

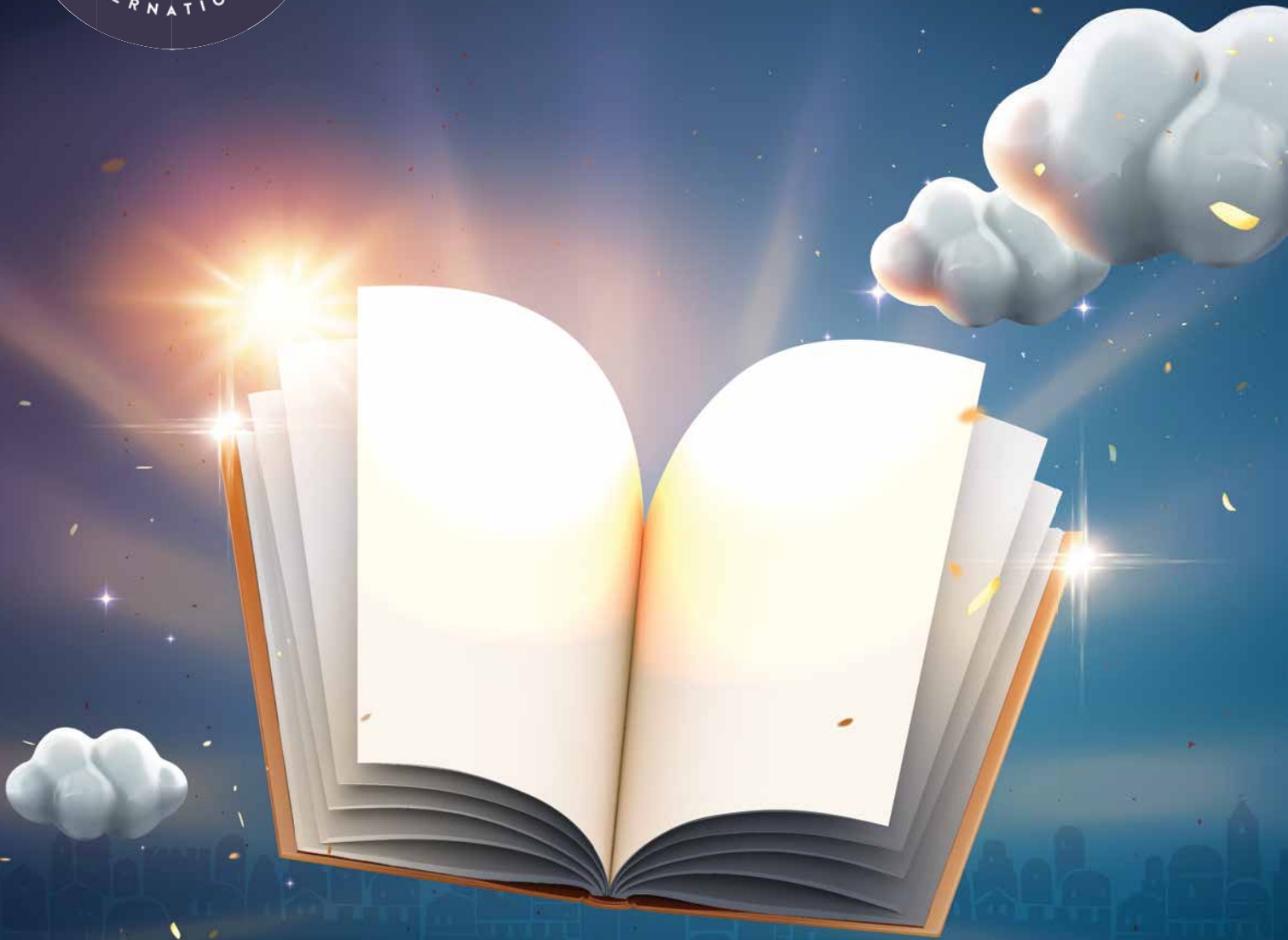


FALL 5782

ב"ה Volume 3, Issue 1

EMBRACE

Uniting and inspiring the worldwide community of Bais Rivkah Alumnae



TEFILLAH—A BLEND OF SELF-EXPRESSION & DIRECTION

THE CHILDREN SHOULD
BE 'MUCHANIM.' HORA'OS FROM
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Recovering from an eating disorder is intrinsically tied to honoring our need for deep connection.



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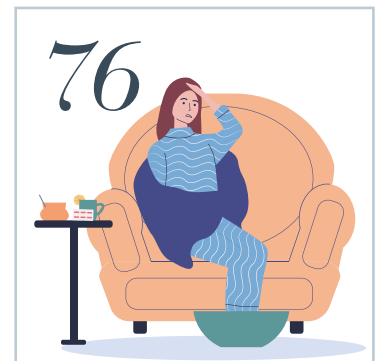
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Usually energetic and active, I was now sleeping most of the day due to post-viral fatigue – Golda Funik

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WITH OUR MIND'S EYE

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



It was the day before camp 5781 and Bais Rivkah Day Camp had no buses. Yes. No buses. Jofaz had canceled its service due to insufficient staffing, and the new buses Bais Rivkah had ordered were stuck in Oklahoma. Camp preparation was in full gear, and with 24 hours until our first pick up, we were at a loss. We did not have bus drivers to pick up the children on the following day. We had called ten bus companies and everyone had staffing shortages. I was under a tremendous amount of stress.

And then I took a deep breath. I entered into a conversation with Hashem and felt my heart rate slow back to normal. I began to daven and started to feel this sense of trust. *Davening* puts me into the practice of remembering that Hashem runs the world and believing that everything is going to work out okay.

You know how when you see something, you know it's there, and you can't "unsee" it? And then there is your imagination—"seeing" with your mind's eye, where you can experience something so intensely that you feel as though you have actually just seen it.

Davening is an exercise of the imagination. While on an external level, we use our voice, the objective is for us to see the truth so strongly with our mind's eye that no one can convince us out of it. As I *daven* I say and imagine the great creations and majesty of Hashem. "You have made the skies, the skies of skies and all their hosts, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them; and You give life to all of them, and the heavenly hosts bow before You."

With such detailed imagery, my brain guides my heart to come along with it. My heart swells with love for Hashem, and relaxes in trust of Hashem. The same Creator that created the heavens and the earth is recreating everything at every moment and I can trust Him to make things work out.

And He did. Hours before camp, we rented buses and we found drivers for camp. It wasn't the smoothest path ever, but I was able to lean in to the trust and to my relationship with Hashem. Because I saw the truth with my mind's eye.

In this issue, you will read about Golda Junik's challenging battle with Covid and the messages it taught her. You will hear about the lasting impacts Bais Rivkah has had on its students and alumnae. And you will read the Rebbe's clear message about the importance of regular *davening*, as well as countless stories and personal anecdotes from those who have struggled with this *mitzvah*, but have since gained beautiful insight from it. Join me, dear readers, through a collection of stories, anecdotes, and personal experiences, and I hope that you, too, will feel inspired to take your relationship with Hashem to the next level through thoughtful and intentional *tefillah*. ■

Sara Blau

Sara Blau

From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

Prayer: The Path to Peace of Mind

By the Grace of G-d

10th of Iyar 5725 [May 12, 1965]

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to receive your respective letters written towards the end of the month of Nissan.

Needless to say, every additional effort in matters of Torah and *mitzvos* and in the dissemination of Judaism in general, will bring additional Divine *brachos*.

With regard to the question of prayer, you surely know that there are various customs insofar as women are concerned. However, this is only as far as the women themselves are concerned. But if, as you write, this also has a bearing on the education of the children, this gives added reason to adopt the custom which would be most valuable for the children, even though the religious community where you lived previously did not demand it.

Besides, there is nothing more conducive to attune the mind and heart towards the consciousness of G-d's Presence than regular prayer, where the first condition is "Know before Whom thou are standing." Fostering this consciousness is very helpful for the attainment of peace of mind and general contentment. For through prayer and direct personal contact with the Al-mighty, one is reminded every day that G-d is not far away, in the Seventh Heaven, but is present and here, and His benevolent Providence extends to each and every one individually. This point has also been greatly emphasized by the Alter Rebbe in his book of Tanya, where he urges everyone to remember that "Behold, Hashem is standing near him." With this in mind, there is no room left for any anxiety or worry, as King David, the



There is nothing more conducive to attune the mind and heart towards the consciousness of G-d's Presence than regular prayer.

Sweet Singer of Israel, said, "G-d is my shepherd, I shall not want," "G-d is with me, I shall not fear," etc. Thus, this is no longer a theoretical idea, but becomes a personal experience in the everyday life.

As requested, I will remember in prayer those mentioned in your letter.

[Signature]

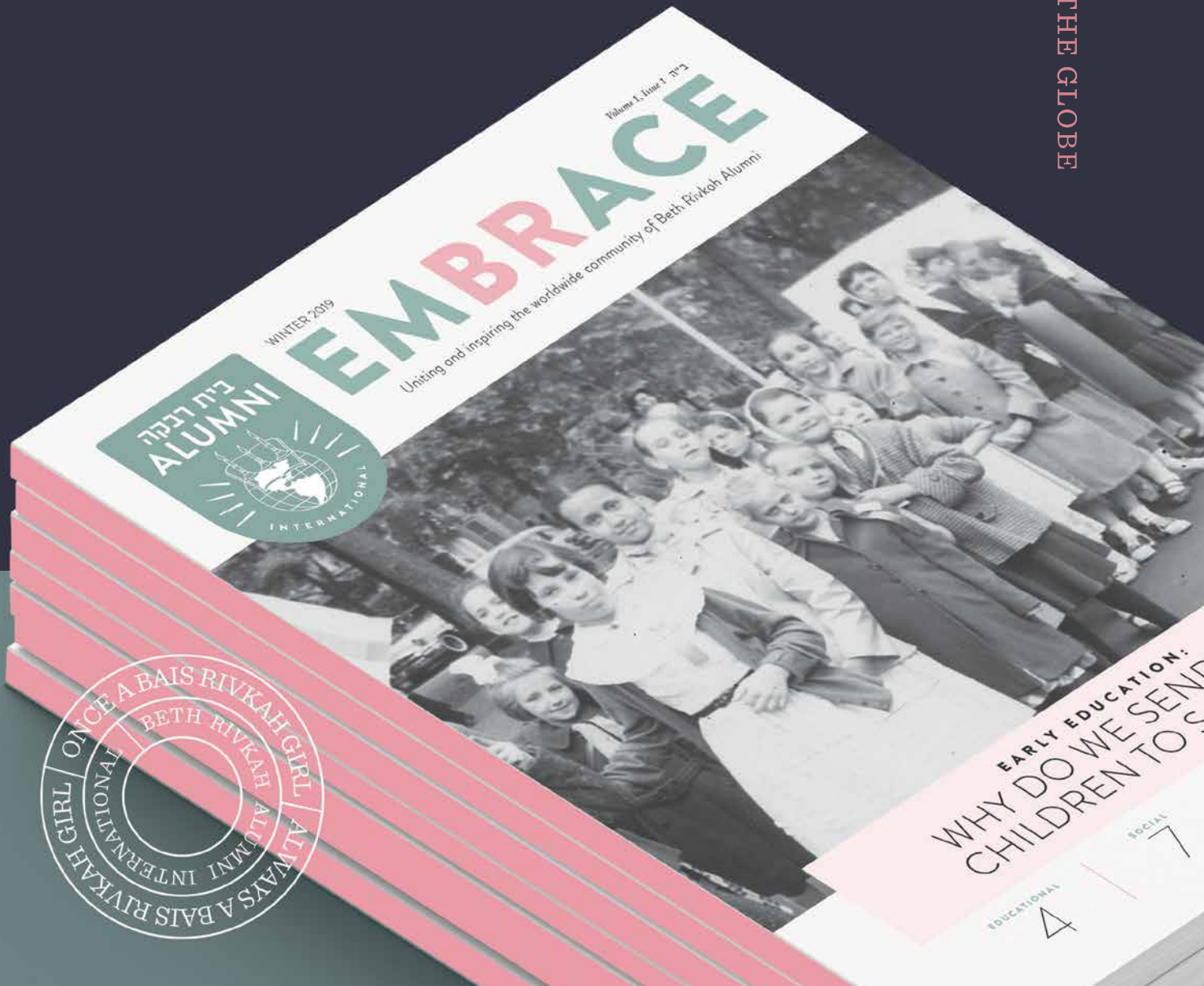
This letter is referenced in the article "Tefillah: Life-Saving Oxygen".

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Hayom Yom: Tevet 22

My father proclaimed at a farbrengen: Just as wearing tefillin every day is a Mitzva commanded by the Torah to every individual regardless of his standing in Torah, whether deeply learned or simple, so too is it *an absolute duty for every person to spend a half hour every day thinking about the Torah-education of children*, and to do everything in his power - and beyond his power - to inspire children to follow the path along which they are being guided.



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HELP US PLANT A SEED

Message from *the* Chairman *of* the Board




Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of the first man and woman, Odom and Chavah. In the Torah's documentation of the origin of the name Chavah, we are taught to appreciate the special role and importance of the woman. Chavah was given that name because her husband saw in her the ability to be *Eim Kol Choy* "the mother of every living being"¹. Rashi, in his commentary on this *possuk*, teaches us how the name Chavah expresses that quality: "the root of Chava is Chaya, *shemchayah es vlodosehah*, she gives life to her children".

Many nations and societies are still struggling to figure out what the role of the woman is or should be. We've been fortunate to be privy to the secret ever since the day we received the Torah at Har Sinai: a woman has the power not only to create life but to *infuse* life and consolidate life in all those that she comes in contact with directly or indirectly.

