Rebbe’s “Mitzvah Chinuch” campaign of 5763 (1923) stressed that chinuch begins before birth because a fetus is affected by the spiritual state of its parents and surroundings.*

Studying Gemora has rekindled my flame for learning. I passionately share what I learn with my family and sometimes my children join me on this “journey.” We have learned some relevant *halachos* together, discussed Chana’s tefillos and Bruriah’s discussions with Rabbi Meir. When my seven-year-old son saw me learning Gemora every Shabbos (with the goal to complete it one day), he requested that we go through the entire Nach together as well. Thus, learning a perek of Nach weekly was added to our Shabbos learning repertoire as well.

Learning Gemora (even the small amount that I have covered) has helped put context to the information I have learned throughout my formal schooling. It helps me keep focused and connected to Hashem and to my neshoma. It contains timeless wisdom and I’m constantly finding points that resonate with my life.

It’s especially exciting now that my learning is not an expectation but a choice! Torah is so vast, there is something that speaks to every individual soul. Find the sefer that speaks to you. Learn it! Own it! Love it! ■

1. *Brachos Daf 18 - Amud B2. Sefer HaSichos 5747, Vol. I, p. 146ff*



Minna with her favorite Sefer (until she starts the next one) in her favorite learning spot (aka her couch).

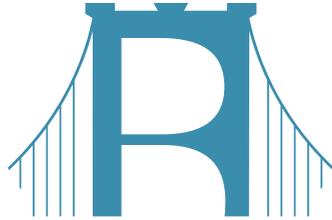
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# Asking the Hard Questions

Sorella (Levy) Abrahams, Sydney, Australia  
*Graduating class of 5766 (2006)*



I have a memory from some ten years back that was life-changing for me. It was Chol Hamoed Pesach and I was sitting on a park bench while my boys and some of their friends

scooted around me in the sunshine. I was holding a bag of fruit and vegetables, peeling them before handing them to a grateful child, when I heard a “Hello!” and noticed a friend from our Chabad house approach. He had a funny expression on his face as he said, “I have never seen someone peel a pepper before.” I laughed and responded with a brief explanation of Chabad’s minhag of peeling fruits and vegetables on Pesach.

We had a pleasant conversation, but as he walked away, something niggled at me. I felt uneasy with the answer I had given, not because he hadn’t accepted it, but because it didn’t sit completely right with me. I suddenly felt like I had just repeated ancient rhetoric that was told to me as a child and it didn’t quite feel like mine. It didn’t feel personal or authentic.

Over the next few days, I thought a lot and realized how I couldn’t just keep Yiddishkeit because I was raised that way. I didn’t want to honor minhagim only because of my childhood and my

*“I have never seen someone peel a pepper before.”*

parents' way. I needed to find my own meaning and understanding in my relationship with Hashem and Yiddishkeit, and my search would begin with the minhagim of Pesach.

Growing up, I was always a 'searcher,' often asking, digging and yearning to understand more. But somehow, this incident sent me into a real search. I want to state here that the concept of having *Kabolas Ol* is the necessary foundation of Yiddishkeit and not everything is always understandable. And then when we find meaning, appreciation, and passion, it is the lifeblood of our relationship with Hashem and Yiddishkeit.

*I needed to find my own meaning and understanding in my relationship with Hashem and Yiddishkeit, and my search would begin with the minhagim of Pesach.*

In order for us to serve with true passion, love, and authenticity, we need to go on our own journey of discovering our own meaning and understanding. We need to nurture our authentic relationship with Hashem and not just serve Him on autopilot or by rote. This can only happen through learning Chassidus, asking ourselves hard questions, spending time thinking about our avodah and relationship to Him, and using our G-d-given talents and passions for growth in Yiddishkeit.

I realized that this situation was much like any intimate relationship in my life. I adore my children and want to support and care for them, even if sometimes I don't understand the reasoning behind their desires. For example, I know that my eight year old doesn't like to mix his spaghetti and meat; they must be very clearly separated on his dinner plate. I also know that my ten year old doesn't like any kind of public talk or attention drawn to him. My husband has his things and my friends have theirs. I don't necessarily understand each specification but I try to honor them, because when you love someone, your commitment to the relationship goes beyond understanding, even if it doesn't make perfect sense to you.

These may seem like silly examples, but the reality

*I need to be inspired myself, and this has been the biggest gift — to be constantly searching, learning, growing, and evolving in my own relationship with Hashem.*

is that they are all efforts I will make as I express my love to the people around me. In terms of peeling on Pesach, yes, there may be logic to it, but in truth, my service goes beyond that. It shows my unconditional, unwavering commitment to showing up in my relationship with Hashem. It is a testament to my commitment to Hashem and His Torah.

So for me, growing up frum, perhaps some of my Yiddishkeit had been on autopilot and there were many minhagim and halachos that I had never thought too much about. Since going on shlichus, however, I have had many opportunities to really dive in and dig deep as people have asked me all sorts of questions. In order for me to be able to share inspiration, I need to be inspired myself, and this has been the biggest gift — to be constantly searching, learning, growing, and evolving in my own relationship with Hashem.

I know that if and when I am feeling 'far' or disconnected, it is because I either haven't focused on gratitude and connection through davening, I haven't learned something in a while, or I haven't found ways to make it personal. That's when I know it's time to spend some time feeding my soul with the lifeblood of Yiddishkeit, the meanings and the passions.

Ultimately, the Torah and its lessons feel more relevant and necessary to me today than ever before. In a world where there is so much confusion and chaos, I am so grateful for the gift of its guiding compass.

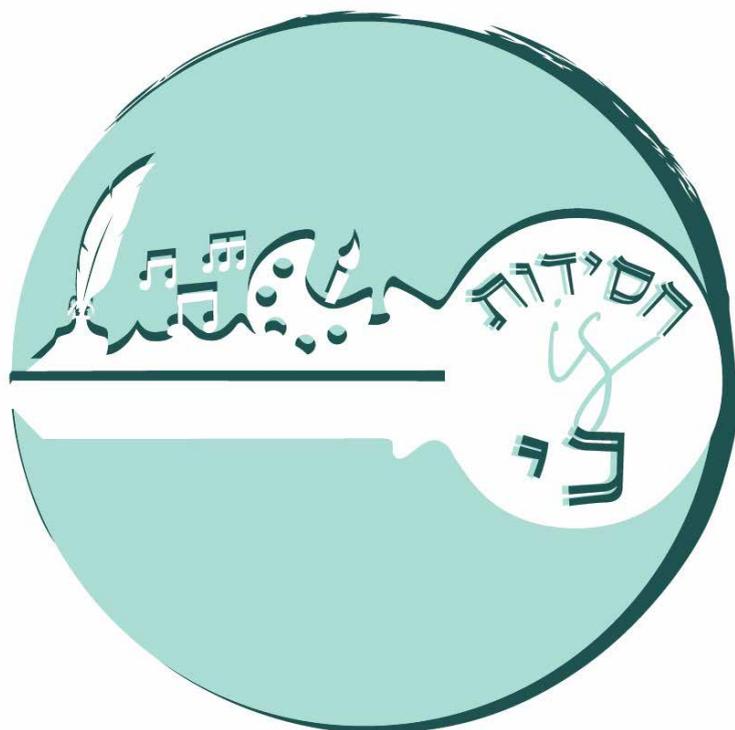
May we all merit to be inspired, shining lights. ■



# Chassidus IS KEY

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As told to  
Rivkah Katz, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5776 (2016)*



From the inconspicuous, closet-sized room famously known as the G.O. room, a small brain-child blossomed into an impactful event. “We didn’t intend for a grand operation,” shares Chavi Swued, one of the Highschool Shluchos, “but once the idea kicked off, the overwhelming involvement of the student body created a mind-blowing ‘Chassidus is Ki’ event.”

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Last year, the G.O. theme was heeding the Rebbe’s call to dive into the twelve pesukim. Each month, a different possuk was learned and internalized through various activities. When it came to the possuk of *Ki Karov*, the team was brainstorming and farbrenging. “How can we make *Ki Karov*, the fundamental of the Tanya, actually feel close to each student?” That was the question they were mulling over. Until inspiration hit. Replicating Rabbi Simon Jacobson’s My Life Chassidus Applied Contest, the G.O. decided to create an event where students can share how Chassidus is really close to them

and how Chassidus has impacted their life. Students were encouraged to take a concept in Chassidus that they live by and share it with the student body through an art medium of their choice. If anyone knows one thing about Bais Rivkah, every program needs a catchy name and logo. After hashing and rehashing and probably some caffeine too, the name ‘Chassidus is Ki’ was chosen, merging the idea that Chassidus is close as well as the key to living our best lives.

There’s always the challenge when piloting something new as you hold your breath to see how it takes off. “Honestly, we thought of the project on a small scale,” admits Chavi. Although every event is saturated with heart and soul, the G.O. made their arrangements of judges and guidelines on a small scale. With over seventy submissions and interest at its peak, the small brainchild became a high-end, large-scale event. Esoteric and lofty ideas were brought down to earth and creative juices were flowing. Poetry, art pieces, and essays depicted different concepts of Chassidus that students inculcated into their lives. From sharing deeper meanings of mitzvos to enlightened perspectives, a wide range of topics was covered. “A student even shared how Chassidus has transformed her outlook and helped her cope when her family was embroiled in sticky family politics.” The event was real, raw, and very practical. Seeing the excitement and investment from a wide array of students, immediately then, the G.O. heads decided that ‘Chassidus is Ki’ should be a Bais Rivkah standard.

Of course, this year, ‘Chassidus is Ki’ leveled it up. Introduced as an *U’vchein* for Yud Tes Kislev, ‘Chassidus is Ki’ was broken out with two tracks, an individual and group track. Students were so invested in seeing this event to fruition, that they fundraised to cover the costs of the event. The ‘Chassidus is Ki’ contest culminated

on Chof Daled Teves, in honor of the Histalkus of the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad Chassidus. Riding on the previous year’s success, no one wanted to miss out, and there were a whopping one hundred and thirty submissions. Each student who participated received ‘Chassidus is Ki’ merchandise because were you really part of something if you didn’t get a sweater? Grand prizes were generously sponsored by friends and family members of Bais Rivkah students and the prizes included Rebbe dimes, gift cards, AirPods, and more.