Throughout millennia, this was generally understood as a role limited to a woman's home and family. Perhaps prevailing conditions in the world did not warrant or allow for anything more than that. Many women today consider this to be a very limited and limiting definition and rebel against it, looking to redefine their role and importance outside of the home. Oftentimes, it is to the detriment of her home as well as to the detriment of her family's health and wellbeing.

A closer and deeper look at what the Torah is telling us, however, will allow us to appreciate that a woman has the power to give life to *every* living being. Needless to say, her family comes *first*, but her potential for infusing life and vitality does not end there; it

A woman has the power not only to create life but to infuse life and consolidate life in all those that she comes in contact with directly or indirectly.



merely begins there. The potential a woman has for influence and impact is limitless. Anything that has to do with creating and infusing life is her domain.

When new opportunities arise, they are accompanied by new responsibilities and abilities. The technological advances of today's world free up much time that would otherwise be occupied with menial tasks. This does not mean that we are now free of our responsibilities; quite to the contrary. The less time we need to dedicate in order to survive, the more time, talents, and resources we are able to dedicate to thriving.

In general, the woman in today's world is not needed in the home as much as women of the old world were. Conditions today allow women to have more freedom than ever before. The question is, what sort of freedom are we celebrating? Freedom from being a woman or freedom to be a woman in the fullest sense? How should a woman take advantage of these new opportunities? The Torah teaches us the answer: *Eim Kol Choy*. The greatest satisfaction for a woman is not when she can relax and enjoy life; the maximum expression of womanhood is through creating and infusing life. For a Yiddishe woman, it is when she can infuse it with *Elokus* and holiness.

The Rebbe זצ"ל, seeing these new realities, unprecedented opportunities coupled with challenges and responsibilities, taught us how to take the greatest advantage of them.

The women who would lead the way in this new frontier would be educated in Beth Rivkah. Why was it called *Bais* Rivkah rather than *Bnos* Rivkah?

Perhaps because it reflects the fact that we could no longer afford to educate our young women to see themselves as nothing more than *Bnos* —daughters of— Rivkah. They would need to perceive themselves as the empowered builders and life sustaining force upon which the *Bais* — Home of— Rivkah depended.

Thousands of Beth Rivkah alumnae, כן תרבינה, have

The question is, however, what sort of freedom are we celebrating, freedom from being a woman or freedom to be a woman in the fullest sense?

chosen to become *Shluchos* and *Mechanchos*. Empowered by the Rebbe's *brachos* and inspired by his teachings, they stand shoulder to shoulder with their husbands and children, in their efforts to infuse the families and individuals in their orbit with a life filled with joy, purpose, holiness and *Elokus*, preparing the world for Geulah.

The Rebbe taught us that each and every Jewish girl and woman has the ability and responsibility to be a *Shluchah* to the best of her ability. In any and every contact that she has, she can infuse new life and vitality. She can serve as the channel through which others can connect with their deepest source of life, namely Torah and Mitzvos, especially as taught to us by the Rosh Bnei Yisroel of our generation.

In addition to the empowerment that every Jewish girl and woman in our generation has to become a *Shluchah*, a Beth Rivkah alumna has special *brachos* and advantages, having been nurtured and nourished within the educational system that was so carefully guided by the Rebbe נשיא דורנו and that occupied such a special place in his holy mind and heart.

אשרינו, מה טוב חלקנו!

With best wishes for a טובה וחתימה טובה, לשנה טובה והנראה ומתוקה בטוב הנראה והנגלה משיח צדקנו בפועל ממש.

Rabbi Avraham Shemtov ■

1. Bereshis 3:20



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I have been enjoying reading the EmBRace magazine and notice the opportunity this platform provides. I ask that my thoughts be shared with your readership.

Are you happy to see me or my house?

Upon meeting someone I have not seen for a long while, one of the first comments I receive is, “Wow, you look so good! How did you lose the weight?” Well, it’s called the starvation diet. I don’t suggest you try it.

You see, I also battle with an eating disorder every day. So now let me ask you a question, are you happy to see me or my skinny body that makes me so ill? If it’s me, then why is my body the first thing you mention? The purpose of our body is to house our *neshamah*. It must be respected and taken care of and not ignored. But it shouldn’t be what defines us and is given the most attention.

For example, your house can express who you are, but it’s not you. So imagine someone comes to your house and the first thing they mention is how clean your house is! Now think how you might feel if she would say that every time she visits. Or how much pressure you would feel if your friends would compare how much cleaner their houses are? So why, when it comes to the body, do many of these situations happen? Most people intend it as a compliment, but you may never know the impact it can make. Because for many, it can lead to bad eating habits. And from there, it’s a very slippery slope to eating disorders that are hard to get out of.

I just want to bring awareness to a very sensitive topic. Weight loss should not be a lifestyle. So please, next time you meet someone, tell them how happy you are to see them, and chances are you will make their day.

– Anonymous

Dear Sara Blau,

You responded to a letter to the editor by explaining your interpretation of the *sichah* saying that a Yid’s *gashmiyus* is *ruchniyus*. The Chassidish saying is: “Yenem’s *gashmiyus*... ANOTHER Yid’s *gashmiyus* is my *ruchniyus*.” The holiest thing I can do is worry about another Yid’s *gashmiyus*, and I certainly don’t get anything out of it, and so it’s *ruchniyus* for me. For example, the Rebbe used this in a letter in Igros Kodesh, *chelek yud gimme*, waving away someone’s apologies for bothering the Rebbe about a health issue. Your interpretation that *gashmiyus* is *ruchniyus*, a foundational idea in *Chassidus* and the way to bring Moshiach, means that our job is to transform *gashmiyus* into *ruchniyus*, not treat our *gashmius* as holy.

And the Embrace *farbrengen* continues!

Your editorial “Growth is very, very quiet” was absolutely stunning. I read it over and over again. And, whether you know it or not, you are the ultimate influencer (aka *akeres habayis*) without even having to call yourself an influencer on a flyer—what a concept.

Thank you for all you do,

– Hindel Levitin





P.S. I know what a huge effort it takes to procure just the right pictures for each and every article, and your pictures in Embrace magazine are outstanding. One complaint: We need captions and IDs on each one! For example, in the past issue, who are the two children pictured with Mrs. Feldman? And what is the school, and names of the students in the pictures of the Henny Bartfield article? Who are the three ladies pictured in Nechamy Segal's *kriah* article? The Geulah box? Frumie Piekarski's article? Most important of all are the oldies and Bais Rivkah class pictures. We all love to get nostalgic, but we need captions and names. Thank you!

Dear Hindel,

Thank you for your feedback! I couldn't agree with you more. Like Mrs. Chanie Wolf writes in a later article, while a minimum of 'self-care' is necessary, a *chossid's* main focus is about fulfilling what is needed from us here in this physical world. Our job is to transform *gashmiyus* into *ruchmiyus* and not to treat our *gashmiyus* as holy. That was absolutely the intent of the article. The difference is in the intention.

This reminds me of a story of the Rebbe Rashab who would often have his granddaughter Shaina (the youngest daughter of the Friediker Rebbe) over for Shabbos. He once taught her that everything she does should be for the sake of Shabbos - eat in honor of Shabbos, walk in honor of Shabbos, etc. Shaina responded, "I can do everything in honor of Shabbos, except sleep! How can my sleep consciously be for the sake of Shabbos, if I'm sleeping?" Her grandfather did not accept her excuse, because even sleep on Shabbos must be holy. When a person has the intention that the sleep itself should be for the sake of Shabbos and prepares accordingly, then even the sleep gets elevated! Subsequently, the sleep doesn't only rejuvenate the body but also the *neshamah* and allows for more strength to be drawn down.

In order to be able to fulfill our job and mission, Hashem requires that we take care of ourselves. It's not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. We aren't glorifying *gashmiyus* for its own sake. But the **intention** we have when interacting with *gashmiyus* is what transforms the *gashmiyus* into *ruchmiyus*.

And yes, I absolutely agree with you, we as women are the ultimate influencers.

Thanks for the feedback about the captions! We'll definitely work on it!

— Sara Blau, editor



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Letters, comments, questions and suggestions are welcome!

Write to us at Embrace@bethrivkah.edu

My Grandmother's World -
& the World of My Granddaughters:

WHERE DO THEY MEET?

Shifra Aviva "Vivi" (Posner) Deren, Stamford, Connecticut
Graduating class of 5728 (1968)



My grandmother, Rebbetzin Chaya Fraida Kazamovskiy

I do not like the expression, “We’re living in unprecedented times.” Because to accept it at face value might lead one to think that since this is “unprecedented,” earlier times and circumstances have nothing to offer us today.

After all, life in Nikolaev in the early 1900’s (5660’s) is so radically different compared to life in the USA in the twenty-first century! What about the world of my grandmother(s) could speak to my own granddaughters today?

I was blessed to have two extraordinary grandmothers: my paternal grandmother, Rebbetzin Chaya (Ceitlin) Posner, who, together with my Zaideh HaRav Sholom Posner were pioneer Shluchim in America, sent to Pittsburgh by the Previous Rebbe in the early 1940’s (5700’s). My maternal grandmother was Rebbetzin Chaya Freida

Many of my grandmother’s contemporaries “jumped ship” to partake in these new opportunities. What always fascinated me was the question of what kept her?

Kazarnovsky, with whom I lived during my years in Bais Rivkah, and whose story I want to share here in the EmBRace magazine.

My maternal grandmother was the daughter of Reb Osher and Risya Grossman. *Chassidim* know him as “Reb Osher Nikolaever,” nicknamed after the city where he lived, as was customary in Eastern Europe. There are many stories about his role in the history of Lubavitch as a leading *chossid* in Nikolaev, about missions given to him by the Rebbe Rashab, to whom he was utterly devoted. Most notably, in 1900 (5660), he was given the task of compiling a corrected version of the Tanya, which he worked on strenuously. He was successful, *Baruch Hashem*, and his name has been printed in every Tanya since. Reb Osher was also very close with the Rav of the city, HaRav Meir Shlomo Yanofsky, the Rebbe’s grandfather, who credited Reb Osher with saving his life, as Reb Meir Shlomo related at the Rebbe’s *bris*.

Often when we hear stories of the lives of previous generations in Eastern Europe, we conclude that at

After visiting both schools, I was adamant that I would go to Bais Rivkah – but how would I manage the travel?

that time everyone was *frum*, that *Chassidus* was thriving, and that the “golden chain” was transmitted smoothly.

However, that was not always the case.

Take Nikolaev for example: Nikolaev in the early 1900s (5660’s) was, indeed, home to many illustrious families of *Chassidim*, and *Chassidische* life flourished. Yet, it was the era of “isms” – socialism, communism, nationalism, and political Zionism. It was, in many ways, a very idealistic time. Young people were increasingly caught up in the “new” world opening up to them for the first time. The Enlightenment had broken through from Western Europe to Eastern Europe and the opportunities that now became available to Yidden were mind boggling. Yidden could fully join in the culture surrounding them - the political movements, the universities, almost all careers, social life, and experiences in the arts were all finally open – and the temptations were strong.

For the boys, the “*refuah* came before the *makkah*.” The founding of Tomchei Temimim produced (and *Baruch Hashem* continues to produce) generations of Temimim, *talmidim* who confront these modern challenges and prevail.

For the girls it was not yet the case. This was in the period before there was formal Torah learning for girls, yet the secular culture was wide open. The sparkling attractions of the outside world were all around, and without the fortification of solid Torah learning, the girls were especially vulnerable.

Many of my grandmother’s contemporaries “jumped ship” to partake in these new opportunities. What always fascinated me was the question of what kept her? What made my grandmother want to stay with what was often derided as the “old-fashioned *Chassidische* life” when she could have easily made her mark in the modern world? I think a key factor was her relationship with her father - but that was only the beginning.

Throughout her life, she spoke of her father with such love, respect, and pride. In one of her favorite

stories, she described how she was at home, listening to the *Chassidim farbreng* late into the night. Her father called her over and asked for the tune of a *niggun* that he did not recall. Over 60 years later, my grandmother would share the story with me and proudly announce that “I gave my father the *niggun*.” I shared this story with a veteran *mechaniches* who gave me profound insight. “I am sure that at the moment that her father asked her for the *niggun*, he knew exactly which tune he wanted. Rather, he wanted her to feel that she was making a real contribution and that she had a part in *Chassidische* life.” And she absorbed that idea.

My grandmother was close to finishing dental school (in Nikolaev) when her father suggested that teaching young children would be a better idea. She left dental school and never looked back. She married a Tomim, HaRav Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, on Rosh Chodesh Kislev of 1920 (5681). Six years later they immigrated to the US, settling in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, where they raised my mother and her siblings. My grandfather was a Rav and one of those actively laying the foundations for Chabad in America.

My grandmother’s focus was to raise a *Chassidische* family in an environment with values and lifestyles

Although those ideas could not be implemented on a practical basis, her care, concern, and devotion earned her the respect of these busy Askanim, who took the time to come and hear what she had to say.

that were the antithesis of what she believed and knew to be true. She did this with no like-minded friends or neighbors and with no community support.

In America, in the 1930s and ‘40s (5690-5700), that was a daunting undertaking. Well-meaning friends questioned her choices by asking why she would hold her children back from being full-fledged Americans when there is a whole new world out there.

Somehow, she kept her compass pointing towards her “true North.” She never lost sight of *emes*, authenticity, and ‘*varemech Yiddishkeit*’. There were only a handful of Lubavitcher families in New York at the time, none of whom lived in her neighborhood, but that didn’t matter.

There was one topic about which I picked up a smattering of disappointment regarding her father: In the politically charged climate of the time, many children of *Chassidim* had left *Yiddishkeit* due to their involvement with the new Zionist movement. Reb Osher was very wary of his daughters being ensnared as well, so he barely let them learn Hebrew. My grandmother learned to read Hebrew but not to translate, and it bothered her terribly. Many years later, with the founding of Bais Rivkah in Brooklyn, she was an enthusiastic supporter, and Bais Rivkah became one of the central pillars of her life. She was thrilled that young girls would now have the opportunity that she missed.

I grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, where my parents were *Shluchim* since their marriage in 1949 (5710), and where they started a day school. In 1961 (5721), the Rebbe told my parents that I should leave home to go to school, which meant that I would live with my grandparents in Bensonhurst. The question was, which school would I attend? Bais Yaakov was practically next door in Boro Park, while Bais Rivkah was over an hour away. I had never even been on a



Rebbetzin Chana and my grandmother

public city bus, and this meant a ten-year-old from a small Southern town taking three NYC buses. The Rebbe said that I should decide. After visiting both schools, I was adamant that I would go to Bais Rivkah – but how would I manage the travel? My grandmother was so ecstatic that I would be going to Bais Rivkah that she offered to take me every day until I knew the way well enough to go by myself. She did this for over a month despite her old age and poor health. What did the difficulty matter if her granddaughter could go to Bais Rivkah?

The challenges were huge. I was away from home (the first out-of-towner in Bais Rivkah) at a time when a long distance call was limited to three minutes, and air travel was rare and expensive! I did not speak Yiddish, and in Bais Rivkah at that time, Yiddish was very much the language of instruction. I had not covered as much *limudei kodesh* as my classmates, and could not join my regular class for the first few years. It was a lot to deal with, but every single day I felt and heard my Bubby's unwavering confidence in me, and that gave me the boost to push forward. Her pride in my accomplishments warms me still.

My grandmother led the Bais Rivkah Auxiliary, a group of grandmotherly ladies who would get to-

gether to hear a speaker, share refreshments, and raise whatever money they could for Bais Rivkah. She planned each meeting meticulously, baked delicious cakes, and schlepped on three buses to Crown Heights for the meetings. It was very important to her, but I must confess that initially, I don't think my grandfather realized the value of this work - until one afternoon when the Rebbe stopped him in 770 and asked him how the meeting went that day. My poor Zaidy did not have a clue, and that was the last time that happened! From then on, his support and pride were evident.

“The young people want to do more. If it's okay to do it, then why shouldn't they?”

Every year, the Rebbe would speak to the ladies of this auxiliary, along with the similar auxiliary for the Lubavitcher Yeshiva (in which my Bubby was also very active). I believe this initially took place in the Rebbe's room, and when I came to New York in 1961 (5721), these meetings were in the *Zal* upstairs in 770. Within a few years, the *Zal* was too small, and from then on, the Rebbe spoke to the women and girls before Rosh Hashanah in the big shul downstairs. The gathering eventually numbered in the thousands, *ka”h*, and I am filled with pride that the original group that the Rebbe spoke to were these Bubbies who worked so hard to support Bais Rivkah.

Until her last years, my Bubby was thinking of ways to help Bais Rivkah grow, and the Rebbe responded to her suggestions. She even summoned the Board to come and meet with her so she could present her ideas. Although those ideas could not be implemented on a practical basis, her care, concern, and devotion earned her the respect of these busy Askanim, who took the time to come and hear what she had to say.

Her love for *chassidische* life, especially for the opportunities for girls and women to grow, was not an expression of trying to live in the past, or even to re-create it. She saw the past as offering the best tools to conquer the future.

One incident in particular speaks volumes to me:



My grandparents, HaRav Shlomo Aharon and Rebbetzin Chaya Fraida Kazarnovsky.

So much of what the world has to offer has such a strong pull – but no, we do not live in “unprecedented times.”

When I was growing up, women did not smell the *Havdalah* spices. When I found out that there was no reason in *halachah* or *minhag* for this omission, I started picking up the *besamim* at *Havdalah*. A family member, who was understandably very worried about any changes in standard behaviors, appealed to my grandmother to adjudicate their concerns. Her response was priceless: “The young people want to do more. If it’s okay to do it, then why shouldn’t they?” She was not advocating change for the sake of change (she first ascertained that it was permissible), but she also was not locked into doing things a certain way, just because that was what we did before. The overriding value of “doing more” spoke to something deep in her, and I think of that every Motzei Shabbos when I smell the *besamim*. And I so wish to live by that value of “do more”.

Living with my grandparents for nine years brought many *brachos* into my life. One of the biggest was that for my first three years in Bais Rivkah, my grandmother included me in many of her visits to a dear friend from her Nikolaev days – Rebbetzin Chana. They spoke on the phone several times each week, and my grandmother visited the Rebbetzin regularly. She went out of her way many times to help the Rebbetzin – and perhaps this is why the Rebbe referred to my Bubby as “Di Krova”, the close one. It was not a biological closeness; it was a closeness of friendship, respect, love, and simply showing up when she knew she could help.

In her later years, my Bubby was unable to come to 770 as often as she had before. On one of her last visits, she was standing in Gan Eden Hatachton with family members. The Rebbe gave her a wide, warm smile and said, “*Shoy n azoi lang nisht gezen zach, vos macht ihr*” – “I have not seen you for so long – how are you?”

My Bubby passed away on Yud Alef Nissan 5747 (1987), the day of the Rebbe’s birthday, the day that the Torah tells us that the *shevet* of Asher brought their *korban*... Her resting place is behind the Rebbetzin, near the Ohel.

I think about my Bubby’s younger years and the world she grew up in and compare it to the world that my granddaughters are growing up in today. It’s almost cliché to notice the differences – from horse and buggy to electric cars and from the rare telegram to the ubiquitous cellphone. Those differences are all about “stuff” and the things we use in daily life, but when I think about the lifestyle choices people face today, compared with over a hundred years ago, it is the similarities that jump out at me.

The choices and opportunities presently available, are plentiful and accessible, and *Baruch Hashem*, the affluence of even average earners, is way beyond the riches of even the biggest *gvur* back then. The world is open and easy to connect with – and so much of it is permissible, which sometimes complicates the choices. So much of what the world has to offer has such a strong pull – but no, we do not live in “unprecedented times.” My Bubby and her contemporaries have so much to teach us about how to navigate choices.



With my Bubbies, at our Chassunah, Adar 5732 (1972).



She showed by example, and her children learned the lesson well, that being different is not a burden when you are doing the right thing.

We are taught that “A *chossid* creates his/her environment.” Whether in Nikolaev or the New World of America, my Bubby proved the truth of those words. She showed by example, and her children learned the lesson well, that being different is not a burden when you are doing the right thing. (Especially when you learn the value of what makes it the right thing).

She correctly and providentially identified the crucial ingredients needed to stand on one’s own feet as a proud Yiddishe woman. How fortunate we are that in many ways, these resources are more available today than they were a hundred years ago. They include:

1. High level, serious Torah study that enables girls and women to take responsibility for their lifelong

growth in learning;

2. The gift of giving of oneself to a higher cause, including one’s own family; and,
3. The passion of *Chassidishe* life – the *niggunim*, the love of stories, the experience of Yiddishe life that has substance and depth, not just going through the motions of a Shabbos or Yom Tov or *davening*, but taking personal responsibility for making these experiences meaningful in one’s life.

Finally, as a mother and grandmother, I try to learn from her example, that everything starts with connection. Her connection to her father, her love and respect for him, enabled her to value what he treasured. Reb Osher’s utter dedication to his Rebbe was vivid in my grandmother’s mind throughout her life; and her connection to our Rebbe was built on that. I hope that the compass she lived by will continue pointing the way for the generations that follow and encourage us all to learn and live Torah passionately. To search for the answers to today’s challenges with the confidence that we can proudly do our part in creating the bright and beautiful future that we yearn for, illuminated by the teachings, guidance, and limitless love of our Rebbe. ■



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Raising Givers



Mrs. Chanie (Avtzon) Wolf, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5763 (2003)



The Friediker Rebbe relates¹:

“One morning, while on datche [rejuvenating trip to the countryside] with my father [the Rebbe Rashab] in Alivka, I awoke at 3:00 a.m. and sat down to learn. I noticed that my father woke up early and was preparing himself for davening. At 6:00 a.m., he invited me to come with him for a walk.

“As we were walking, he said to me, ‘When one rises in the morning, learns and then davens, something is accomplished, but without the opportunity of actually doing a kindness for another

Yid, the day is 'dry.' One needs to daven to Hashem that He send a Yid for whom one can do an act of kindness - though one should daven that he not stumble upon unworthy people.'

"Later that day, two Yidden from Rudnia came to my father to ask him to do a personal favor for them. My father called me and said, 'You see, if one desires truthfully, Hashem helps him.'"

Having been raised with this type of *chinuch*, it is no surprise that at the tender age of eleven, the future Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchok, was already demonstrating *mesiras nefesh* for helping his fellow Yidden. With the money he earned for studying Mishnayos by heart, he established a free loan fund to assist those in need. And not content to merely wait for loan requests, he would venture out to the marketplace, searching for a Yid who could use a cash advance for a business opportunity.

Once, as he walked through the marketplace and saw Reb Dovid, a Yid to whom he often loaned money, being attacked by a policeman, he even risked his personal safety to protect him by jumping on the ruthless officer! The brave eleven year old future Rebbe sat in prison for this act of sacrifice, but it wasn't the last time. He went on to be imprisoned on no less than seven occasions, devoting his life to caring for his people, physically and spiritually, with the ultimate *mesiras nefesh*.

The Rebbe notes that this story is instructive to each and every one of us regarding how to educate our children.²

Beyond the Self

We live in a world focused on self-gratification and self-actualization. We are taught that we have rights and are entitled to have those rights respected; that our feelings are paramount and sacred. We are encouraged to see every benefit we can provide to others as another opportunity to earn money. After all, why volunteer if we could be getting paid?

We are told that establishing firm boundaries is the ultimate virtue; if it is not in our job description or it is beyond our comfort zone, we must learn the critical art of confidently saying "no." And oh, no, we must absolutely not "be a *shmatteh*" and allow anyone to take advantage of our goodwill!

Of course, a reasonable level of self care and responsible priorities is necessary so that we will be healthy

We are Yidden. We have a Torah. We have a value system that is radically at odds with that of the world.

and functional enough to serve Hashem. But we are Yidden. We have a Torah. We have a value system that is radically at odds with that of the world. And transmitting it's message, especially in our generation, requires consciousness, clarity and courage.

Reb Mendel Futerfas related the following story that took place when he was five years old and learning Torah in a cheder in Russia:

One of the boys forgot to bring his ink bottle and asked the boy at his side for some of his. The latter declined to share, telling his classmate that he didn't have enough and he should have brought his own. The boy asked someone else instead.

The teacher observed the scene quietly. A short time later, he asked the second boy if he could show the class an Alef, Bais and Gimmel. The child eagerly complied, pointing out the holy letters in one of his seforim.

"No," said the teacher. "You are wrong." The boy was confused, protesting that this is what they had learned.

The teacher continued:



The ultimate expression of a life inspired by Torah is *Ahavas Yisroel*.

“Aleph is - When your friend asks you for ink, you give it to him.”

“Beis is - When your friend asks you for ink, you give it to him.”

“Gimmel is - When your friend asks you for ink, you give it to him.”

This anecdote highlights a critical point that serves to guide us as we navigate our lives, and specifically the *chinuch* of our children: The ultimate expression of a life inspired by Torah is *Ahavas Yisroel*.

Hillel famously told a potential convert that all of the Torah on one foot is: *“that which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow; the rest is commentary...”*³ The Alter Rebbe explains⁴ Hillel’s answer to mean that true *Ahavas Yisroel* necessitates a radical paradigm shift, where one’s perspective is transformed at its core. There are many *mitzvos* we can do on a surface level, choosing proper actions, speech and even thoughts, without essential change. But to truly love another Yid as we love ourselves requires that we identify ourselves as *neshamos*.

All humans are born completely self-centered. Babies naturally perceive only their own needs. “My mother

must be really tired now; I think I’ll wait,” said no infant ever. The clenched fists with which a child is born are an apt metaphor for his or her self-absorbed state. Even as we grow and learn to recognize the presence and needs of others, selfishness remains our default setting. We are naturally wired to navigate life from a place of “what do I need or want?”; to see everyone around us through the lens of “what can you do for me?”

While we may be trained to be polite and even kind, these traits ultimately remain limited by our egos. That is, of course, unless we are taught to access our true essence and identity. We are not physical beings who happen to have *mitzvos* we must keep; we are parts of Hashem Himself for whom Torah and *mitzvos* are the truest expression of our essence. On that level, life is not about what we want, but about what is needed of us. And on that level, we are one. The differences fall away, as do our ever-present egos, and the needs of a fellow Yid become our own.

Thus, the ultimate expression of Torah values permeating our lives is reflected in our ability to rise above our natural selfishness and have real *Ahavas Yisroel*—without limitation. To love, to care, and to give abundantly of our time, resources and energy. And to find true joy in doing so.

And this is the first lesson we want to impart to our children: You are a *neshamah*. You are a part of Hashem Himself. And so is every other Yid—including your siblings, your classmates and bunkmates—even those whom you may have difficulty appreciating. Even the ones who are unpopular. Even the ones who get on your nerves. We are one.