Prior to the event, the three judges, Mrs. Tzirel Goldman, mechaneches of the tenth grade, Shluchos and Bais Rivkah Alumnae, Mrs. Yehudis Bluming and Mrs. Geulah Gniwisch, spent countless hours reading each submission anonymously. Following a specific rubric, the judges graded each submission. The three highest scores were deemed winners.

## ‘CHASSIDUS IS KI’ LIVE

When the girls entered the shul, their jaws dropped. The shul was transformed into an upscale auditorium with fairy lights and balloons creating a celebratory and classy vibe. The interactive event, emcee’d by Chaya Zucker, a twelfth-grader, rode students through a whirlwind of emotions. Girls were nodding in agreement when Leah Chaddad from twelfth grade awed the crowd with a spoken word poem, eloquently depicting the desire for control, but the freedom and need to let go and let Hashem run the world. Other presentations included essays, animations, artworks, and various forms of poetry and song, bringing esoteric concepts down to earth and into girls’ lives.

The energy was palpable as the girls were shuttled



*The presentations being introduced.*



*A finalist shares her submission, a song about how she made Chassidus her own.*

into different seforim and immersed in the various ideas and insights that their peers were sharing.

The first-place winners were Leah Chaddad and Mushkie Kievman who shared spoken word poems about giving control to Hashem and the power of each individual despite their struggles, respectively.

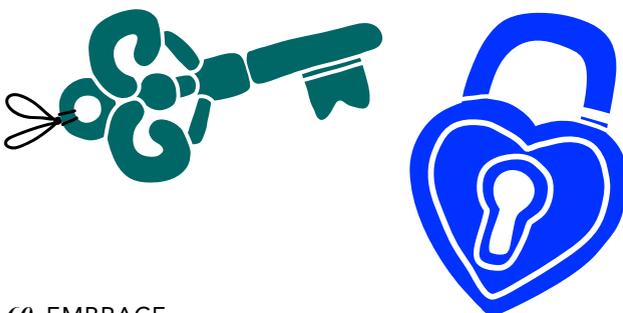
Shaina Kugel, the second-place winner, created a unique clay animation presentation depicting how Hashem constantly recreates the world enabling us to change our reality, and the third-place winner, Sarah Futerfas, created a video explaining the advantage that people have over angels.

The Bronstein sisters, winners of the group track, composed and recorded a song about a person's avodah of transforming the *nefesh habihamis*. The second-place winners of the group track were Haddasa Benshimon and Chana Butman who composed a parody of the well-known song, "Excuse Me, Are You Jewish?", using the lyrics to expound on why we have Torah and mitzvos.

To lighten up the event and give students time to digest the powerful and relatable concepts delivered, exciting and interactive commercial breaks were on schedule. Trivia questions were posed to the crowd and students who answered correctly received a delicious donut. Also, professional and captivating commercials were played, advertising upcoming events for students to look forward to.

Of course, adding to the atmosphere, the students broke out in song. The room was filled with warmth, clarity, and honesty. Through each presentation, students shared vulnerability, challenges, and eureka moments on how Chassidus is the tool that helps them overcome their obstacles.

In a student's words, "I walked into the room as a skeptical observer just there to cheer for a friend. Participating in this one-of-a-kind experience showed me that Chassidus really is practical. It actually is key."



*The audience enraptured by the beautiful presentations.*

## 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE WINNER

*Leah Hadad*

### SPOKEN WORD POEM

This is my second  
This is my minute  
This is my hour  
My day  
My week  
My month  
My year  
This is my life

I've been taught to treat it like a gift  
I've learned that time passes sooner than one thinks  
Close your eyes and blink  
And where have the years gone  
And the years are mine  
And so is the time  
And I must treat it as such  
And take control

Take control  
In the form of lists I map out my life  
Initial bliss authority is mine  
Watch my power shine  
Hundreds of minute details  
Plans upon plans  
Lines upon lines

Take command  
Plays out in little checkboxes  
Dances to the exact music of every schedule  
Hurry to comply  
Fill out each order to the T  
Don't stop to breathe

What does it even mean to rest  
You have work to do  
Disregard your body's signs  
Your mind's cry  
Crushed under the stress

Take leadership  
Let your vision board guide you  
Not just guide you  
Perhaps blind you  
For the things you give importance to  
Hide the little things out of your view  
Out of my view  
How can that be  
I have control

I am trapped by the monsters of illusion that tell me  
it's dependent on me alone  
Suffocated by the pictures of my past that scream  
you should have known  
You could have done more  
You should have done more  
For every occurrence they hold me accountable  
Every situation oh so insurmountable  
I could have prevented this  
I could have guided this  
What details did I miss  
They hold me down  
In the abyss of my own faults

And so I schedule long term  
My lists have lists  
My steps have steps  
I need it to go the way I see is right  
The way that's perfect to my limited mind  
Though I know my view lacks height

To fulfill this mode  
This oh so promising method



*A finalist with her submission, a game featuring the concept of Ratzu and Shuv.*

*“I walked into the room as a skeptical observer just there to cheer for a friend. Participating in this one-of-a-kind experience showed me that Chassidus really is practical. It actually is key.”*

My mind says don't rest  
Says that hard work is the only thing blessed  
Success doesn't chance upon you  
Craft plans  
Think big  
That's what you need to do  
That's what I need to do  
Aim for perfection  
And perfect my aim  
And so I do

I do  
Bc it's at times like this that we forget to pray  
we neglect to say  
“Hashem it's up to you”  
Up to you  
I'll do what I can do  
But you'll see it through

Think highly of yourself yes  
Bc you are a glorified messenger of goodness  
Think high of yourself  
Yet step down a step  
Remove yourself from that high esteem  
What do you mean  
I mean it's not all up to you

*Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*

*Hashem echad*

Don't you hear

Don't you comprehend

There is one power

One force

One guiding hand

Belongs to the one G-d

*Hashem echad*

He's the ONLY one in command

It appears as though people and things have power

As if we run the hour

But in truth

Hashem's the one that plans



*A pair of contestants from the group track presenting their submission.*

Do your part  
 But drop the anxiety  
 What's meant to be is meant to be  
 Do your part  
 Yet acknowledge the true overseer  
 Who's busy from finish to start  
 So steady your pounding heart  
 No use trying to outsmart

But how can I do my part  
 Yet it's not up to me  
 How am I the one who must perfect  
 Though Hashem is the one that directs  
 Setting it all into effect  
 There's a disconnect

Yes  
 You're not entirely incorrect  
 No one said it's not hard  
 No one says it has to make sense  
 Free choice is beyond human comprehension  
 That Hashem directs despite our intentions  
 Faith is the vital dimension  
 To this paradox of choice

And that's what it is  
 Every leaf on every tree  
 Every animal, rock and seed  
 Every minute of my time  
 Every road I take  
 Every mountain I climb  
 Set in motion by Hashem alone

Just breathe  
 He knows what He's doing  
 Let go of the notion that you know best  
 Let your enslaved mind take a rest

Break free from worshipping the ideas of authority  
 Any authority but Him  
 Let go  
 Let the divine agenda take control  
 Let go  
 Let the master plan fill its role  
 Let go  
 Let go and let G-d

## 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE WINNER

*Mushky Kioman*

## BUILT BY ME — SPOKEN WORD POEM

Hashem,  
 My great great great grandfather Avraham,  
 jumped into a fire for Your sake  
 My great-great grandmother Esther,  
 risked her life to save her nation

And I?  
 I struggled to get out of bed this morning

Yet somehow You placed me  
 In the final generation  
 And entrusted me to build You a home  
 amidst this blinding confusion

A home where You can come inside  
 And choose to either dine on fine wine  
 or perhaps just rest and  
 recline  
 on the well worn sofas  
 weathered by years of hope and fears  
 Or lean on sun drenched pillars  
 lightened by love and tears

A place where Your essence can shine  
 And Your blinding light  
 no longer needs to hide  
 When in the familiar comfort  
 Of a home

A palace  
 dreamed up  
 by the master architect  
 For me to erect  
 And with all due respect

ME?

There were ones before me  
So much braver and better  
Ones who knew how to spread light  
In a time where the night  
Was so thick and everyone else hid in fear and apathy  
Yet they did what was right

They suffered the fires of persecution  
Fought off the the tentacles of assimilation  
And through it all  
They stood tall  
and proud  
And refused to fall

They sanctified Your name  
Embraced You though the pain  
And never stopped trying to  
build You a home  
But it wasn't enough

So each generation gave way  
as they passed on this role  
To build a lofty home for You  
Way down below

They built and built

Trying to reach Your goal  
With their passion and sweat  
And all their heart and soul

Yet  
You wanted perfection  
You wanted more  
And somehow  
The ones before

Couldn't build it

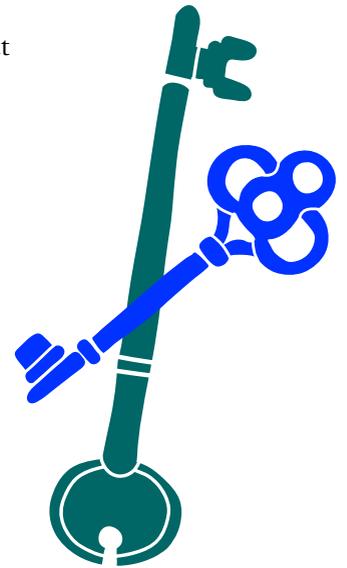
But really Hashem

You wanted me?  
HOW  
HOW COULD IT BE?!?

Me?