When serving Hashem is the focus of our lives, we have the ability to earnestly share with our children these most powerful messages: *“If you love Hashem, you love His children.”* And: *“A neshamah may descend to this world and live seventy or eighty years, in order to do a Yid a material favor, and certainly a spiritual one.”*⁵

And with that perspective, we certainly, *chas v’shalom*, wouldn’t hurt them. As the HaYom Yom⁶ teaches: *“Of what good is the study of Chassidus and the fear of Heaven if the main thing — a love of one’s fellow Jew — is lacking? And all the more so, if one person pains another!”*





In All Ways

This very theme, of the centrality in *Avodas Hashem* of unconditional and unlimited love for a fellow Yid, is echoed throughout the Torah. We find it in the stories of Tanach, numerous *mitzvos*, the lessons of Pirkei Avos, and the teachings of *Chassidus*. And not only in general terms, but in all of its practical manifestations. For saying “be nice” and “love every Yid” is important; yet our children must learn what that actually means.

It means, like *Avraham Avinu* - and the stories above - going out of our way to perform acts of kindness, even begging Hashem to send our way the opportunity to do *chessed*.

It means, like *Rivkah Imeinu*, giving, giving, and giving some more - even more than we are asked to.

It means, like *Rochel Imeinu*, being *mevater* - giving up that which is most dear to us for the sake of another Yid’s happiness.

It means, like *Yosef HaTzaddik*, forgiving with a complete heart those who have hurt us, for we know everything that happens to us is by *hashgacha pratit*.

It means: “Be like the students of Aharon; love peace and pursue peace...”

It means: “What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours.”

It means no *lashon harah*, no revenge, no using hurtful language, and no touching the possessions of others. All of which are *mitzvos* in the Torah.

And so much more.

Torah means “teach.” Every story, every concept, informs our lives, illuminating our mundane concerns and our deepest relationships. And as parents and teachers, we need to help our children see themselves in the lessons of the Torah. At the Shabbos table, we can discuss the *middos* highlighted in the weekly parshah or chapter of Pirkei Avos, bringing practical examples of their application. We can tell stories of *tzaddikim* and *Chassidim* - like that story of the Frierdiker Rebbe - who demonstrated *mesiras nefesh* for Ahavas Yisroel.

And when we notice their efforts to live by what they have learned, we can reinforce their positive behavior, noting how they are emulating one of the *Avos* or *Imahos*, the *Rebbeim*, or the *Chassidim* of old.

A Living Example

Of course, the most powerful aspect of *chinuch* is always role modeling. The lessons we share are only as meaningful as the example our children see. Like the impression left on the Frierdiker Rebbe from seeing his father’s sincere desire to have the opportunity of doing a favor for a Yid.

Do our children see us volunteering? Do they see us giving *tzedakah* with our money, time, and other resources? Do they observe us treating others with kindness, compassion, empathy, and patience? Do they sense that we find joy in doing so?

I was fortunate to grow up observing my father, Rabbi Yonah Avtzon A”H, lovingly devoting count-

We are not physical beings who happen to have mitzvos we must keep; we are parts of Hashem Himself for whom Torah and mitzvos are the truest expression of our essence.

less hours to doing favors for others - usually quiet, humble favors that went unrecognized and unrewarded. He was busy. He had an organization to run. He had a family he was completely devoted to. And money was in short supply. But somehow, there was

In a world of entitlement and self-centeredness, let us help our children develop the traits that truly define a Yid and a chossid: א חוש מיט א געשמאק א איד א טובה טאן.

always time to help another Yid. In the words of the HaYom Yom⁷ of his birthday:

“It is a wondrous trait, when Hashem grants a person א חוש מיט א געשמאק א איד א טובה טאן - a warm sensitivity and a pleasurable satisfaction in doing a fellow Yid a favor - to the point that he cherishes him more than he cherishes himself...”

For a child to see this “*geshmak*” for *Ahavas Yisroel* in a parent is a priceless gift and a lifelong lesson.

Training

And then there is training - the literal definition of “*chinuch*.”

The Rebbe points out that it is through the Frierdiker Rebbe’s involvement with his *gemach* as a young boy that he developed deep feelings of empathy and concern for the needs of others. His *mesiras nefesh* in jumping on the brutal policeman who was attacking Reb Dovid was the natural outgrowth of the many encounters he had had with him, lending money for

his various endeavors to earn a living.

There are many opportunities for our children to practice doing *chesed*, physically and spiritually. We simply need to encourage them. They can give up their room for guests or help prepare food for them. They can use their free time to visit and befriend children with special needs or invite a classmate who doesn’t have many friends to a playdate. They can help pack care packages for *chesed* projects, and they can go on *mitzvot*. As they grow, if they don’t have younger siblings of their own to assist with, they can be encouraged to help out a mother of young children.

Actual involvement in helping and giving to others fosters feelings of love and care. Which then generates more helping and giving.

We can do this. In a world of entitlement and self-centeredness, let us help our children develop the traits that truly define a Yid and a *chossid*: א חוש מיט א געשמאק א איד א טובה טאן. ■

1. *Sefer HaSichos* 5699 p. 339

2. *Sichos Kodesh* 5741 Vol. 4, p. 144

3. *Shabbos* 31a

4. *Tanya* Ch. 32

5. Based on teachings of the *Baal Shem Tov*

6. 8 *Menachem Av*

7. 6 *Adar I*



A warm-toned photograph of a glass inkwell and two lit cigarettes on a wooden surface. The inkwell is on the right, and the cigarettes are in the foreground. The background is softly blurred, showing a hand holding a pen. The overall mood is artistic and nostalgic.

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WORDS MATTER

Goldie (Shemtov) Plotkin, Thornhill, Ontario
Graduating class of 5742 (1982)



“I can’t give my husband a compliment when I don’t feel it in my heart! That’s so disingenuous; I’m not a hypocrite!” The woman was trying to understand why I would ever suggest that she tell her husband something that wasn’t true.

While I generally do appreciate honesty, she was clearly missing the point about

words of affirmation in interpersonal relationships.

Marriage and parenting aren't about how we feel or about our integrity. It is mostly about our spouse, children and their feelings. For a marriage or parent-child relationship to thrive, we need to fill the emotional tank of our spouse or child daily with generous helpings of love and positive attention. It is as simple as that. If our loved one needs to hear words of affirmation, don't hold back! It is unfair to withhold them because of our own so-called integrity.

Just give it to them.

Remember not to get stuck in the self-centered word "I" at the beginning of a phrase "I really appreciate your..." Have a little patience and wait for the closing word of the very same phrase — "I really appreciate *your sensitivity*." That's where we should be investing and paying attention.

Then allow for the likelihood that if we say it long enough, the feelings will follow. Fake it! Start giving compliments regularly, even if it feels robotic. Eventually, we will make it, and it will induce positive emotions.

Have you ever been at a *shivah* house and the *avel* begins to speak casually about the one whom he lost, when suddenly, he or she says something that evokes a concealed emotion? The raw feeling triggers an emotional tsunami and the feelings that the mourner was completely unaware of start pouring out. Words have the uncanny power to evoke untapped emotions, beyond the expectations of the speaker himself.

When sitting *shivah* for our beloved son Zalmy, a young fourteen year-old boy with Downs Syndrome who passed away very suddenly in 5778 (2018), we experienced something similar. Raising a special needs child is a full-time job for both parents. Consequently, from the day Zalmy was born until his passing, we never had a spare moment to reflect on Zalmy in a meaningful way. We were too busy raising Zalmy to contemplate what we were experiencing and to parse our feelings. The *shivah* was extremely therapeutic for us; we had those pent-up feelings in our hearts from the day he was born! When people engaged us in conversation and we spoke about our life with Zalmy, it uncovered feelings that were trapped in the deepest crevices of our soul. We would barely start speaking a few words before an avalanche of emotions followed. It unleashed all our hurt, guilt, and love that connected us to our son.

Words have the uncanny power to evoke untapped emotions, beyond the expectations of the speaker themselves.

I always tell people that when going to a *shivah* house, their job is not to speak but rather to be good listeners. Once in a while, drop a few encouraging, empathetic words that help uncover the mourners' deep emotions and provide the mourners with an opportunity to use their own words to express their feelings. This helps the mourners bring out feelings they never even knew existed within them.

The masters of Kabbalah teach us that whatever falls lower is connected to a higher place at its source. The reason for an outburst of emotion when speaking about a loved one is that speech uniquely reaches the deepest levels of your soul. So, ironically, these corporeal tangible "lower" words of speech connect and boomerang back to the deep-seated emotions in the essence of the soul.

This also explains why *halachah* demands that *tefillos* be expressed with speech. Prayerful thoughts alone are considered insufficient; by saying actual words, you touch a chord and stir up the dormant love for Hashem within your *neshamah* that otherwise can not be accessed.

This is commensurate in marriage and parenting; giving intentional compliments and saying positive words to a spouse or child over and over again brings out feelings of latent love.

Words of affirmation are crucial to a healthy relationship. When we give a positive compliment, we are giving our loved one the words of affirmation that they crave and rightly deserve, and we will also likely cultivate and spark our own untapped feelings of love and appreciation, to the point of revealing feelings that we were completely unconscious of. ■

Based on an upcoming book on marriage by Rabbi Avraham and Goldie Plotkin



ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND



DEAR CHAYA,

I have a question I've been thinking about for some time now. When I think of *davening* as an “*avodah*,” it evokes an image of a man in a *tallis davening* at length in the city of Lubavitch. I don't feel like that idea relates to me.

On the other hand, it inspired me to read how Rebbetzin Rivkah meditated on the word “Echad” in Shema for twenty minutes.

So, is contemplating deep spiritual ideas a “thing” for women to try to do during *davening*? What does *davening* look like for the modern day frum and busy woman?

Inspired But Unsure



DEAR INSPIRED BUT UNSURE.

Yiddishkeit places a lot of emphasis on stories. Beginning with the Chumash itself, the Torah starts by teaching us through the example of others. This continues through Nach, in the Gemara, the Medrash, and in the tradition passed down throughout the generations.

Now, while it's certainly inspiring to learn about what great people have accomplished, it can also be confusing. How does it relate to us when we are clearly not on their level, or for any number of reasons don't have the capacity to do things the way that they do?

So the question you are asking is really a very fundamental one. And the fact that you are asking it is a wonderful sign.

“Well, this was a beautiful thing for a Rebbetzin to do, or for a man in the village of Lubavitch, but it's really just not a ‘thing’ for me (or for anybody today) at all.”

Because it is easy to tell ourselves, “Well, this was a beautiful thing for a Rebbetzin to do, or for a man in the village of Lubavitch, but it's really just not a ‘thing’ for me (or for anybody today) at all.”

But the Torah is for everyone. Even when we may not be able to replicate the exact scenario, allowing ourselves to be inspired by the story will help us find a way - even a small one - that we can fulfill that *mitzvah*, or that *inyan* in *Yiddishkeit*, just that much better.

Davening is a fundamental and universal *mitzvah*, as you clearly understand from your question. But beyond the obligation “to *daven*”, your question is more profound: Does reciting the words qualify? Or is there a deeper level that is also relevant, even to today's women? And how would that fit into our lives practically, since meditating in a forest is (at best) a dream for most of us?

The contemporary *frum* woman is busy. Whether with a houseful of children, community initiatives, a demanding job, *shlichus*, or all of the above, today's Chabad women are more active than ever.

But beyond the obligation “to daven”, your question is more profound: Does reciting the words qualify?

Maybe in this thought itself lies the answer to your question.

What are we so busy with? Do we ever take the time to pause and think?

How connected are we to our Source, to our purpose, to our Creator and Father who placed us where we are and gives us strength every moment to fulfill our mission?

How often are we carried away by the responsibilities, challenges, and struggles that we deal with daily and forget our deeper purpose and the Source of our strength?

How different would our lives be if we took those few minutes each morning to pause, to think, and to feel—even just a tiny bit—our connection to our Creator?

Avodah in *davening* is relevant to us as much as it is for every Yid, everywhere, and each on their own level.

Avodah means stopping for a moment to think, to



Avodah means stopping for a moment to think, to connect to the words within davening that one finds most relevant.

connect to the words within *davening* that one finds most relevant. One of the messages that speaks to me, personally, very strongly, is the miracle of creation. I can never get enough of the complexity and sophistication within nature, how Hashem runs this world, makes food grow, and makes my body work in the incredible way that it does.

There are many other themes in *davening* you may connect to more, too. You can think about how Hashem sustains us, ensuring that no matter the circumstances, we always have our needs. Reflect on the miracles Hashem has performed for us as a nation, on our unique inherited connection through the *Avos* and *Imahos*, or any of the many different messages contained within the *musach hatefillah*. Any one of those thoughts can help tune us into our integral connection to Hashem and give us the strength to carry that through our day.

Thankfully, in general, women are naturally more spiritual than men and hopefully find it slightly easier to connect to our spiritual side. That is why we are not required to *daven* with a *minyan* of others. Also, unlike our male counterparts, there isn't a set time for us, nor are we required, to complete the entire *musach hatefillah*.

But SOME form of *tefillah*, along with focused thoughts on our connection to Hashem, is still an obligation and relevant for every single one of us. In fact, many of the *halachos* about *tefillah* are actually derived from the story of Chana's prayer in the Mishkan. The Navi describes her whispering quietly while pouring her heart out to Hashem. This depiction later became the foundation of the requirement of *tefillah* for future generations. We learn from Chana that we must verbalize the words (albeit quietly) but more importantly, we must connect with our souls. And just as the *halachah* was derived from the story of a woman, we understand that it applies equally to all Yidden, men and women alike.

Try it - you'll be amazed at the difference it makes to your day. ■



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(שמואל א. א: ט"ו)

"And I poured out my soul before Hashem."