Me. with all my imperfections  
Me. with actions lacking intention  
Falling and failing and struggling to rise  
Fighting the forces that taunt me outside

It is a mission too daunting  
It's too high of a hill  
There were so many  
greater before me



*The entire crowd unites in song.*

That possessed the power and will

I can not build this house  
You so desire  
I lack their drive  
The inspiration and fire

I'm not enough  
I'm not enough  
I'm not enough

Yet with all this  
You chose  
me  
Painfully  
beautifully  
Chose  
me

Better than I know myself  
You know me  
And with this knowledge  
You affirm Your absolute belief  
That only I can play my part  
In Your symphony  
And with this simple clarity  
I now know

I am enough  
I am enough  
I am enough

Because while  
The base and foundation  
Is made of rough stone  
It needs curtains and couches  
To truly be called home

So I get out of bed each morning  
And push myself a little more  
My effort in the fine details  
Better than the day before

With every stroke I brush  
And every nail I screw  
I decorate and develop  
Completing this home for you

I work to uplift my vanity  
To mend and to add  
To give to Your home  
Of whatever I have

A Home for Hashem  
Built with the toil of my two hands

Will be built in the human broken way  
that only I can

Instead of being trapped by this world  
And succumb to its temptations  
I seize these worldly trappings  
Breaking limitations

And I affix them to Your walls  
For all to see  
The beautiful spiritual house  
In a place so worldly

This plan is perfection  
You designed it as such  
And decreed that I alone  
Can place the finishing touch

I can illuminate this dark  
And kindle with my burning spark

Light the flames in others  
And together we will build a home

where you can come inside  
And choose to either dine on fine wine  
or perhaps just rest and  
recline  
on the well worn sofas  
weathered by years of hope and fears

Or lean on sun drenched pillars  
lightened by love and tears

A place where Your essence can shine  
And Your blinding light  
no longer needs to hide  
When in the familiar comfort  
Of a home ■



*Students on a high after an inspiring program.*



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# U'vacharta Ba'Chaim

# Choose

# Life

---

Chani (Greenberg) Fishman, Clifton, NJ  
*Graduating class of 5774 (2014)*



*Sweet baby Chaim.*

"**Y**our baby is not compatible with life," were the words I heard from a doctor whom I'd never met before.

It was Tammuz 5780 (2020) and I was entering my fifth month of pregnancy with my second child. Just a few months prior, my husband, son and I, moved out on shlichus to Clifton, an area in North Jersey, and we were energized and excited about our future ahead. After finding out I was pregnant, I joined a midwife practice in my area. I was young and healthy and did not have complications in the past, but my midwife said I should schedule an appointment at a specific doctor for the mid pregnancy anatomy scan. I wasn't concerned. I knew that taking this scan was a standard protocol for this practice.<sup>1</sup>

*“Your baby is not compatible with life,” were the words I heard from a doctor whom I'd never met before.*

It was at the peak of Covid, which meant I went to my appointment alone.

Thump. Thump. Thump. A perfect heartbeat. But looking into the nurse's eyes, I could see that something was amiss. After the sonogram, I sat there alone, waiting to be called in by the doctor. I felt a pit in my stomach. After a tense few minutes that felt like an eternity, I was called back into a room. The doctor looked at me and said flatly, “Your baby is not compatible with life.”

He rapidly moved on to explain the rare neurological condition my baby appeared to have and advised me that, from a medical perspective, my next step forward should be termination.

I felt my heart being ripped out of my body, shattering, too numb to say a word.

“Don't do this to yourself and your family. It will only bring you more suffering and pain to go through with this pregnancy,” he stated impassively.

I left the office shaking and walked slowly to my car. I dialed my husband.

“Something is very wrong,” I choked on my tears, “Daven that I drive home safely.”

Many feelings and thoughts surged through our minds that day. We felt that the doctor did not have the license to state that there was absolutely no hope. Life and death are only in the hands of Hashem. So, we traveled to a top specialist for a second opinion.

“Your child is not compatible with life,” reiterated the specialist after reviewing his new scans. The stabbing words hit deeper and harder; the same words I'd heard before now felt almost certain.

“You may not make it to full term with this baby, and if you do, there is a high chance it will be a stillbirth,” he explained. “I recommend you end this pregnancy. It's the right thing to do,” he concluded.

I came home sobbing. Do I even have a choice? What were my options? Hashem, why me? Why my precious baby?

My sister called me that evening, and we sobbed together. “Chani, you should know you do have options.

You CAN go forward and have this child. Even if it's just to hold your baby close to you and say goodbye.”

It was thirty-six hours since I heard the devastating news, and time was ticking. Whichever road I was going to take, I had to decide that night. Here I was, at twenty-four years old, having to make a decision that felt way beyond me.

Late that night, we called Rabbi Ulman in Australia. In addition to being a true mentch, he is an expert in halacha and medical ethics. He guided us through every step of the way; for that I'm truly grateful. I hung up the phone with Rabbi Ulman, and it was clear. I knew I was going to have this baby. This neshoma needed a pathway to enter the world, and Hashem chose me to be the vehicle through which it could fulfill its purpose. I felt confident and calm with my decision. I was going to bring this neshoma into this world.

After many phone calls and resourcing, I transferred

*“Don't do this to yourself and your family. It will only bring you more suffering and pain to go through with this pregnancy,” he stated impassively.*

to an incredibly caring doctor, who respected my decision and made me feel like I was safe and in good hands. I carried on with my pregnancy, keeping up with the responsibilities of everyday life and my shlichus, all while carrying the heavy reality that awaited



*Chaim touched the hearts of many in the few months he was in this world.*

me. Driving to each prenatal appointment, I davened that all the problems should just disappear because Hashem could do anything. But deep down, I feared the worst, and the anticipation of my unknown reality made each day feel like an entire year.

On Chol Hamoed Sukkos, a few weeks before my due date, I went in for my prenatal appointment. After reviewing the recent scans, my doctor looked at me and said, “If we are going to give your baby the best chance at life, go home and pack your bags; you’re having your baby tonight.”

I let go of the worries and fear. I even let go of my hopes and dreams. I let go of my control. I was completely in Hashem’s hands.

That night, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Against all the odds of his medical condition, he was there and breathing on his own. Hearing him cry as he entered the world was the sound of life filling my ears and heart. His calm and peaceful nature was reviving and uplifting.

After seven weeks in the NICU, our baby boy came home and was strong enough to have a bris. We named him Chaim Refael.

Life was a rollercoaster. Daily doctor and therapist appointments, a revolving door of nurses, G-tubes, hourly medications, and life-threatening decisions were components of our everyday reality. Though I call it a rollercoaster because this ride came with many highs as well. The tiny milestones were incredibly re-

*I knew I was going to have this baby. This neshoma needed a pathway to enter the world, and Hashem chose me to be the vehicle through which it could fulfill its purpose.*

warding. Life was full of joy. Chaim was a bundle of joy! He was a piece of heaven gifted to us.

We were so incredibly grateful for the love and support we received during that challenging time from our wonderful parents, siblings, friends, and fellow Shluchim in our area.

I vividly remember the Shluchim of Friendship Circle Livingston, NJ, Rabbi Zalman and Toba Leah Grossbaum, coming all the way to meet with us in our home to genuinely offer their support. We were young, new Shluchim, who they had never met before, but that didn’t matter to them.

“*Chassidim ein Mishpocha*,” stated Rabbi Grossbaum. And he truly meant it. From that point on, the Grossbaums treated us like their family and guided and supported us in countless, remarkable ways. The sincere *Ahavas Yisroel* they exemplified was inspiring, and we will forever be grateful to them.



*Chani with Chaim in the hospital.*



*Chaim with his proud big brother.*



*Chaim's family writes a Sefer Torah in his memory.*

On the tenth of Iyar, our beautiful Chaim a”h passed away. His holy neshoma finished its mission in this world and peacefully returned to Hashem in the same pure state that he was entrusted to us in. Every neshoma that is brought into this world serves a very special purpose. The neshoma’s mission may take a full lifetime to complete or perhaps only a few years. For our Chaim, it took a short six months and twenty-one days.

*I am thankful to Chaim for teaching me the power of unconditional love and for showing me what true life is all about.*

Although Chaim’s life was short, each day was a blessing so wholesome and treasured. I am thankful to Chaim for teaching me the power of unconditional love and for showing me what true life is all about. I am grateful to Hashem for choosing me to be Chaim’s mother.

R’ Menachem Mendel of Kotsk said, “There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.” A broken

heart means that there has been life, there has been love, and there has been passion. Empowering life lessons were learned and memories made.

My daily Modeh Ani has been infused with a higher consciousness. I have come to appreciate the meaning of the final words, “*Rabah Emunasecha*” — Hashem has greater faith in us than we have in ourselves. When we trust and accept the challenges He gives, He will guide us and hold our hand through every step of the way.

The Gemora<sup>2</sup> tells us that while a baby is in the womb, it is taught the entire Torah. The time in the womb is considered the best time in the child’s life. During this period, the mother is likened to the Beis Medrash or to the Aron Kodesh and the baby is likened to a Torah itself. It is with this sentiment that we will be honoring Chaim’s upcoming first yartzeit, on Yud Iyar, with completing the writing of his Sefer Torah. May the collective challenges we have overcome in Golus help us greet Moshiach meriting the ultimate Geula when we will all be reunited with all our loved ones again. Amen V’amen. ■

1. Please consult with your personal Rav about this scan.

2. Niddah 30b

# Thank You, Aibishter



---

Rivky (Chanin) Goldfarb, Kfar Vradim, Eretz Yisroel  
*Graduating class of 5755 (1995)*





## Dear Aibishter,

I usually take time at the end of the day to focus on good things in my life. Today, I want to surprise you and thank you for pain, loneliness, and frustration.

Thank you, Aibishter, for the struggle with my son Chaim today. It means he is not a pushover and has an opinion of his own. It gives me an opportunity to exercise my muscles of *emunah* and *bitachon*.

Thank you, Aibishter, for making my son Mendy not go to yeshiva today. That means he is happy and comfortable at home.

Thank you, Aibishter, for my discomfort with my reflection in the mirror. It has taught me to work on self-acceptance, compassion, and self-love. It also means that I am relatively healthy and gaining weight because my post-surgery esophagus allows food to go down and nourish me. It also reminds me that I have beautiful, healthy children.

Thank you, Aibishter, for the phone call from my friend that emotionally crushed me to pieces. It means that she still believes in me and has not lost hope in all of humanity.

Thank you, Aibishter, for a messy house. It means that the kids are healthy and active. It also teaches me to let go of perfection and control.

Thank you, Aibishter, for my back pain. This means that I am active, moving, and have time to wash dishes and do laundry. It also means that I am healthy enough to carry and put away groceries and pick things up from the floor.

Thank you, Aibishter, that I am feeling sensitive today. Remember the days when I did not feel at all; I was too strong for that? Today it is different; today I feel, which means I have supportive friends and a loving husband. It also reminds me to let go of the tears that are waiting to be released.

Thank you, Aibishter, that I'm tired. It means that I have a car for driving the kids to school so they can study Torah. It also means that I have a full life, busy with doing good things and helping others.