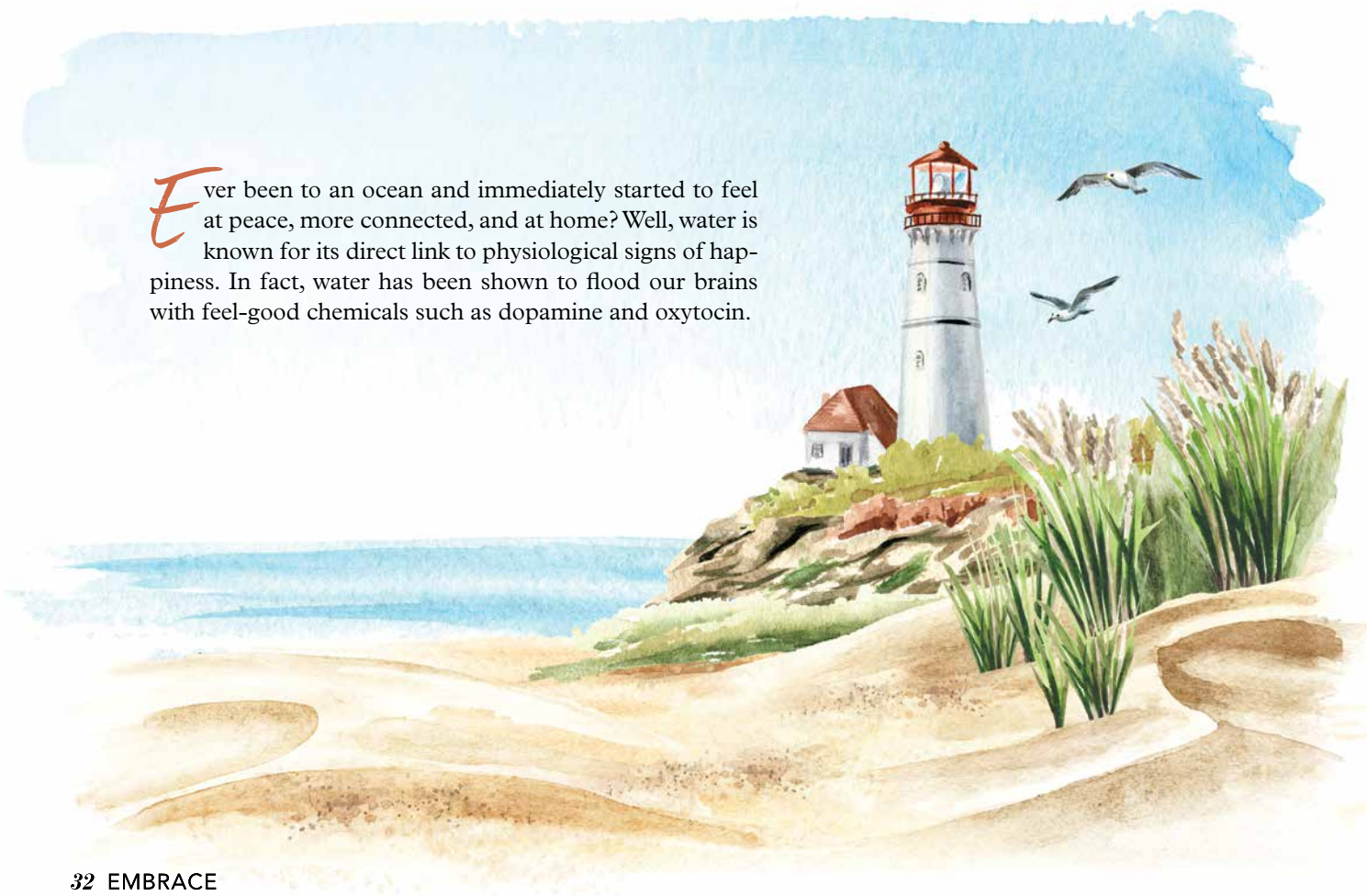
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Daily Boost of Connection

Divi (Kamman) Bogart, New Haven, Connecticut
Graduating class of 5765 (2005)

Ever been to an ocean and immediately started to feel at peace, more connected, and at home? Well, water is known for its direct link to physiological signs of happiness. In fact, water has been shown to flood our brains with feel-good chemicals such as dopamine and oxytocin.



Throughout *Chassidus*, we find the expression “*ahava k’mayim*,” love that is like water. And the service, the *avodah*, in which we long for this love is in *davening*. If we were to examine someone’s brain while *davening* - meaning really *davening*, with “*kavana*,” with one’s heart and mind connected to the resonant meaning of the words - we might find similarities to our brains when we gaze, fixing our eyes and mind, at the ocean. While *davening* is clearly not the same as ocean gazing, it is the time for “*hisbonenus*,” for heartfelt and mindful meditation, concentration, and connection with the oceanic allness that is the Divine. *Davening* brings our awareness to something greater than ourselves, with sustained attention, while letting go of distractions.

Furthermore, studies have shown that those who meditate have actual brain changes as a result, leading to more rational thought and intelligence, as well as greater emotional control, and heightened awareness and bliss. Imagine that we can reshape our brains and improve our mental resilience with something as achievable as meditative *davening*!

In short, we Yidden are blessed to have a meditative practice built into the structure of our daily lives that brings our attention to the greatest focus of all, the Source of all life. While we should not mistakenly say that *davening* is a physical brain exercise, we can acknowledge how incredible it is that Hashem provides us with a way to connect with Him that literally nourishes our minds and our physical brains, as well as our *neshamah*.

On a psychological level, the equivalent of brain food is connection. We all want to be connected with others, loved, understood, seen for who we are. We want to matter to those around us and to know that we are important to others. Without this sense, we are alone, anxious, and eventually depressed and hopeless. We are not designed to exist in isolation. When we are persistently alone, we face psychological death, thirsty in a desert of human connection.

When we *daven*, we engage in the act of “*tefillah*,” which literally means connection. We are connected in a way that transcends human connection, because our bond with Hashem is unconditional and infinite. Remember the dopamine and oxytocin that are released when we see water, making us feel warm and soothed inside? These are the same hormones that fill our brains when we give our child a hug, see someone we know, or receive grateful feedback from someone we’ve helped. How much more so, when we connect to our Creator, our brain is filled with the sense that we’ve come to the right place, that we are home, that

How much more so, when we connect to our Creator, our brain is filled with the sense that we’ve come to the right place, that we are home, that we are connected, and that we are held.

we are connected, and that we are held.

The beautiful thing about connection is that we don’t have to rely on other people, necessarily. As with *davening*, the power lies in our own capacity to connect. The power to connect is in many ways an internal strength. One way of illustrating this is through the chassidic anecdote that a *chossid* is capable of *farbrenging* even while alone. On the other hand, we can be making small talk at a packed party and feel very much alone. The power to connect is inherent to us as individuals and does not depend solely on the people around us.

One way to build our capacity to connect is tuning into our physical bodies. This includes changes in heart rate, hunger cues, and energy level throughout the day, or when we become emotionally escalated. Connecting with our body helps us stay grounded when our thoughts and emotions spiral. This places us on solid ground from which we can connect to others and the world around us. If we are in a whirlwind of fear, we may avoid others or be so distracted that we can’t fully connect. Connecting with our bodies, learning to self-monitor and self-soothe, is a prerequisite to connecting fully with those outside ourselves.

Connecting with others in-person rather than through social media is another way to maximize the feel good hormones that accompany the act of connecting. Social media is a synthetic substitute for connection. It feels “almost good enough,” so that we keep coming back for more but never quite get what we need. Limiting our



Recovering from an eating disorder is intrinsically tied to honoring our need for deep connection.

time on social media motivates us to create opportunities for in-person communication, rewarding us with soul-to-soul connection and with all the feel-good neurochemistry that our Creator has wired into our brains.

As Yidden in this physical world, we not only have to nourish our physical brain and body but also our spiritual *neshamah*. Davening is an all-encompassing opportunity to build our internal capacity to connect—feeding both our brain and its chemicals as well as our spiritual need for connection to the Source. This act fills us with a warmth that permeates our lives with a sense of purpose and belonging.

As a provider who works with individuals struggling with eating disorders, I've thought a lot about the need for connection and its role in recovery. When someone does not eat and becomes emaciated, they are indirectly telling us, "Feed me. Nourish me." When someone binge eats to fill the empty hole of loneliness, they may hide within their larger body and inadvertently keep people at a distance. Recovering from an eating disorder is intrinsically tied to honoring our need for deep connection.

I remember one particular young adolescent woman who expressed tearfully in a session, "It's as though I'm surrounded by strangers watching me drown." She was referring to her friends, her family, and even

her providers. She felt misunderstood by them, as if they were looking straight through her while she remained invisible. Something had broken down in this young woman's ability to feel the connection that others were offering her. As providers, our job was not only to help her get refeed with physical food, but more importantly, our job was to understand this loss of connective capacity and to rebuild it with her.

We are fortunate that our "connection capacity" is boosted daily by our allotted time for "*tefillah*," connection with the ultimate source of oneness. When we have awareness of our unique sense of connection with Hashem and its impact on our *neshamah* and physical bodies, we can bring this sense of awe and purpose into our activities throughout our day.

We are fortunate that our "connection capacity" is boosted daily by our allotted time for "tefillah," connection with the ultimate source of oneness.

May we merit to feel truly connected to Hashem, to the souls around us, and to Hashem's incredible world. Through each of our individual efforts, may we merit the ultimate revealed global connection with the Divine, the times of Moshiach, when the connection and oneness within all creations will be revealed for all to access. ■



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Tefillah: Life Saving Oxygen

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



Dear Tefillah,

I owe you an apology. I just want to say I'm sorry. For so many years, I thought you were a chore. I thought I didn't have time for you.

It took so much effort to focus, and I was always running out the door. Always running, running—no time to stop. I didn't think I needed you.

But I was wrong, so wrong! My *neshamah* needed you so much.

I yearned to have a connection to Hashem, but I was feeding that thirst with thrills of all sorts of candy—never giving it real food.

I struggled with negative emotions, with a lack of a center, with so many unhelpful thoughts. I needed you in my life. I needed you to help me heal, to give me a sense of peace and con-

nection to my Creator. In fact, the Hebrew word for *davening*, *tefillah*, is rooted in the word connection. I needed to put the spinning in my life on pause for a few moments every morning, for the sake of my *neshamah* and even for the sake of my brain.

Time? I learned that if I needed life-saving dialysis, I would make time for it. And that is how I want to relate to you. Not like a chore. And not like a luxury. But like life-saving oxygen. Like an experience, not a mumble jumble of words. A time to meditate. To slow down my thoughts and be grateful for the *brachos* in my life. To bless Hashem and hear myself thanking Him for all that I have.

I stumbled on this mind-blowing letter written by the Lubavitcher Rebbe regarding women and *davening*:



“Besides, there is nothing more conducive to attune the mind and heart towards the consciousness of Hashem’s Presence than regular *davening*, where the first condition is ‘Know before Whom thou are standing.’ Fostering this consciousness is very helpful for the attainment of peace of mind and general contentment. For through *davening* and direct personal contact with the Aibershter, one is reminded every day that Hashem is not far away, in the Seventh Heaven, but is present and here, and His *Hashgacha Protis* extends to each and every one individually. The Alter Rebbe has greatly emphasized this point in his book of *Tanya*, where he urges everyone to remember that ‘Behold, Hashem is standing near him.’ With this in mind, there is no room left for any anxiety or worry, as King David said, ‘Hashem is my Shepherd, I shall not want,’ ‘Hashem is with me, I shall not fear,’ etc. Thus, this is no longer a theoretical idea, but becomes a personal experience in everyday life.” (For full text, see the Rebbe letter printed at the beginning of this magazine.)

The more I learn, the more I *daven*. And the more I *daven*, the more I learn. I learn the profound impact *davening* has on me. I notice different *tefillos* that I find meaningful and how their poetry ignites my imagina-

I yearned to have a connection to Hashem, but I was feeding that thirst with thrills of all sorts of candy—never giving it real food.

tion and leaves me feeling more awe for Hashem.

And you know what? I’ll do more than just apologize. I will invite others along the journey with me. I will share what I’ve learned about *davening*—its prominence and place in a Yid’s life. Its deeper meaning and how it gives us the tools to connect to Hashem, ourselves, and fellow human beings.

This brings to mind a story I’ve been told time and again. When Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi was 20 years old, he had a crucial decision to make. Vilna and Mezritch were two great capitals and centers of Yiddishkeit in Eastern Europe. Which should he travel to?

He chose Mezritch. For in Vilna, they taught how to learn Torah. And that he already had a handle on. But in Mezritch, they taught how to *daven*. About that, he felt he knew very little. In Mezritch, he would learn the teachings of Chassidus and how a Yid ought to *daven*.

And so he traveled there. And learned. And taught what he learned to his disciples.

That is how I want to relate to you. Not like a chore. And not like a luxury. But like life-saving oxygen.

We can make that choice, too. To learn from his teachings and the wealth of Chassidus. We may have learned the *tefillos*, but did we learn how to *daven*?

I hope that together, we will soon look at *davening* not as an item to check off the to-do list but as the highlight of our day. A time to tune in to the *neshamah* and tune out the voices of the world.