*Thank you, Aibishter, for a messy house. It means that the kids are healthy and active. It also teaches me to let go of perfection and control.*

Thank you, Aibishter, for the moments when I lose my sanity. They mean that I am surrounded by children who know exactly which button to press, but at the same time intensify the love I have for them. This is a love that words cannot describe.

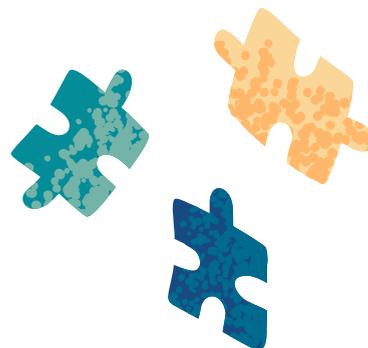
Thank you, Aibishter, for giving me things to complain about. It reminds me that I have a sister who is willing to listen to me and loves me unconditionally. She is always there for me when I need her.

Thank you, Aibishter, for confusion. It means that I do not act impulsively. It gives me a chance to consult with my mashpia and ask for help. And it means that I really care about my children's education.

Thank you, Aibishter, for the feeling of loneliness even when I am among a lot of people. It reminds me that I am gentle and special and that not many understand my soul.

Thank you, Aibishter, for those moments of helplessness, moments that are so much that I cannot bear them. In those moments, I have no choice but to surrender and hand them over to you. Then I am able to feel relief, joy, and blessing because, through all this heaviness called life, I do not have to bear it alone.

I know I came to say thank you for hardship, but now I don't feel it; right now, I feel the happiest in the world! ■



# Shopping Smarts

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Chava (Sneiderman) Witkes, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5771 (2011)*



**H**ow my kids dress matters to me. It's not about keeping up with other moms or trying to fit in. I believe that the way my children look has a big effect on how other adults and children treat them — even the way I treat them! To me, spending time and effort on how my children look makes a strong statement: I care about my children.

Our children are more prized and precious than anything; I think the way we dress them is a chance to reflect that.

The way our children dress is also an opportunity to make a *kiddush Hashem*. Children who look refined and elegant make a statement about our frum values. We are children of the King, Hashem, princes and princesses who get to represent that. For me, that means choosing elegance and class over casual, baggy, or childish looks.

Dressing nicely doesn't have to mean spending a lot of money. Living above our means is never a good idea. But there are many, many ways to keep our children looking good on a budget. Here are some tried and true tips that work for me and dressing my four kids. I hope they'll help you too!

**1. Do the free things first.** It doesn't cost you any money to keep your children clean! Wipe your children's faces before leaving the house. If you have girls, brush their hair after the bath every night. With four children under four, I'm constantly keeping up with little cheeks that quickly get covered with food, drink, and other mysterious substances. But don't skip this step! Keep wipes in your bag and stroller for any time you're out of the house.

**2. Can you fix it?** My rambunctious boys quickly get holes in many of their pants' knees and shirts' elbows. Some of their nice Shabbos pants are also hopelessly faded at the knees, making them look worn and sad. I did a quick Google search and found twenty five suede patches on Amazon for ten dollars. They come in black, gray, brown, navy, and hunter green and are super easy to iron on to clothing. This means that in five minutes I can fix nice pants and shirts I would otherwise have had to throw away.

**3. Sur Mera, then Aseb Tov.** Getting rid of stained or ripped clothing doesn't cost any money and can go a long way in making sure your children look good. Make it a habit to get rid of any clothing, tights, or socks that are stained or ripped beyond repair. If the clothes are fancy, you can put them in a dress up box for your children to play with.

**4. Size Right.** Here's another tip that doesn't cost much: make sure you choose the right size. Although sizing up can be a budget-friendly tip, wearing things that are too big or too small instantly makes an outfit look cheap or "off." If you're

## *The way our children dress is also an opportunity to make a kiddush Hashem.*

buying something online and it's final sale, you can buy two sizes. If you're worried about buying a size you don't need, hopefully you'll have many more children in different sizes and will be able to use a bigger or smaller size at a later time in your life, b'ezras Hashem.

**5. Gender Neutral.** This is especially great advice for moms of little children, but can even apply way into preschool years. Dress your children in elegant, neutral colors, and you won't have to replace so many clothes between your boys and girls. Choose a black coat, instead of a pink or blue one. Get the dark green rain boots, instead of the silver sparkly kind. You can always buy little things like bows and socks to make an outfit more feminine, but for big-ticket items like boots, coats, or even backpacks, stick to quality items in gender-neutral colors that can be passed down from child to child.



*6. Take good care!* That being said, taking good care of your children's clothing will allow for more wear! I throw undergarments and socks in the dryer, but I hang up anything else that I want to last for more than one season. Newborn clothes last especially well. You can share hand-me-downs with friends in between babies and still get the clothing back in time for your next birth! It's always fun for me to look at old pictures of my children wearing the outfits.

*7. Know when to spend.* There are some areas where your money will go further, and other places where it's smarter to cut corners. When buying undershirts or school clothes, for example, take advantage of cheaper options. Your money is better spent on items that won't be used as often: Shabbos coats are a great example. Children wear them only once a week, so they are easy to keep clean. I have a Shabbos coat in size two that has been worn by all three of my children already! Shoes are another example where it's worth investing. I buy quality



shoes on sale and have a few pairs in every size, from boots to sneakers to sandals. When a new season comes around, usually it's only my oldest who needs something new—for everyone else I can pull out what I already have. (See earlier note about buying gender neutral!) You can also put your money towards accessories that can easily upgrade an outfit, such as a nicer pair of socks or a better-quality yarmulka.

*8. Get comfortable with AliExpress.* Learn how and when to use this amazing resource. Certain products just can't be found at such a low cost anywhere else. You'll have to allow a few weeks for shipping, so plan in advance. For accessories like headbands, socks, mittens, or sunglasses you can buy things for just a few dollars. There's a little bit of a learning curve in figuring out what to buy and how to choose the right products, but the price is low enough that you'll get the hang of it without making such costly mistakes. With some trial and error, you can learn to use AliExpress to supplement all of your other shopping. Some of the great items I've gotten on AliExpress are ribbed pajamas for eight dollars, fancy pearl headbands for three dollars, good-quality plain turtlenecks for three dollars, and those adorable fur-lined "Gucci" shoes for thirteen dollars.

*9. Shop twice a year.* I try to only shop twice a year, once before each season, and time my shopping with the end-of-season sales when stores offer up to seventy percent off. I usually look through a few specific stores to stock up on anything I may need for the next season (keeping in mind sizes and weather). For everything else, I usually use Google shopping to find exactly what I need, which works better than browsing through products I may not need.

*10. Know your brands.* Here is an important one. Learn which brands are worth splurging on and which ones disappoint. Learn which brands have good fits, better quality, and longer wear to get the full value for your money. Within each brand, not all products are created equally though, and some brands have products that last longer than others. Certain fabrics, no matter the brand, will never survive more than one season. Splurge with a long-term vision.

*11. Don't overbuy.* Children don't need too much, so go for quality over quantity. A week's worth of



school clothes and pajamas. A good-quality, classic coat and pair of boots that will last a few children. A nice pair of sneakers, sandals, and Shabbos shoes, gender-neutral if possible. A handful of nice accessories. For Shabbos outfits, four nice, mix-and-match separates are all you need. I also love to have one or two pairs of Friday night pajamas — cozy and comfortable and such a nice way to honor Shabbos. That's it! Focus on the few things you need and forget the rest. Which brings us to our next tip...

**12. Don't Subscribe.** If you're on Instagram, go to your account and unfollow stores and brands, as well as influencers who are constantly posting sales, swipe-ups, and product recommendations. Then, go to your email and unsubscribe from every shopping email and sale alert that you've been getting. Yes, someone needs to be supporting these small businesses, but you'll do it on your own time, when you actually need something. If we stop exposing ourselves to so much retail stimulation, we'll be more in control when it comes to when and how we spend. Just because it's on sale, doesn't mean we need it!

**13. Indulge Small.** Now, if the urge for retail therapy comes up, don't ignore it. Maybe you really do need that anxiety release. The best way I've found to indulge in a compulsion to spend is by... spending. Just do it small. Buy something under five dollars, like a cute clip or pair of fancy socks. Worst comes to worst you now own a five dollar pair of socks that you didn't really need. Not so bad in the greater scheme of things.

**14. Google Shopping Alerts.** I recently used this trick for the first time when I needed a new winter coat. I had been eyeing a coat I wanted, and it was one hundred and eighty dollars at the beginning

of winter. So for a month or two I was still wearing the previous year's coat that just wasn't in the best shape. Then the coat dropped to one hundred and twenty dollars during a one-week post-holiday sale, but I knew the season wasn't over yet, and that didn't seem like a big enough discount to take the leap. At the end of January, the coat price dropped to seventy two dollars — score! I bought it right away. This is the power of delayed gratification.

**15. Don't wait.** If your nephew's bar mitzvah is tomorrow night and you and your children are missing key wardrobe pieces, yes, you will be forced to march down Kingston Avenue and drop serious money on whatever emergency outfits and accessories you need. If you plan in advance, you'll give yourself the flexibility of waiting for sales, comparing, borrowing, shopping around, ordering something from AliExpress, etc. Think ahead and you won't get stuck.

Raising children isn't easy and with their constant growth, it's hard to keep up with their closets! Especially as my children get older and start having opinions on what they wear ("I don't like that new shirt you just bought me!"), dressing our children well is definitely a challenge. But know that every effort we put in will benefit our children and bring a *Kiddush Hashem*, because that makes it all worth it. ■



### *Hashem's Work:*

The Rebbe was once addressing a women's convention. In middle of passionately encouraging women to continue their activism on behalf of the Jewish people, he stopped and earnestly said:

"...But when a woman dresses her children in fresh clothing, feeds her children nutritious food, and goes around her home at night making sure that the windows are closed and no draft is blowing on her child, this too, is avodas Hashem — the holy work of serving Hashem!"

*(Excerpt from Seeds of Wisdom)*

# Getting Out of the Way

---

Yehudis (Gopin) Wolvovsky, Glastonbury, CT  
*Graduating class of 5757 (1997)*



**I** was feeling down. Really down.  
We were on shlichus for more than twenty years and I was disappointed.  
Shouldn't we be seeing more growth? Shouldn't we be attracting more people?  
What were we doing wrong?  
What was *I* doing wrong?

Here's the thing — I went on shlichus for a reason.  
I really and truly believed in the mission. I wanted to be part of the Rebbe's army.  
I wanted to help other Yidden connect to the greatest treasure in their life — and I still do! Passionately!

I was struggling with my concept of success, though it was not the first time.  
Over the years, I've grown through my expectations versus the reality of my life.

I've spent time thinking, learning, and connecting to the Rebbe's definition of success. I've discussed this idea often with my mashpia, working out what my individual shlichus goals should be.

I moved to a small town, with a small Jewish population. I am used to small crowds. Focusing on the power of each mitzvah, each neshoma, is how I spend my energy. But somehow I was at a point where I was having a hard time feeling it. My heart wasn't accepting the answers my head so logically provided anymore. A very human voice in me wanted more.

I am a talented, capable person.  
I am a great teacher. Inspiring speaker. Wonderful cook. Creative party planner.  
I have so much to offer. No lack of self-esteem here :)  
Were my talents being wasted?  
I had so much more to give.  
I felt like there were so many muscles in my body that needed to be stretched.  
I felt as if I was standing in place.  
I was desperate for an exercise that would make me feel alive again.

This drive was a mix of my Nefesh Elohis and Nefesh Habihamis, I believe.  
They both wanted me to give more. I just wasn't sure how to do that without creating stress.

I wondered, do I work harder?  
Plan more programs?  
Start another class?  
Publicize our offerings better?

But then I told myself — if I push harder and succeed, great.  
What if I put in so much effort and don't see the results I wanted; how would I feel then? Would that get me back into the negative tailspin?

So, I didn't.  
Don't get me wrong; I was busy.  
But I didn't feel like I was fully invested.  
And I certainly didn't feel successful.

*I told her that my goal is connection. I truly wanted to create meaningful relationships with people.*

And that is where I was stuck.  
I wanted to be successful.  
I wanted to **feel** successful.  
I wanted to make a difference — and see it.

I discussed this with a local coach. She asked me a great question, "What is the main goal of your programming? What are you looking to accomplish?"

I told her that my goal is connection. I truly wanted to create meaningful relationships with people.

She gave me some food for thought: Stop thinking about your success.  
Focus on building those relationships with people.  
Put your energy into creating those connections.  
When you honestly connect with others, with no ulterior motive — everything will flow from that.  
When people feel your desire to connect with them, they will come.

I took some time to think about this.  
When I invited a woman to an event, did I want *her* at the event?  
Did it matter to me whether it was Lisa or Robin, or did I just want a full room?  
How much was I focusing on each woman and her needs?

The Rebbe speaks about how ahavas yisroel must be entirely about the other person. No ulterior motives — even for the benefit of an organization, worthy as it may be.  
We simply love the fellow Jew, for the fellow Jew.  
*Eme'sseh ahavas yisroel.*

At the Kinus, every message seemed to be directed at me.  
Raizy Metzger mentioned something that electrified me — not complex or new; it just spoke to my soul.

“What is our goal? *Tzu oisfren di kavona*. We are here to actualize Hashem’s intention in creating the world.”

A very simple litmus test.  
Does this activity, conversation, or thought process bring me *tzu oisfren di kavona*?

A few days later, I had a hard time getting out of bed. I was exhausted — I hadn’t had much sleep the night before. The day ahead was going to be a long one with my two youngest children home with me. Why should I want to get out of bed and face the day?

The words popped into my head, “*Tzu oisfren di kavona*.”

That did it.

Yes, it would be an exhausting day.

Yes, I had to do a million and one things with my little helpers at my side.

Yes, I had Hebrew School that afternoon (for four precious neshamos) and I hadn’t yet prepared.

Yes, I was so tired.

*“What is our goal? Tzu oisfren di kavona. We are here to actualize Hashem’s intention in creating the world.”*

But, I was going to *fir ois di kavona*.

It was a Modeh Ani I will always remember.

I may be an official Rebbetzin, but I am no super-spiritual person. I have a hard time davening without folding laundry at the same time. And here I was, connected to an exalted idea with a very practical implication.

I got up and did my day with purpose and yes, joy. And that is when I felt like I was stretching.

I felt the inner growth take place.

I took another step forward.

I realized that my success is what I put in, rather than results. My job is to teach Torah — not to attract crowds.

I called a friend and arranged a weekly shiur with her.



*Yehudis Wolvovsky and her family.*

We decided to open it up to other women as well, but in my mind, the class would be built around this one woman.

We got together and learned the Chof Beis Shvat sicha from 5752. We resolved to study Tanya together. It was a special discussion.

I mentioned this new shiur at the end of my monthly Rosh Chodesh Society class and invited the other women to join us. I posted a little blurb on Facebook. That was that.

Well, I have six women interested.

Six women in Glastonbury, Connecticut interested in learning Tanya.

We're starting this Monday. Wish me hatzlocha!

Usually, I prepare in-depth classes, publicize for weeks, text and call loads of women (read: tear my hair out), and have the hardest time getting a group together. And here, with no work, no angst, and no stress, women were interested. What changed?

My theory?

I changed.

I changed my goal.

I changed the narrative.

This was not about Yehudis Wolvovsky being a successful Shlucha and teacher.

This was about Jewish women learning Torah. And when I got out of the way, the emes shone through.

And so, at risk of sounding like a holy tzadeikes... this is my new goal.

To be transparent to the kedusha within. To be *bottul* to the mission. To let myself be the vehicle for *oisfren di kavona*.

It's not about me. It's not about my success. It's about the kavona.

And you know what?

When I stop focusing on myself, I gain the most.

When I don't aim for success, growth happens.

When I am connected to the source and allow my ego to fade, I feel the most joy.

I stop questioning my purpose.

I *live* my purpose.

May we see the kavona be completely actualized today.

*P.S. One more woman just signed up!* ■

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# Service FOR OTHERS, Relief FOR ME

---

Anonymous



I was in a free fall. And not on a fun, exhilarating ride in an amusement park, but deep into the depths of despair.

Everything was taking an enormous amount of effort. Getting up, going to work, taking care of the kids. I was surrounded by a dark cloud, and I didn't even have the energy to shake it off.

Supper. Bedtime. Buses. Repeat. I went through the motions with no desire to actually do the above-listed tasks.

It's not enough to not die. A person needs to be alive. And I wasn't.

I killed a lot of time on social media, busying myself with mindless, numbing scrolling — anything to not feel the overwhelming sense of despair. And then, an article caught my eye which I read. And then I read it again and again and again.

### *It's not enough to not die.*

It was an article written by Jamie Geller, but was neither her typical dropping a menu check-in, nor was it one of her many posts about supporting a farmer for Shmita. It was a personal post, and it quite literally gave me a new life.

I knew Jamie from her cookbook, *Quick and Kosher*. For those who don't know her, Jamie Geller is an Israeli-American food writer, celebrity chef, and businesswoman. She is the author of several cookbooks and the founder of the Kosher Media Network. In 5770 (2010), KMN launched a cookbook called *Joy of Kosher* with Jamie Geller. Geller hosts online cooking shows called the Joy of Kosher cooking series.

I knew Jamie and I connected to her because she was successful.

And what was this iconic, multi-role woman sharing?

She publicly posted about a million-dollar contract she had signed that failed. Mic drop. She did something huge, and it fell on its face. And she was so down about it.

What did she do to climb out? Jamie explained that she climbed out of the rut of self-pity by



**Jamie Geller** ✓

Jan 13 · 🌐

I signed a \$1Million contract! Swipe to see it.

This contract, for my signature product line, was the realization of a dream that turned into a nightmare.

By month 8 the contract was breached. After a short meeting, funding ceased. I fell from heaven into heartbreak in a heartbeat. I mourned the loss of my business, my employees, my dreams. Hubby came home and found me crying on the floor. "No one died" he said—but I felt like part of me had. I cried with no idea how my life would turn around. This was 3yrs ago.

While picking up pieces of my business, I shelved my dream in favor of survival. 2yrs later, Hubby said one day "why don't you try your spice line again?" I almost bit off his head. How dare he suggest it in such a flippant way?! He ignored me.

He researched, sent emails, and with a \$5K investment (put on a cc) we launched with 8 signature spices. We now have 12 spices with an exclusive KforP collection, 2 flavored honey drops, and a new line of rice pilaf mixes coming soon (G-d Willing!).

What did I learn from this? So much. And it's not to never give up on your dreams. Because I gave up. The launch was not a result of my hard work. The failure followed by years of financial struggle caused me to stop believing in myself. Since it was my personal brand that was failing I felt like a failure. How did I get out of that dark self-centric place? I decided to be part of something bigger than myself. It wasn't my bruised ego talking. It was my soul talking. I needed to do something more meaningful and rewarding that didn't ride on my popularity.

As part of that decision, I am donating my profits from the product line this year to [cmatch.me/SupportOurFarmers](https://cmatch.me/SupportOurFarmers) my new initiative dedicated to Israel's farming families. Dedicated to farmers from whom I source my products, who are having trouble paying water and electric bills this shmitah/sabbatical year. Please join me. When buying my products on [Amazon.com/shop/JamieGeller](https://Amazon.com/shop/JamieGeller) or donating at [cmatch.me/SupportOurFarmers](https://cmatch.me/SupportOurFarmers) you'll be partnering with me in my mission to do something greater than ourselves, on behalf of the Jewish People.

When you've been discouraged, how did you flip the switch?

*Jamie explained that she climbed out of the rut of self-pity by starting a project to help someone else.*

starting a project to help someone else. She got out of her head to think of other people, and that pulled her out of her funk.

She helped bring awareness to the farmers' predicament during Shmita by creating "Women in the Field", an interview series where Jamie speaks with farmers' wives bringing attention to the real *Mesiras Nefesh* and challenges of keeping Shmita. Her work is inspiring Klal Yisroel to support their fellow Yidden. She helped others, and she felt better.

Eventually, when Jamie invested in her own line of spices again, some proceeds went to the farmers. By focusing on soul, meaning, and purpose, Jamie turned her situation around.

Now, I could have told you this. I knew this, silly me. Of course, when you're in a self-pity party, you need to get out of it by doing something for someone else. Yet somehow, when it happened to me, I totally forgot.