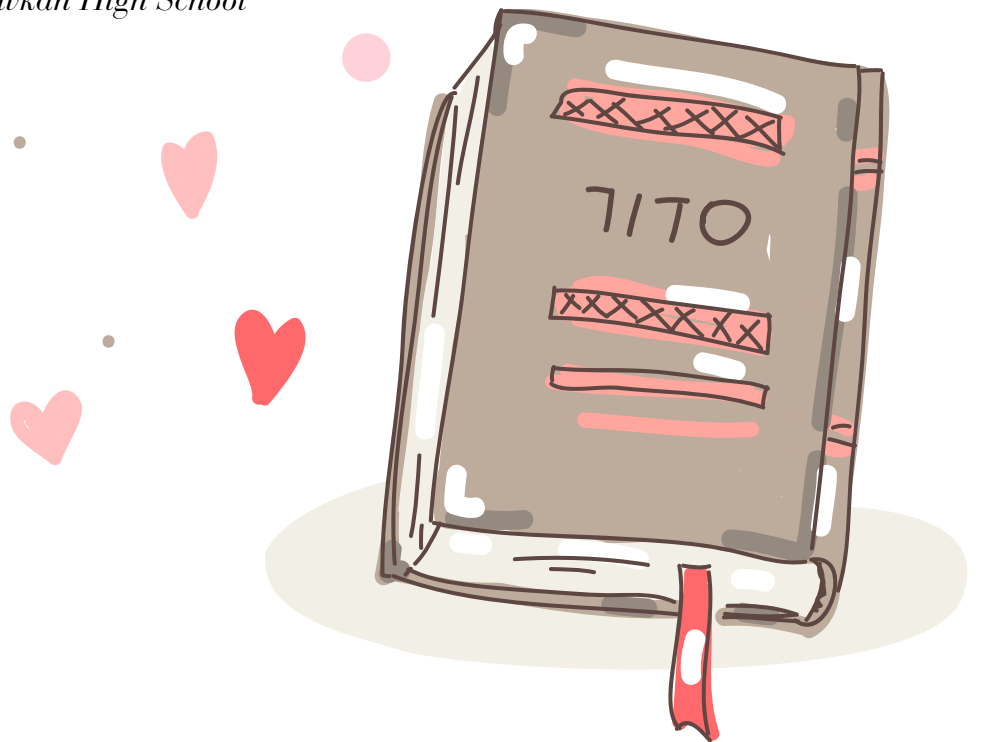
For what is *davening*? A time to sing. And not just any song, but the song of the *neshamah*. ■

Reprinted from Chabad.org

Tefillah

Beyond ^{our} Wildest Dreams

Chana Hirschowitz, Crown Heights
Current Teacher in Bais Rivkah High School



The more I learn about *tefillah*, the more I feel as though it's a response to a noisy world. In a world filled with expectations, opinions, and assertions, there is no wonder people aren't listening anymore. Our minds are filled with the myriads of lists and sublists, where so often 24 hours just doesn't seem to fit within our calendar of time. We find ourselves running ferociously on the conveyor belt of life, where the importance of responsibility and consistency seem to contradict

Amidst the chaos of life, we are commanded to stop everything and meditate, connect, and inspire ourselves to speak earnestly to Hashem.

all opportunity for adventure and exploration.

There is almost a guilt that is felt when we slow down and relax for a bit. Amidst the chaos of life, we are commanded to stop everything and meditate, connect, and inspire ourselves to speak earnestly to Hashem.

As the Rambam states, *tefillah* is defined as ‘*Avodah Shebalev*,’ the dedication of one’s heart, explaining that the Torah obligation (mid’Oraisa) of *tefillah* is to turn to Hashem whenever needed and speak from the heart. This has always resonated so deeply with me; I am naturally always crying to Hashem to help me find a parking spot in Brooklyn and thanking Hashem when I find a spot less than three blocks away. It has never been difficult for me to use *tefillah* as a lifeline and ventilator when hardships fall my way and a sigh of relief coupled with a ‘*Baruch Hashem*’ when my day is filled with nuggets of miracles and clarity.

However, it is the simple opening of the *siddur* three times a day where I struggle. For some reason, it sometimes just feels like a chore. My heart isn’t always in it, my mind is focused on the day ahead and my eyes cannot stop glancing at the clock on the wall, dictating my lateness to work. Why does guilt, impatience, and urgency overwhelm this sacred time that is supposed to fill one with inspiration and connection to the One above? And why did Ezra and the Anshei K’neses Hagedolah believe it was so important to create a prescribed text which is possibly the reason so many of us struggle with *tefillah* in the first place? How can a command from the Torah to daven and connect from one’s heart, turn into a prescribed routine written and compiled thousands of years ago? How do they know what I need today and what lives in my heart?

Our question only strengthens when looking at a conversation between the Tana’im in the Mishnah. In a discussion about which *possuk* is the most important one in the Torah, Shimon Ben Pazi suggests that it is the *possuk* that states, “The first lamb you shall sacrifice in the morning and the second lamb you shall sacrifice in the evening,” referring to the Korban Tamid that is replicated nowadays in the *tefillos* of Shacharis and Mincha. The Gemara holds the *halachah* like Shimon Ben Pazi, declaring that the most important *possuk* in Torah is about the consistency of *tefillah*. The real question is, how is prescribed, consistent *tefillah* in the evening

How can a command from the Torah to daven and connect from one’s heart, turn into a prescribed routine written and compiled thousands of years ago?

and the morning anywhere close to the Rambam’s definition of *tefillah* as ‘*Avodah Shebalev*’?

Furthermore, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *ob”m* defines *tefillah* as, “our intimate dialogue with Infinity, the profoundest expression of our faith that at the heart of reality is a Presence that cares, a G-d who listens, a creative Force that brought us into being with love.” This statement in itself sounds like anything but a chore, rather a heartfelt conversation with the One above. But then again, why are we forced to have this conversation several times a day? How can dictation and sincerity co-exist?

Perhaps we are missing something. Perhaps there is a world where the juxtaposition of heartfelt earnestness and prescribed direction can not only co-exist seamlessly, but create a new reality - of oneness and sanity that we need today more than ever before.



Perhaps there is a world where the juxtaposition of heartfelt earnestness and prescribed direction can not only co-exist seamlessly, but create a new reality - of oneness and sanity that we need today more than ever before.

Let's go back to the days of the heartfelt reunion of Yaakov and Yosef. In Parshas Vayechi we find the only word in the Torah with the same root as the word *tefillah*. It is a *possuk* spoken by Yaakov 'Lo Pilalti,' 'I never imagined!,' he exclaims. As the *possuk* states, "And Yisrael said to Yosef, 'I never expected to see you again, and here Hashem has let me see your children as well'". This *possuk* describes the utter disbelief and excitement that Yaakov experiences when he discovers that he is to not only meet a son that for so long he thought of as dead, but two beautiful grandsons following in the footsteps of Torah in a place like Egypt.

This, I believe, is the essential meaning of *tefillah*: thinking of the unthinkable and unimaginable. Dreaming big, thinking big, and pushing ourselves far beyond our limited comfort zones and day-to-day reality. As humans, we are fallible creatures. Things that can fully consume my mind on Monday, can be a mere memory on Wednesday. One week we are preoccupied with finding a gown for our second cousin's wedding, the next week we are preoccupied with hosting our 30-person meal for Shabbos, and the next week we are preoccupied with our summer plans. These are all good things. However, in the day-to-day conveyor belt of life, sometimes we forget. We forget about Hashem's big, beautiful world out there. We forget about the reality of the *Hallelukah's* we sing every morning, the "grass growing upon the mountains" and the "snow like fleece" that emerge atop the beautiful Carpathian Mountains. When I camped upon a mountain facing the Himalayan Mountains at sunrise, my *Pesukei D'zimrah* never felt more real and earnest. It was easy to sing my gratitude

to Hashem when the "shining stars... sun and moon... snow like fleece" was evident for all to see. When those close to me are ill, it is easy to dig deep into an earnest *Refaeinu*, and when there is upheaval in Eretz Yisrael, most of *Shemoneh Esrei* aligns with my feelings and emotions. However, when we are preoccupied by our day-to-day activities, we forget about the big picture.

Thus, Ezra and the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah dictated a prescribed text which we now call the *siddur*, from the root word *seder*, the order of our day, allowing us to keep our priorities in line. Thinking big and praising. Requesting and thanking Hashem for the big, wonderful world that we find ourselves in, the celestials above, the praising angels in the spiritual world, the *neshamah* deep within us, our ancestors, the fact that we can walk, talk, breathe, open our eyes, have a homeland, declare Hashem as our King in *Shema*, and fundamentally remember that Hashem is ultimately in charge of all.

The Chachamim knew that there was so much more in our heart than what preoccupied us superficially on the daily. The Chachamim knew there was so much more to think about, that there's a big picture out there that we could have forgotten



about if we didn't 'pilalti,' if we didn't imagine the unimaginable. Thus, the prescription and dictation of davening is not to limit our self-expression but rather consistently provide us the platform to think real, re-order our priorities, and within the daily regimented nature of life, be consistently reminded to think bigger.

Hence, *tefillah* is undoubtedly a beautiful blend of self-expression and direction. *Tefillah* is a little nudge in the right direction. It is the consistent request we make of Hashem to heal those that are sick, even though they may be unfamiliar to us as part of our extended *Yiddishe* brotherhood. It is there to remind us of who our ancestors are and how we have a purpose to bring about the ultimate redemption.

Tefillah is here to remind us not to lose focus, to imagine the unimaginable. *Tefillah* is a beautiful, seamless reality of heartfelt earnestness and prescribed direction. Not to limit us, but rather to consistently inspire us beyond what we ourselves,

The prescription and dictation of davening is not to limit our self-expression but rather consistently provide us the platform to think real, re-order our priorities, and within the daily regimented nature of life, be consistently reminded to think bigger.

within our preoccupation, thought was unimaginable.

May Hashem always answer all our *tefillos*, the ones we imagined and the revealed good that was beyond our wildest dreams. ■

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Catalyst for Change

Moussie Berkowitz, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5780 (2020)



“Don’t cry over spilled milk,” they say. This adage reminds us not to shed tears in vain.

Crying can’t undo something that can’t be reversed. But crying isn’t just for babies; it can actually be a catalyst for change. Not always are tears wasted; some cleanse, and some have the power to water the world. As learned from the *shofar*, crying can be the voice of an innermost plea, a *tefillah*.

Not always are tears wasted; some cleanse, and some have the power to water the world.

Growing up, my father lived across the street from Mr. Herty. They always knew he was someone they had to respect, being that he was their elderly neighbor who survived the Holocaust. Before the war, he was a Satmar Yid who was fully observant. However, after being one of the few survivors left from his family, he didn’t keep anything of *Yiddishkeit*, despite his fluent Yiddish. He was very bitter, yet he would always show up to my father’s family bar mitzvos while silently crying on the side. My father and his brothers made an effort, but Mr. Herty would never put on *tefillin*.

Years later, when my father was already a father of five, we were in Detroit visiting my grandparents, who had moved to a different neighborhood since. My father wanted to take us to his old childhood home and was very excited to show us around his old neighborhood. When we arrived, my father remembered Mr. Herty. He eagerly knocked on his door as a rush of nostalgia hit him. After a meaningful introduction and conversation, Mr. Herty agreed to put on *tefillin*, to my father’s delight. The same Mr. Herty, who, for years, was in pain postwar and didn’t

want anything to do with any level of observance. It was such a powerful moment, especially for us as children. As he began to say *Shema*, for the first time in what seemed like an eternity, he couldn't get the words out past the first *possuk*. Then, he started heavily crying and sobbing. "My tears are enough for Hashem to understand and feel what I have to say next," he cried, for no words could express

As he began to say Shema, for the first time in what seemed like an eternity, he couldn't get the words out past the first possuk.

Mr. Herty's innermost feeling at that very moment. Sometimes, tears can say what words can never get close to.

Throughout history, the Yidden have been known for their resilience and tears. Not debilitating tears, but rather tears of strength and prayer.

Leah Imeinu's red eyes are quite infamous. Everyone knows that Leah's eyes were red from her tears about her fateful lot. She cried because she was destined to marry Eisav. Crying over destiny can seem pointless, but Leah's tears were a *tefillah* from the depths of her soul. Those tears were what merited her to become Yaakov's wife.

Rachel Immieniu also used her tears as a fervent *tefillah* to change destiny. "A voice is heard on high, Rachel cries for her children." Rachel wasn't crying over spilled milk, but rather over something in the future. Picture the scene: the Yidden have sinned, and Hashem is busy orchestrating the consequences of their actions. There's a commotion in heaven. Avraham pulls out his wad of merits, trying hard to intercede, to no avail. Then come Yitzchok and Yaakov, followed by the *Imahos*, each trying to appease Hashem. Next comes Rachel, bitterly weeping as she pleads her case before Hashem. Amidst the tears on high, finally, there's a response: "You can stop crying; there is a reward for your work. There is hope; the children will return to their borders." Rachel's visceral teary plea is accepted.

Rachel's son knew what tears could accomplish, and it is his tears that teach us an essential element of crying.

When Yosef and his brother Binyamin were finally reunited, they fell on each other's shoulders with tears streaming down their faces. An onlooker may assume the emotional tears were because of the long-lost time between the almost strangers, but the Chachamim tell otherwise. Each wept bitterly for the misfortune that would befall the other. Yosef wept on his brother's shoulder because of the two *Batei Mikdash* that were to be built on Binyamin's territory and destroyed. Binyamin, too, wept bitterly on his older brother Yosef's shoulder, for the Mishkan that would reside in Yosef's land and ultimately be destroyed. They cried for each other. Because for yourself, you have to act. For another, send up a plea of sorrow. For another, tears help.