My mind was going in circles. What I needed was to channel my energies toward something productive.

I needed Jamie to remind me, and I'm so grateful she did. I was so grateful that she shared her process of growing, from feeling like the end of the world is upon her to finding purpose and meaning.

Let me tell you. I didn't even come up with a massive chessed organization. The very act of stopping and thinking about how I can be of service to others lifted my spirits. Mind-blowing. I wouldn't have believed it if it hadn't been me.

So next time you're feeling down, try this. Think: who can I help or be of service to right now? How can I transcend myself and think of someone else?

*So next time you're feeling down, try this. Think: who can I help or be of service to right now?*

I wish I could hear how that goes for you, and I wish you the best of luck! ■



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# MARKETING THAT'S SO GOOD

*It's Like French Fries for Lunch*

---

Racheli (Feldman) Edelkopf, Montreal, Quebec  
*Graduating class of 5770 (2010)*



I'm going to drop some tips for nonprofits here. If you're in the nonprofit world, now's a good time to hide (with your coffee cup) so you can read this undisturbed. If you're not, don't be shy to eavesdrop; if you're anything like me, everything is more interesting when it's none of your business.

I'm Racheli (Feldman) Edelkopf, founder of Pedal, a boutique marketing company for nonprofits and purpose-driven companies.

I might do marketing as a profession, but we're all marketers in our day-to-day life.

Telling your toddler that the green cup works just as well as the pink cup? That's marketing (*good luck with that, by the way*).

When you hear marketing, you think about convincing people to do something.

To change their mind about something and choose you. But nobody wants to be convinced, and nobody wishes they can see one more advertisement or get one more solicitation.

I DON'T CARE HOW MANY TIMES MY DONATION WILL BE MATCHED (sorry for shouting).

What if you didn't have to convince people about your cause?

What if you could make them want in.

Make them thrilled to give you their time, excited to give you their money, and bursting to tell their friends about you.

If you want to make people obsessed with your cause & adding zeros to your bank account so you can create a real impact. Here are some of the most important things to know.

### 1. You already have enough followers.

Yes, even if you have 267 followers on social media. Each follower is a person who raised his or her hand and said I want to hear from you. The best way to grow your following is to focus on the people you already have. If they're not engaging with your content, more followers won't fix that. And if you have a small but mighty engaged audience, that's more powerful than thousands of followers who don't really care at all. Imagine you had 267 people show up in person to hear you talk? You'd be thrilled and you'd make sure to deliver a great experience.

So how do you engage your current followers?

### 2. Don't be that friend.

You know the one. You haven't heard from them in months but they pop up just in time to ask you for a grand favor. Too many nonprofits focus all their marketing energy and budget on their twice-yearly fundraisers. You know how to show up, but only when you need something.

People are on social media to connect with others and to gain immediate value. We all love accounts that educate us, inspire us, or make us laugh. Your favorite accounts are the ones that show up giving you value without constantly selling to you and asking for something in return. They add immediate value to you, every day.

Do a quick check on your last posts and emails: Are you asking for, or giving your audience value? The test is — if someone takes no action from seeing your post, do they get any value from this? If you're not sure what kind of value to share with your audience, keep reading.

### 3. Valuable to whom?

What I find valuable and what you find valuable

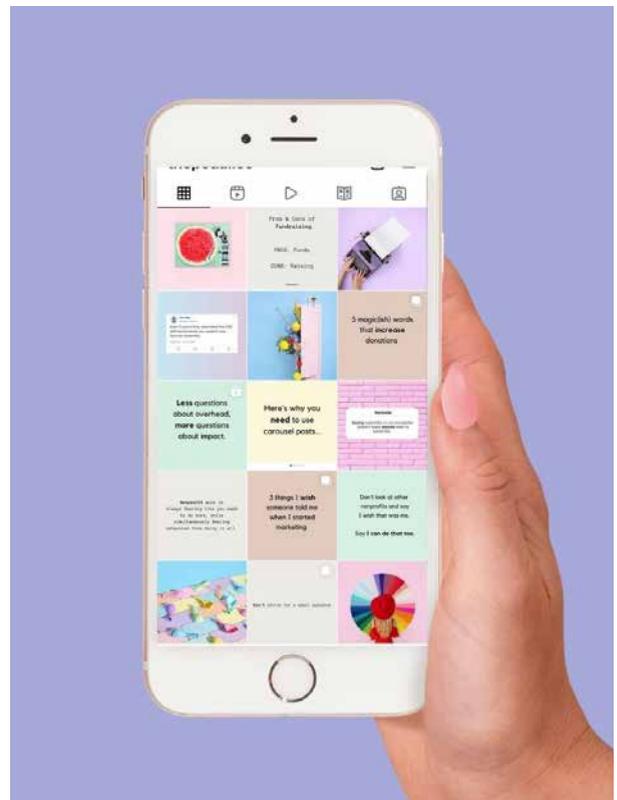
*What if you didn't have to convince people about your cause? What if you could make them want in.*

might be very different. Don't assume that your audience wants to see the exact same thing you want to see. What kind of value does someone get from your events, programs, or volunteering? Ask them what they most appreciate and gain from it and see how you give a follower a micro dose of that value.

Your job is to get to know your audience as much as you can and deliver content that resonates with them, that they fancy — you need to make them say “you're reading my mind, I belong here.”

A nonprofit I worked with got over one hundred shares on one post! It was a combination of adding valuable content combined with content that spoke directly to the issues his audience cared about most.

You need to connect with their values and beliefs so that being part of your charity isn't charity, it's a way for them to live out who they are.



#### 4. *You are your most valuable marketing asset.*

The best marketing comes from within. I see so many nonprofits running to outsource their marketing to anyone under the age of twenty five who knows Instagram and TikTok. You're the expert on your cause and community.

People are attracted to your organization because they know, like, and trust you. When you show up as yourself online, people can build a relationship with you and be so much more likely to take action. Write your content using your voice, how you'd talk, and show your face and personality. If a newcomer dropped into a program or to volunteer you'd want to greet them with your face, not send your secretary in your place; social media is not an alternative universe, the same rules apply.

After recently completing a campaign for a client, she told me that it was the first time people actually replied to her emails in addition to donating. Her personality was all over the content which made ppl hit the reply button and continue the conversation.

Use your best asset — you.

You made it to the end! 4,831 characters in. You have an above-average attention span. I like you already.

*The test is — if someone takes no action from seeing your post, do they get any value from this?*

Now take some of what we chatted about and start making people obsessed with your cause so you can create a real impact. ■



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# A Taste of Bais Rivkah



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Gitty (Freeman) Freedman  
Crown Heights

Graduating class  
of 5765 (2005)



*Gitty hard at work.*

## A TASTE OF THEIR OWN CREATION

“Mommy, I’m hungry! What can I eat?”

I looked into the pleading eyes of my (very cute) five-year-old, her face and fingers still covered with food residue from the carrots and dip she had JUST finished eating, and sighed. The five-year-old’s pleas were quickly echoed from around the house with a chorus of “I’m hungry too!” and “Can I have something also?”

It was the second summer I was running “Camp Mommy,” and my children’s favorite activity seemed to be asking for food. I think “What can I eat?” had become the official bunk cheer.

Don’t get me wrong; baruch Hashem they all have healthy appetites, but I simply couldn’t keep up. The creation and delivery of meals and snacks had become my life. That was when I decided to teach my kids (ages two to seven years old at the time) how to make simple meals and snacks for themselves.

I know what you’re thinking: that sounds messy, hard, frustrating, and even more overwhelming than just making the food myself. But let me tell you, it was worth every mess!



*Gitty's daughters love to help out, discovering recipes, new herbs, and chopping techniques.*

Fast forward to the present day, and my now-thirteen-year-old, Frayda, has gained a love and passion for making dishes using fresh ingredients and herbs. Her signature dishes are tomato basil pasta, veggie feta herb salad, and berry tarts. My eleven-year-old, Shira, is a baking pro! She makes her own fondant, buttercreams, Neapolitans, and the best chocolate cake you've ever had in your life. My eight-year-old, Aviva, loves slicing vegetables, baking, decorating food, and styling dishes. My four-year-old, Asher, loves making smoothies and measuring and mixing ingredients. Anytime I ask if he wants to help me

make a meal, he comes bounding into the kitchen ready for action.

I was so proud of the confidence my kids built and the skills they were mastering that I began teaching cooking classes to other children in my community. Watching my students grow and thrive has been so satisfying, and getting messages from their parents with pictures of the meals they make at home brings me so much joy!

Getting here took time, patience, and appropriate expectations, but is completely achievable for everyone.

I'd like to offer some basic tips and skills to get your kids comfortable in the kitchen.

The first things you'll need are the right tools. Start with a medium/large cutting board, a paring knife with a grippy handle, and a horizontal peeler. I specifically like these for safety. Most of the other necessary tools are things you probably already have in your kitchen. If your child has never used kitchen tools before, it's important to always supervise until they feel comfortable and know how to use them properly.

Next, pick something simple to make together, for example, sliced veggies and dip, ants on a log, granola, breakfast muffins, etc.

Lastly, set appropriate expectations and get into the right mindset. You are setting aside time to spend with your child while giving them lifelong skills and having fun at the same time. It may not go exactly as planned in the beginning, but be flexible! You can make this a memorable, exciting experience that you will both enjoy if you go in with the right attitude. It's also a valuable investment, if I may say so!

Here are two simple recipes to get you started:



## ANTS ON A LOG

*A terrific, simple, first-time dish for younger children, this recipe is pure fun! You will have the opportunity to teach your child how to wash, dry, and slice celery, which is great prep for learning how to clean and chop dirtier and denser veggies.'*

### INGREDIENTS

A few celery stalks  
A small jar of peanut butter/butter of your choice  
Raisins/craisins

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Wash a few celery stalks. Pat dry and cut into about three-inch slices. Use a spoon to scoop up butter and a clean finger to gently move the butter inside the center of the celery. Then gently press your raisins/craisins along the butter to make them look like "ants on a log."