In the days of Rabbi Akiva, there was a couple, Yochai and Sarah, who yearned for a child. When it seemed their fate was to be barren, Yochai considered divorcing his beloved wife. With a heavy broken heart, Sarah cried and pleaded to Hashem to pity her and change her fate. A few nights later, Yochai had an amusing dream. He saw himself in a forest, leaning on a withered tree, amongst other trees; some withered, some full of leaves, and some even bearing fruit. A dignified-looking man was walking around the forest, watering the variety of trees. Just as he reached the parched tree Yochai was leaning on, he put down the flask, pulled out a different flask, and proceeded to water it, instantly causing the tree to bear fruit. Yochai awoke and immediately shared the dream with his wife. Seeking an interpretation, they went to Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva explained that the separate flask represented the tears shed by Sarah. Thus, they merited to give birth to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai later that year.

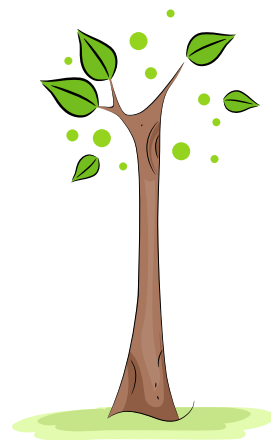
They cried for each other. Because for yourself, you have to act. For another, send up a plea of sorrow. For another, tears help.

While crying over spilled milk is inconsequential, a heartfelt plea has the power to change what seems inevitable. A genuine cry, not one for the sake of complaining and sighing, can change our destiny, arouse Hashem's mercy, and place us on a firm footing in the realm of good. ■



A Growing Connection

Nechama (Wasserman) Laber, East Greenbush, New York
Graduating class of 5752 (1992)



It was Chanukah 5776 (2015).

While I was *davening*, I had a flashback to a subconscious memory that came to the surface from my childhood. I must have been seven years old. It was early Rosh Hashanah morning, and I awoke startled, still fully dressed. I realized that I had fallen asleep without reciting the nightly *Shema*. Inspired by my father, Rabbi Azriel Yitzchok Wasserman OBM, I had taken upon myself to recite the full *Shema* from a *siddur*. I approached my father while he was studying and with tears in my eyes, I cried that I forgot to recite the *Shema* on the holiest day of the year. I felt so terrible. He smiled and said, “These are holy tears,” and he placed them on my forehead.

Why did my father place the tears on my forehead?

Perhaps he was training me to use the power of my mind to turn my tears into a spring-

board for growth. Another message that came to me was that he was teaching me to not only recite the *Shema*, but to meditate on its meaning and say it with intention.

As I was saying *Shema* on that cold Chanukah morning, I began to cry those same tears. I felt my heart open and my *neshamah* reconnect with Hashem. I realized why *davening* had become a difficult *mitzvah* for me. I had *davened* for my father to get well. My *tefillos* were unanswered, and then he passed away and left me at the age of 10. I felt abandoned and alone. I subconsciously felt a disconnect, and *davening* was no longer natural for me. As a teenager, I would *daven* because my mother and teachers told me I had to. As an adult, there were days that I took time to *daven* and there were other days that I couldn't find the time as a busy mom. I yearned to appreciate *davening* and truly connect to my Creator. As I *davened*, I cried more tears, but they weren't tears of sadness. They were helping to wash away the emotional pain buried deep inside. I felt my heart open. I felt love for Hashem in a way I had never experienced before.

I don't have to *daven* now — I want to *daven*! I want to connect to Hashem; He is truly my Partner in everything I do. I appreciate the gift of communication with Hashem. Would I go to work and ignore members of my team? Of course not! Hashem is the One leading my team. I must talk to Him because He wants me to succeed. All of Hashem's *brachos* are waiting for me. All I need to do is connect through *davening*.

The same week that I had this *davening* breakthrough, I was asked to give a class on *davening* by a woman yearning to feel the connection with Hashem through understanding the *tefillos*. *Davening* is called "*avodah sheb'lev* — work of the heart." When my heart, which had become like a rock, opened to receive the wellsprings of wisdom, it also opened the hearts of others. A month later, we launched our online *davening* class, Roses to Pearls.

Many tell me that they struggle with *davening*. Our *tefillos* begin with *Pesukei d'Zimrah*. While the word *zimrah* means "song," it also comes from the phrase, "*L'zamer Aritzim* — to cut away thorns." The "thorns" are obstacles that prevent us from

feeling an inner connection to Hashem. These obstacles affect our concentration in *davening*. The purpose of *Pesukei d'Zimrah* is to clear our minds and hearts of all these "thorns," enabling us to connect to Hashem by focusing on His greatness and the beauty of His creations. Through singing songs of praise about the wonders of nature, we recognize Hashem in every detail of life: the leaves, branches, and even the delayed bus.

I cried that I forgot to recite the Shema on the holiest day of the year. I felt so terrible.

Roses to Pearls symbolizes my journey to opening my heart. *Kavanah* in *davening* is a powerful tool to see through the thorns and transform life's irritations into pearls. Meditating on the meaning of the *tefillos* creates a connection between the mind and heart. Filling our minds with thoughts about Hashem's greatness gives birth to healthy emotions in the heart, like love and joy, instead of sadness and grief.



When the thorns are eliminated, love of Hashem can flow in our hearts. My father imparted this message to me by placing tears on my forehead. I only comprehended and received his wisdom many years later. Through reconnecting to Hashem, I

I felt abandoned and alone. I subconsciously felt a disconnect, and davening was no longer natural for me.

also discovered a renewed spiritual connection with my father.

We are all on a journey to *tefillah*: a state of connection with Hashem.

Think about the obstacles that can come up while traveling. Especially since this pandemic, so many have found it more complex to travel to another country.

Similarly, on our journeys with *davening*, numerous obstacles can stand in the way. Why? Because a greater *mitzvah* has a greater Yetzer Harah standing in opposition.

It always seems to happen that just at the start of *davening*, we suddenly remember something urgent that we have to do or say, or an issue that we need to figure out and work out in our minds. This happens because *tefillah* is so precious and holy that the Yetzer Harah comes specifically then to stop us.

The Connection Project

A Global Initiative



In the aftermath of this pandemic, countless Jewish women and girls are feeling alone, anxious, and disconnected. The most essential human need is connection.

Jewish Girls Unite, which has been at the forefront of empowering women and girls, in-person and online, is responding with The Connection Project, to create the framework for personal and meaningful connections: where every woman and girl is seen and supported through life's journey and knows she is not alone.

The Connection Project includes new innovative and practical resources for meaningful connection. The JGU Press is publishing a *tefillah* curriculum and a My Prayer Planner

& Journal, a practical tool to navigate life intentionally through the orderly route of the *siddur* infused into our daily schedule.

We are also forming Connection Retreats and Connection Circles where small groups connect in a safe space weekly to grow through sharing *tefillah* reflections, stories of gratitude, recognition for Hashem, and wants and needs. The Connection Circle leader is trained to lead a group and also receives inspirational content and meditations to share.

Contact Nechama to learn about online classes for women and girls, to join or lead a connection circle, and to purchase the new curricula, Finding Connection, and My Prayer Planner.

Through singing songs of praise about the wonders of nature, we recognize Hashem in every detail of life: the leaves, branches, and even the delayed bus.

This shows us how significant it really is when we DO concentrate and *daven* with our hearts! If our Yetzer Hara is trying so hard, it must mean that there is something very important that he is trying to disrupt because that is his job: to cause us to fight him to make the right choice.

How do we overcome these obstacles?

If you know your destination, then you will do everything in your power to get there. We realize that each precious word we say is part of a step-by-step process that leads us to our destination. By gaining a greater understanding of the power we possess to experience connection, we will achieve our goal.

The *siddur's* literal meaning in Hebrew is order. The text of the *tefillos* is the road map and was written in an order of steps to forge a strong connection with Hashem.

What are the steps in the *siddur* to achieve a state of connection?

With the rise of disconnection, anxiety, and loneliness due to the pandemic, we are launching the Connection Project and forming connection circles of teens and women who meet to talk about their process to achieving connection to Hashem and others using the “GROW” acronym. This acronym gives us four steps and tools to lead us towards a greater connection with Hashem.

The sun has risen, and a new day beckons. It's time to fortify our connection with Hashem and **G.R.O.W.!**

Theme: We are grateful to Hashem, Creator of our body and our *neshamah*. It mostly focuses on the PERSON and acknowledges our dependence on Hashem for our survival.

Journal/Share: List 5 things you are grateful for.



Step 2: RECOGNITION

Content: The “*Pesukei d’Zimrah*,” a series of *perakim* of Tehillim (the bulk is *perakim* 145-150), preceded by a *brachah* (*Baruch She’amar*) and followed by one (*Yishtabach*).

Theme: We joyfully thank and praise Hashem for the wonders of the world. We focus on the WORLD to awaken our hearts to experience an emotional attachment to Hashem through awareness of His awesome deeds.

Journal/Share: Recognize Hashem in the small details of your life. Praise Hashem in your own descriptive words.



Step 3: ONENESS with Hashem

Content: The *Shema*, preceded by two *brachos* and followed by another.

Theme: We contemplate the workings of the SUPERNAL WORLDS, Hashem's greatness, and ONENESS. We are now emotionally and intellectually ready to proclaim our love for Hashem in *Shema*. We are ONE and ready to commit to serving Hashem.

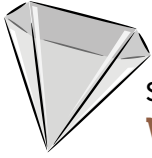
Journal/Share: What does Hashem want from You? What *mitzvah* can you OWN to become ONE with Hashem? List your goals and tasks in partnership with Hashem.



Step 1: GRATITUDE

Content: *Modeh Ani - Birchas Hashachar*





Step 4:
WANTS

Content: The *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Shema Koleinu*

Theme: We are standing before Hashem to address Him directly, ASKING for our WANTS and needs. Our *neshamah* is asking Hashem for the physical needs to fulfill our mission in this world. We reveal the intrinsic bond that connects us with the Creator, a bond that transcends emotion or intellect.

It always seems to happen that just at the start of davening, we suddenly remember something urgent that we have to do or say, or an issue that we need to figure out and work out in our minds.

Journal/Share: Compose your personal *tefillah* with your wants and needs. What do you want from Hashem to fulfill your *neshamah's* purpose?

I give you a *brachah*, dear sisters, on your journey to connection, may you feel grateful for every moment, and recognize Hashem's unconditional love for you. May Hashem answer all your *tefillos*

and may we merit to travel to Eretz Yisroel with Moshiach. ■

Nechama Laber is a Shlucha in Upstate NY and the global founder and director of Jewish Girls Unite, Jewish Girls Retreat, and the Connection Project. The above article includes excerpts from her memoir, Finding Song in Sorrow, and tefillah curriculum, Finding Connection. Nechama has been a passionate educator for over 25 years and is also a certified life coach. She is the proud mother and grandmother of 11 children ka"h.



The day I wrote this article, Chaya Pellin gave my mother this picture of my father obm *davening* that she salvaged from her fire. My father would *daven* with great concentration and on Shabbos he would *daven* in great length. She had it because she had painted a picture of him that now hangs on my wall.

Chaya told me that she had meant to give us this picture for months. The timing was exact. This picture was given to us on the same day that I wrote this article, sharing our vision for the *tefillah* connection project. My father has his ways of communicating his *brachos*.

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CHINUCH TANK



The beginning of the school year provides students with a fresh opportunity. They return from the summer reenergized and invigorated. The new year also brings along an opportunity for *mechanchim* and parents to recommit themselves to investing in their children's *chinuch*. The beginning beacons for new ideas to take flight and for fresh endeavors to be implemented to enhance our students' *chinuch*.

Sometimes, these ideas are buried because they are bogged down by logistical needs, like funding for the execution of a brilliant brainchild. Without proper resources, it

seemed impossible for *chinuch* dreams to become a reality. Until Bais Rivkah appealed to *mechanchim*, parents, and its student body: *Imagine being handed \$25,000 to spend on creating growth and improving something in your child's school. What would you do with it?*

Bais Rivkah's Chinuch Tank created an opportunity for dreams to become a reality. The Chinuch Tank encouraged people to participate in an innovative competition to improve students' *chinuch* by proposing their *chinuch* visions with the necessary logistics to a panel of judges. The finalists proposed their ideas to the public at the Bais Rivkah Alumnae Embrace virtual event this past *Shevat*. The winners, Mrs. Sara Morosow and Mrs. Rivky Boyarsky received \$25,000 to implement their vision for a proper Bayis Yehudi curriculum which is well underway.

In Hayom Yom, the Rebbe Rashab says that a parent should spend at least thirty minutes daily thinking about the *chinuch* of their children. That is the goal of Chinuch Tank. Think about your children's *chinuch*. Think about our future. And of course, share your ideas, and maybe, next Chinuch Tank, it will become a reality.

Here are some Chinuch Tank proposals that were pitched by alumnae worldwide. Although these have not come to fruition yet, perhaps, as you read these *chinuch* visions, they will inspire you to take a leap for the *chinuch* of our children, and, if you feel so inclined, to embrace these ideas and support them.

SPARKING DREAMS

CHAYA M. RASKIN



Chaya M. Raskin noticed the gray children, those that don't shine academically or socially. Because they don't shine overtly, such students don't believe that they shine at all.

They are the students with poor self-esteem. To remedy this, Chaya M. Raskin believes that a dream, a tangible image for a student to hold onto, can be the wings that will carry them

through their school years. It will create an outlet and a niche where this student realizes that they shine.

As Chaya M. Raskin shared, "I believe that by exposing our children to these successful women, who are frum, happy, and using their G-d given abilities to serve Hashem, we can plant important

Without proper resources, it seemed impossible for chinuch dreams to become a reality.

seeds. We can teach them about the value and importance of the countless different traits, abilities, passions, and skills that they may possess, giving them a sense of self-worth and ultimately a dream to work towards."