## BREAKFAST BANANA MUFFINS:

*This recipe will give you the opportunity to teach your child about the different sizes of measuring cups and spoons. Show them how to measure, scoop, and pour the ingredients into the bowl. There is an egg in this recipe as well, so it's the perfect time to teach your child how to crack and check eggs for blood. It's a great opportunity for chinuch until your child is bar/bas mitzvah, when they can do it on their own. To top it off, they get to mash bananas! A potato masher or the back of a fork does the trick and can be super fun.*

### INGREDIENTS:

½ c sweet potato bisque or applesauce  
½ c sugar  
1 egg  
1½ c flour

- 1 tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 3 mashed bananas

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Mix bisque/applesauce and sugar together. Add the egg and mix. Add flour, baking soda, salt, and mix. The batter will be very thick. Mix in the mashed bananas. Pour the batter halfway up into the muffin tins, or pour the entire batter into a pie dish for pie. Bake at 330° for 20-30 minutes (for pie, bake a bit longer). Yields about 20 mini muffins.
2. Remember to be flexible. You might be surprised at how quickly your children become budding little chefs, but don't be frustrated if you find that you need to teach the same thing many times. Whenever you feel they're ready, don't be afraid to work on more complicated dishes together. And most importantly, have fun! ▀



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# - BAIS RIVKAH - Talent



## LISTEN

Chanale (Katzman) Kalmenson  
London, England  
*Graduating class of 5764 (2004)*

If you listen  
patiently,  
quietly  
with compassion  
and curiosity

You may begin to discern  
which of your inner voices  
belong to the tenacious,  
magnificently resilient survivors  
with deeply compromised views of reality,  
the animal soul with her fragmented perspectives,  
underdeveloped and un-resourced,  
undermined and uncomprehending,  
grasping desperately,  
heroically, to keep you alive  
in a shockingly broken world  
coping, adapting, morphing  
just to stay afloat another day

And which  
of the voices within  
are native to the Light,  
the wise and knowing self,  
connected, energized, and whole  
serene and content,  
loving and powerful  
the still small voice  
that manifests healing and light  
the place from which you flow  
the place you know the Divine  
for it is you, it is One

## ENERGY

Chani (Zalmanov) Vaisfiche  
Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5765 (2005)*

Flowing and ebbing  
Putting forth and receding  
My energy goes in waves  
On my “ebbing” days  
I need to remind myself that I am still valuable  
and whole  
No matter my energy or lack thereof  
I am a human who flows  
Like a wave  
And there's a beauty to that  
If I would stand back and just let myself be  
I can discover my beauty even when I'm depleted  
of energy



## WORDS TO LIVE BY

Sara (Herson) Brafman

Morristown, NJ

*Graduating class of 5744 (1984)*

What do you say  
When words evade you  
When you are filled  
With gratitude  
For the blessings  
Of today  
And long for the gifts  
Of yesterday

What do you say  
When there is so much  
Goodness; wholesomeness  
Yet too much  
Brokenness

When, seared into  
Your memory  
Are visions of  
The Rebbe

Vigorously clapping  
Face aglow  
Filling the room with  
A spiritual energy  
A vibrancy  
That connected you  
To him  
To your fellow  
To your truest self  
A palpable infusion of  
Goodness  
G-Dliness  
Permeating your very being

In an all-too-often  
World of confusion  
You knew  
You were never alone

There was  
A captain of the ship  
A shepherd of the flock  
A father to turn to

Yes, the Rebbe is with us  
Now, more than before  
Answering  
Guiding  
Praying for each of us

But the Jewish people needed  
משה רבינו  
To lead them through the  
desert  
A holy countenance  
To behold  
An audible voice  
To hear

ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו  
Isn't this the way  
It's meant to be?

One word from the Rebbe  
One encouraging swing of the  
arm  
Could turn  
Confusion to clarity  
Despair to hope  
Sadness to joy!

The Rebbe's very presence  
Created  
Harmony; balance  
Both within  
And without

We have been left  
With a void so great  
We yearn for  
Days gone by  
The gifts of yesterday  
The Rebbe's holy countenance  
To behold;  
His audible voice  
To hear

But...in truth  
We have the Rebbe;  
We have the mission

The Rebbe's clarion call  
טוט אלץ וואס איר קענט  
Echoes powerfully still

We have been entrusted  
With a sacred task  
It is up to us...  
Me  
You

*Me?*

*But, what do these words mean  
Really mean,  
For me?*

I survey my  
Internal landscape  
For answers  
What I find  
Are questions...

Where, exactly  
Is my point of entry?

If a chain  
Is as strong as  
Its weakest link,  
Which "link"  
Is in greatest need  
Of repair?

Can  
I  
S-t-r-e-t-c-h  
Myself  
More  
Today  
Than  
Yesterday?

Or  
Is it time to:  
Pause  
Breathe  
Reflect  
Recalibrate  
Reassess  
  
Is my pace meant to  
Quicken or  
Slow down?  
  
Do more, or  
Do deeper?  
Is more, more?  
Perhaps, for today,  
Less is truly more...

Can I reach  
Outward  
Thinking less of the  
“I”  
And more of the  
“You”?  
Or  
Is it time to  
Replenish, by first  
Reaching  
Inward?

Will I heed  
My internal voice  
My inner “knowing”-  
That centered place  
That holds  
The truth;  
The answers?

And when I feel  
Confused, uncentered  
Will I have  
Courage  
To be vulnerable  
And seek guidance?

Will I continue  
Scaling walls  
Built by  
My own hands  
Or  
Will I choose  
To let them crumble

And walk on through?  
  
Can I adopt  
A “Know Aleph - Teach  
Aleph”  
Attitude;  
Acknowledging that  
Great things often come  
In small packages?

And...ultimately  
Will I dare to care  
Or  
Retreat in fear;  
Succumb to apathy?

For each of us  
The answers will vary  
What matters most  
Is the action  
That follows

No step forward  
Is a step  
Too small  
Too insignificant



Help us Hashem  
To navigate this final leg  
Of a journey  
Millennia long...  
Step by precious step

For, the end can be  
Most difficult  
The darkest before  
The dawn...  
  
Truly, we are living  
The ultimate paradox:  
As if suspended  
Between two realities

We experience a world  
Of deepening  
Darkness  
Fragmentation  
Utter confusion

Simultaneously, through each  
Positive action  
We continue to create  
Radiant light -  
The very light  
That will  
Usher in  
Redemption!

It is not an  
Easy place to be  
But it is exactly  
Where we are  
Meant to be...

Today, perhaps  
Words have not  
Evaded me  
טוט אלץ וואס איר קענט  
Echoes deeply within  
Reverberating through  
The heart and soul  
Of our Nation

*These are the words I seek  
The words to live by...*

We do  
We try  
We struggle for better  
And we plead -  
Hashem, please  
Take us home  
Not because we  
Are perfect  
But because we  
Are ready

We stand, today  
On the cusp of tomorrow  
Anticipating the  
Imminent arrival  
Of Moshiach Tzidkeinu

When that  
Dream  
Becomes  
Reality

We will  
Sing  
  
Thank  
Rejoice  
As never before!

We will be  
Together  
With one another  
With You

The Rebbe's  
Holy countenance  
We will behold  
His holy voice  
We will hear  
  
Once more...  
Do all that you can to bring  
Moshiach, immediately

---

## WAKE UP!

Simi Sebbag  
Crown Heights  
*Geacher in Bais Rivkah High School*

Wake Up!

It's your wedding day. The anticipation and raw emotions cannot be contained. Family and friends are dressed in their finest. There is joy and excitement in the air.

The groom prepares himself with some final chapters of Tehillim. As he greets each guest, butterflies dance in his stomach.

You are the bride. You wear a glistening white gown. Crystals sparkle on your crown. Yet, strangely, your eyes are closed. You are at the wedding venue, surrounded by flowers, but you are sleeping.

Your father approaches and gives you a gentle shake. "Wake up! It's your wedding!"

You hear him in your slumber, but it hardly makes you stir.

As your father continues to attempt to wake you, the wedding begins.

You are sleeping.

"Wake up! It's your wedding! You've waited for this day since you were born!"

It doesn't produce a budge.

The bride is unconscious of the music as it begins to play. She must only wake up, and take her role as star of the show.

Dear Yid, the music of our wedding day with Hashem has begun. Our father, the Rebbe, rouses us from our slumber. The only thing we must do is wake up.



# *EMBRACE MOMENTS*



I must have been in ninth or tenth grade when we had a school assembly in the large shul on the first floor of BRHS.

After the assembly, there were throngs of girls slowly making their way out the doors, when I realized there was something timely I needed to tell a classmate before she left. But I couldn't catch her attention. So, I did the next "best" thing... I climbed up on the bench (not the most appropriate thing to do in a shul) and tried to wave to her and call her name.

That's when I heard a soft voice saying my name. Turning around, there stood Morah Teichtel. I recall feeling flustered and embarrassed, but not for long. In

the softest voice (so only I could hear) and with an understanding smile, she simply said, “You probably forgot that you’re in a shul.”

I nodded in agreement.

And that was it.

I remember feeling, ‘Morah Teichtel *knows me, gets me, respects my feelings.*’

Sure enough, this little anecdote has remained with me all these years.

I’ve repeated it to my children to help drive home the concept of sensitivity and the power of words.

And so, Morah Teichtel, here is a very belated but very heartfelt — thank you!

*Sara Brafman*

When I was a tween, I started asking a lot of questions. My teacher, Mrs. Leah’le Schapiro, took notice. She called my parents and suggested that they arrange for me to learn with an older girl once a week. I found it so stimulating and enjoyable. While I didn’t actually ask the older girl many of my questions, just the fact that my teacher cared and took the time to notice that I needed a little more stimulation, helped to satisfy me somewhat.

Taking care of my needs helped me feel so seen, and I’m truly grateful.

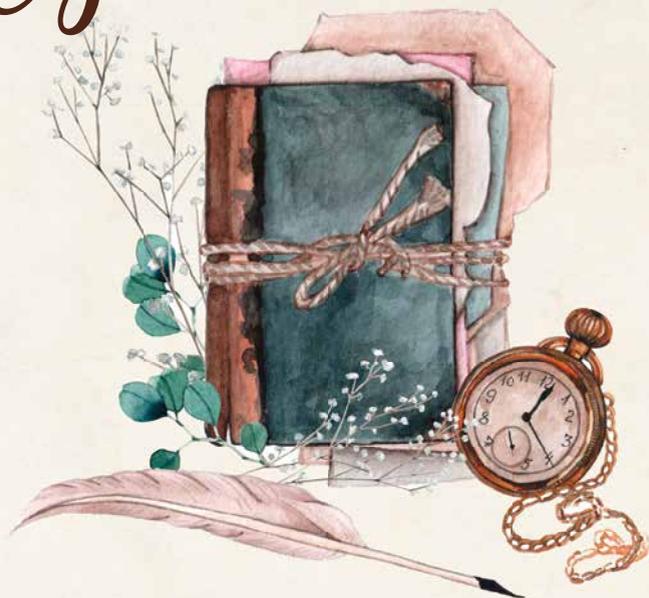
*Anonymous*



# Keepsakes

## *Bais Rivkah through the years.*

Have more photos? Please send them to [alumni@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:alumni@bethrivkah.edu)



Prior to moving to Stone Avenue, Bais Rivkah was a neighborhood school located on Riverdale Avenue in the East New York section of Brooklyn. This class picture was taken in 1955.

Front row:(l-r) Bella Reich, Batsheva Wolf, unknown, Rochel Blau, Malka Reich, unknown

Middle row:(l-r) Rachel Greenberg, Rivka Goldberg, Malka Blander, unknown, Leah Goldberg

Back row:(l-r) Devora Unger, unknown, Susan Haberman, Rochel Geisinsky, teacher Mrs. Sara Katzman

In 1975 (1992) Marc Asnin photographed the Rebbe and the Crown Heights community for the New York Times Magazine cover story on the Rebbe's ninetieth birthday. Since then, the award-winning photographer has visited over a hundred Chabad Houses, documenting their activities.

In preparation for *The Oracle*, the upcoming book on the Rebbe and Chabad to be published by Hasidic Archives (HasidicArchives.com), hundreds of photos taken in Bais Rivkah were discovered.

Hasidic Archives was kind enough to release some of those photos for EmBRace. Please email us at [embrace@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:embrace@bethrivkah.edu) if you recall any details or identify anyone in the photos.



# THE CODE OF JEWISH LOVE

Shulammis (Brodsky) Saxon  
Ramat Bet Shemesh, Eretz Yisroel  
*Graduating seminary class of 5749 (1989)*

WHEN I WAS APPROACHING MY BAS MITZVAH, I HEARD THAT THERE WAS A MINHAG TO WRITE TO THE REBBE FOR A BROCHA. I was

fairly new to Chabad and wasn't familiar with this custom, but as I sat down to write my letter, I thought it would probably be nice to also give the Rebbe a brocha. I shouldn't just be asking and taking; I should also be giving. This is the way my twelve-year-old mind reasoned.

I knew that the Rebbe was child-

less, so I decided to give him a brocha for children. Now, this was 5741 (1981), so the Rebbe was nearing eighty, but I did not see that as an obstacle. Didn't Avraham have Yitzchak when he was one hundred years old? The Torah teaches us that Hashem can do anything!

Still, I was a little bit shy about writing this outright. I didn't know if the Rebbe opened the letters himself, or if his secretaries read them first. I didn't want anyone else to see what I wrote, because they might not give my letter to him if they felt that a brocha to the Rebbe from a little girl was not appropriate. So I decided to write that part of the letter in Hebrew code.

There are a number of substitution systems where Hebrew letters are exchanged with each other according to certain specific methods. The most famous is called Atbash, but there are many others. My younger brother helped me with this, and he told me which code was best for me to use.



I wrote the following in normal Hebrew:

In three days' time, on the sixth of the month of Tishrei, I will have my bas mitzvah. And I wish to receive a brocha from the Rebbe for the coming years when I will be obligated in the mitzvos of women ... I also wish to receive a brocha to succeed in all that I do – to bring the *Geula Shleima* closer in time.

I concluded by writing in big letters across the page: “I want Mashiach now!”

*And then, all the way at the bottom of the page, there was a phrase that I could not make out. It seemed like gibberish.*

And after that, I wrote the following message in code: “*Birchati leRabbi sheyivaled lo banim af al pi shelo nigzar lo kach* – This is my brocha to the Rebbe: that he should have children even if it has not been decreed thus for him.”

A short while later, I received a letter from the Rebbe addressed to me, dated on the day of my bas mitzvah. He wrote in Hebrew:

*In answer to your letter, in which you write that you have reached the age of twelve, which is the time of bas mitzvah. May it be Hashem's will that you accept upon yourself the yoke of heaven and the yoke of the mitzvos with a full heart. May Hashem bless you to be successful in your studies and in your activities. You should grow to be worthy of being called a daughter of Chabad, in keeping with the will of our holy Rebbes.*

*You should also influence your friends through your words, and even more so through your example as a daughter of Israel who is educated in Chassidic teachings. And may this bring you spiritual and physical satisfaction.” [The Rebbe's signature]*

And then, all the way at the bottom of the page, there was a phrase that I could not make out. It seemed like gibberish. I thought that it must be some sort of internal reference like you see in business letters. I showed it to my brother who clued me in. “That's the Rebbe's answer to your brocha, in the same code that you used. It says, ‘*Todah al habrachah* – thank you for the brocha.’”

Being twelve years old, I thought this was really neat, and I framed the letter. But I didn't realize the true significance of what transpired until I was older.

Here was the Rebbe, who spent his days davening and learning, and of course with everything involved in leading Chabad. He then spent his nights answering an untold number of letters personally. My bas mitzvah fell on his mother's yartzeit – during the busiest time of Tishrei, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – yet on that very day, he answered my letter, which I find absolutely mind-boggling!

I was just a little girl, not from any important family. Nevertheless, the Rebbe read my letter carefully, taking the time to decipher the message in code, and then going to the trouble of responding in the same code.

When the significance of all this dawned on me years later, I realized how much I mattered to the Rebbe even though he did not know me or my family personally. I mattered simply because I was a Yid.

The Rebbe interacted with people from all walks of life. It didn't matter what their profession was, it didn't matter if they were frum or not, it didn't matter if they had Torah knowledge or were versed in Chassidus. The Rebbe treated each human being with respect and with kindness.

*Nevertheless, the Rebbe read my letter carefully, taking the time to decipher the message in code, and then going to the trouble of responding.*

That is something I try to pass on to the people I interact with. We should not limit our love and care to those who are like us, or to those who live in our community, or to those who are our relatives. We need to really care about each other – one and all – and extend ourselves as the Rebbe taught us to do. ■

*For the past three years, Mrs. Shulammi Saxon has been living in Israel, where she teaches at the Oryah Seminary in Jerusalem and also gives online classes for women. She was interviewed by JEM in August of 2013.*

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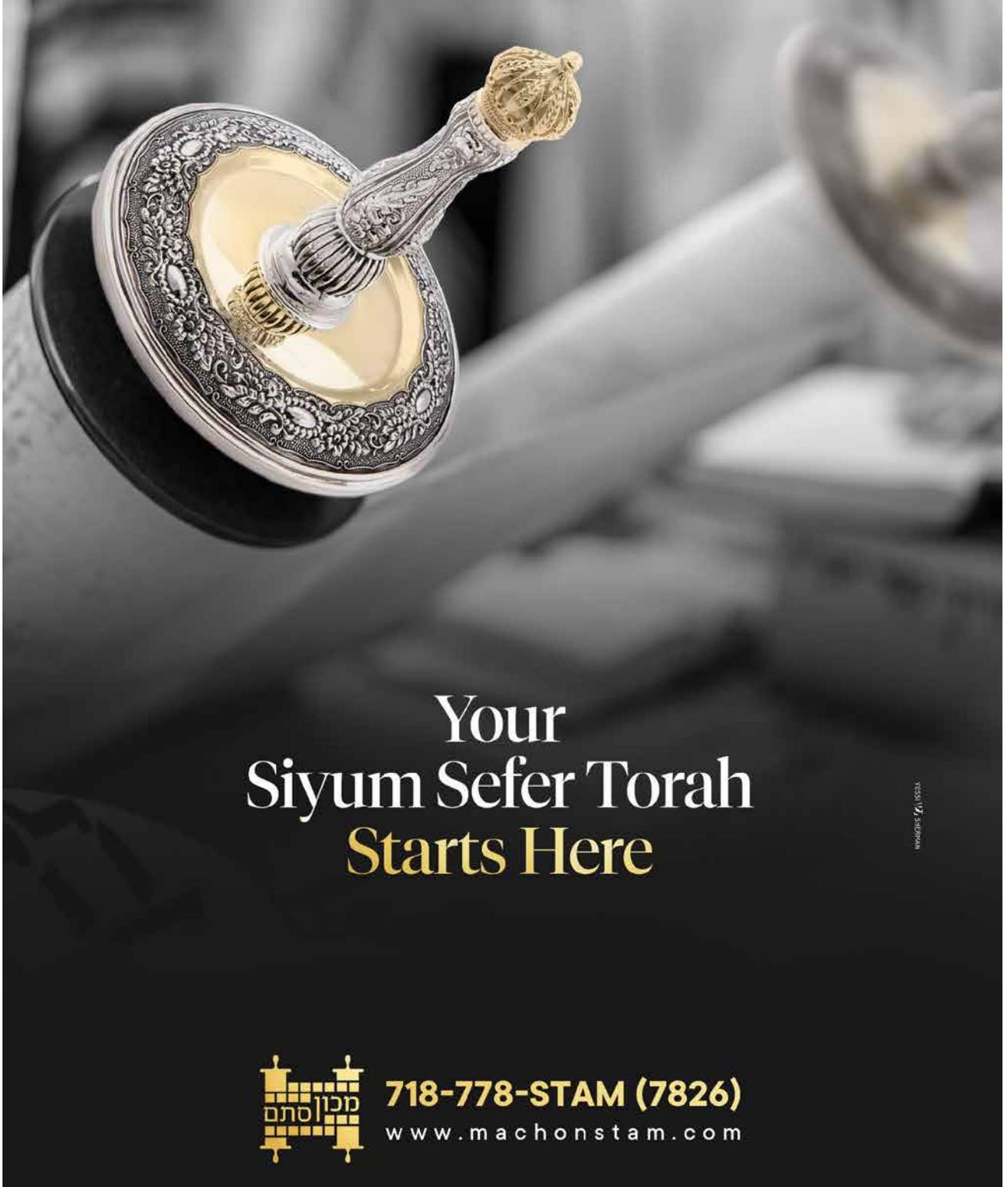
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