Chaya M. Raskin proposed to create a monthly workshop beginning in Grade 4, continuing all the way through high school, spotlighting a different channel each month. It would feature a presentation by a Chabad woman in the field and a workshop relevant to the particular skill that is being featured.

The presentation would need to address these three points:

1. Why would someone choose this field? What types of traits/interests does it involve?
2. What skills are needed for it and how can a Chabad woman acquire them?
3. How can this skill be used in the service of Hashem?

Perhaps this skill can also be incorporated into other parts of the school curriculum, for example, to have an "Art Month" or a "Month of Music" with corresponding activities that could expose the children to that particular skill and enable them to try their hand at it.

All the funding would be allocated between the different needs to make this a reality, such as paying the workshop presenters and the program coordinator. By sparking students' dreams, we can enable them to recognize their spark.

THE BAIS RIVKAH JEWISH ART FAIR

GISHY WEINFELD



Talents need to be nurtured. Everyone can shine. Gishy Weinfeld proposed an idea to bring girls' talents to the forefront. "Sometimes we miss noticing those students who have talents that are underdeveloped or not channeled properly", explains Gishy Weinfeld. That is what sparked the brainstorm of the Bais Rivkah Jewish Art Fair whose purpose is to attract those girls who are overlooked and spark their inner fire, giving them an opportunity to shine their light. "My Bais Rivkah Chinuch Tank idea is to make a Jewish Art Fair, displaying the creative talents of any student who wishes to participate." The fair would have a yearly theme and would have a specific criteria for each division. Any form of art would be encouraged. The grant for the fair would be for the person(s) implementing the idea; advisory board/judging panel; advertisement; hall rental, décor, etc.; website for online viewing in case of covid guidelines or for out of town family to view; a fund to assist students in-need with purchasing the supplies necessary for their projects - providing an equal opportunity for every girl to participate and have a fair chance at winning; and of course, prizes – raffles/gift for every entry and winners for each grade.

LOOKING UP TO A SISTER

CHANI ZIRKIND



Navigating school is filled with fun, frenzy, and, for some, lots of confusion. Whether socially, emotionally, or even just keeping up with classes, a student can feel very overwhelmed. Such students can sometimes feel lost trying to find the right person to turn to, leaving them burdened and stressed. To help bridge the gap that

"I believe that by exposing our children to these successful women, who are frum, happy, and using their G-d given abilities to serve Hashem, we can plant important seeds."

is inevitable in large schools, Chani Zirkind proposed a sophisticated Big and Little Sister Program. "This idea stems from Torah", shares Chani. "When Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, saw how Moshe was judging the nation alone, he suggested that there be smaller divisions. In this way, everyone had a chance to come with their questions to a leader, and the most difficult ones would go directly to Moshe."

Her vision is that the sister program be implemented for students from grades 1-12. Girls from 5th grade and up would be paired with a student from a younger grade. Girls from grades 5-8 will also have a "big sister" from high school. The funding would go toward hiring staff to execute programming and accurate matchups which is a key component in ensuring success. The programming would be threefold to include bi-weekly missions for sisters to develop a connection, monthly gatherings to engage the sisters, and monthly checklists to gauge the friendships. Aside from the program coordinators, there would also be a social worker on staff to deal with more intricate matters. Such a program would alleviate the stress of the school staff, as well as the students that need someone to turn to.

THE MECHANCHOS EXCHANGE

CHAYA KATZ & RIVKY VOGEL



The Rebbe gave countless *brachos* to *meanchim*. This is because the Rebbe valued *chinuch* as vital work that cannot be skimped on. This leaves teachers and *meanchim* with an enormous responsibility, both in the classroom and

in preparing each lesson to cater to their students. Lesson preparation is probably one of the most underrated aspects of teaching. Any teacher who has a tailor-made lesson for her students knows the countless hours it takes to create a well-balanced, interesting, and practical lesson. To help this, Chaya Katz and Rivky Vogel created The Mechanchos Exchange, a forum where *mechanchos* can share teaching resources in an organized and efficient fashion. “This forum is already up and running”, shares its founders. “But we can definitely use the grant to advance our resources like creating a website and hiring individuals to further organize the resources and build curricula that can be used by *mechanchos* worldwide.” Imagine that, instead of reinventing the wheel, with a click of a button a teacher can find a curriculum or lesson plan that may need minor tweaks but has rich content and interesting tidbits in one. “Of course, this costs a tremendous amount of money, but we don’t want to charge our *mechanchos* for this service as they are already stretched thin. We feel that students gain the most when teachers collaborate and share ideas,” explain the founders. And

Any teacher who has a tailor-made lesson for her students knows the countless hours it takes to create a well-balanced, interesting, and practical lesson.

as any teacher can attest, that is very true. Such a resource is every teacher’s dream.

Maybe these ideas sparked an epiphany, or perhaps you have been percolating a brainchild. Now is your time to let those *chinuch*-oriented juices flow. The Chinuch Tank will open for submission on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, October 7. The criteria and details can be found at bethrivkah.edu/chinuchtank. It’s time to make our *chinuch* dreams a reality, so our children can receive a stellar *chinuch*. Submission deadline is Yud Aleph Kislev, November 18. In your daily thirty minutes devoted to *chinuch*, think about the Chinuch Tank and share your ideas with the public. ■

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Prison Without Walls

Understanding Asperger's Syndrome

Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld,
Director and Founder of S.O.S.
(Strategies for Optimum Success)
Brooklyn, New York
Graduating Class of 5745 (1985)

Rifka Schonfeld formerly worked as Director of Resource Room at Bais Rivkah, as well as a kriah evaluator both privately and in groups. She also coached staff on how to teach kriah in their own classrooms.

Esther came across a crumpled-up paper on the floor of the den. Curious, she straightened it out. It was a poem in her daughter Shana's handwriting. "If You But Dared," the title read.

*I was a child/who was hurting
no escape except through yearning
nursing wounds no one could see
anesthetized by fantasies*



Tears of wonderment came to Esther's eyes as she scanned the lines her 16-year old had written. *Wounds no one could see...* Those must have been the wounds of loneliness.... Shana had been a loner all through elementary school, and now in high school, the pattern was continuing.

The jokes, camaraderie, and easy conversation characteristic of young teens eluded her.

She was moody and remote, absorbed in her books. She did well in school with barely any effort but her social skills lagged far behind her academic achievement. She denied being unhappy and refused to talk about her feelings. But misery cried out from the page.

*She denied being unhappy
and refused to talk about her
feelings. But misery cried out
from the page.*

*memories bring back the ache
pain that ebbed once more awake
the years roll back the sense of loss
once more a child waits to cross
a deserted corner far from home
in the dark she lingers alone
a traffic light that never changes
and so she waits and waits for ages
to all of you who passed her by
noticed not her haunted eyes
all of you who might have cared
reached out a hand if you but dared
unlock the prison without walls
find the captive sad and small
no voice to call no words to share
no brush to paint the deep despair
you never saw you never asked
what lay behind the child's mask
my heart still hurts from that neglect
despite the years I can't forget*

Esther's eyes blurred with tears. Shana's description of a sad and forlorn little girl in an invisible jail rang so true. But it shocked her that her daughter perceived herself as abandoned by everyone. *You never saw, you never asked...* How they had struggled to understand her and help her! But she never allowed anyone inside her "cell." Like the captive in the poem, she seemed to "have no voice to call, no words to share."

Over the years, the family had gotten used to Shana's idiosyncrasies. She was painfully shy and inhibited around people. Feelings quickly overwhelmed her. She broke down in tears over any degree of disappointment, stress, or frustration and couldn't communicate to others what the trouble was.

Advanced scholastically, she nevertheless had no idea how to engage in the simple amenities of routine conversation. It made her appear



slow-witted, immature, or, as children labeled it, “weird.”

First Grade Blues

It had all started so differently.

“She was so cute and endearing when she was little; she had an amazing vocabulary, far beyond her age level,” Shana’s mother recalled. “When she piped up, you couldn’t help but smile. But trouble started as soon as she hit first grade.”

As talkative and spirited as the little girl was at home with her parents and siblings, she seemed withdrawn and wrapped up in her own world at school. She day-dreamed and doodled in class. At recess, she wandered off by herself, gazing wistfully at the games others were playing.

“At first, we attributed her apartness to boredom,” her mother explained. “But that didn’t explain the other ‘oddities’—the extraordinary shyness, a stiff, awkward gait, not swinging her arms like most kids when they walk... and her difficulty in maintaining eye contact. She was always shy, but this odd behavior seemed to have developed when she first started mixing socially with other kids.”

Shana resisted her parents’ efforts to arrange counsel-

Advanced scholastically, she nevertheless had no idea how to engage in the simple amenities of routine conversation.

ing for her. It wasn’t until she was in tenth grade that her parents induced her to cooperate with an evaluation. The child psychologist who evaluated Shana called in her parents to discuss his findings. Shana suffered from a neurological disorder called Asperger’s Syndrome, he said. They blinked at him in shock. *What was Asperger’s Syndrome?*

Wanting Emotional Connection

Until 1994, no one, including psychologists and behavior specialists, knew much about Asperger’s Syndrome. The disorder went unrecognized, and children who had it were labeled “weird,” “off-beat,” or “emotionally disturbed.”

Named for Hans Asperger, an Austrian physician who first identified it in the 1940s, Asperger’s was first defined as a mild variant of autism. Still, that designation has been contested by many scientists who feel it is not part of the autism spectrum.

“While some Asperger’s Syndrome symptoms seem similar to symptoms of classic autism,” psychologist Michelle Ver Ploeg writes in *Asperger’s Syndrome In Young Children*, there are significant differences. Asperger’s children and adults, unlike those who have autism, often show true emotional connectedness, including an ability to empathize that is uncharacteristic of autism.

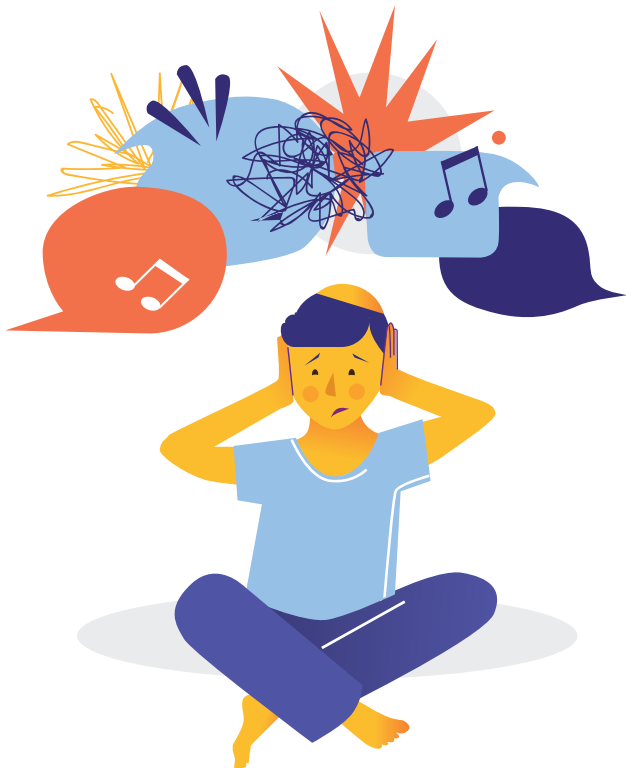
The difficulties that students with Asperger’s Syndrome face reflect problems with nonverbal communication and drawing social inferences, she explained. The social cues that guide most people through day-to-day interactions are a foreign language to them.

Simply put, these children desperately want friends but don’t know how to make or keep a friend.

By contrast, those with autistic symptoms are emotionally remote and disconnected, for the most part, incapable of a mutual, two-way relationship.

Newly Diagnosed In 1994

It wasn’t until 1994 that Asperger’s Syndrome finally became an official diagnosis in standard American and British medical lexicons. Awareness of how this



disorder impacted children began to filter down to educational channels. Schools finally had an approach to understanding those ‘odd’ students they’d been diagnosing with ADD, learning disabilities, and bipolar disorder—all of which come with various symptoms that may mimic Asperger’s.

Asperger’s Syndrome is not widely recognized by the public or by health care providers in this country. An estimated one out of every 1,000 people suffer from the Syndrome. Much progress has been made in identifying children with the disorder, but thousands of adults were never correctly diagnosed.

People with Asperger’s generally have average to superior intelligence and—like Shana—advanced early language acquisition. However, they often seem to be “mind-blind” when it comes to social interactions—failing to perceive what is evident to everyone else by “reading” body language, eye-gaze, and facial expression.

They may display an intense preoccupation with an unusual focus of interest and repetitive behaviors such as rhythmic rocking or flapping of the hands.

The Young Child

A preschool-aged child might demonstrate complete unawareness of the basics of social interaction—how to join a game or share toys or belongings. He or she may be oblivious to basic social cues—like waving hello and goodbye, smiling one’s pleasure, frowning or glaring to show displeasure—and may misuse these non-verbal messages.

Elementary School-Aged Child

One often hears the phrase “poor pragmatic language skills” concerning children with Asperger’s. This means that the individual cannot hit on the right tone and volume of speech. Their voices are often flat and expressionless, too loud, or too high-pitched. The person may stand too close, avoid eye contact,

Shana suffered from a neurological disorder called Asperger’s Syndrome, he said. They blinked at him in shock. What was Asperger’s Syndrome?

or stare at people. Many are clumsy and have visual-perceptual difficulties.

Non-verbal learning difficulties, subtle or severe, are common, especially in reading comprehension and math work that demands imaginative problem-solving and critical thinking.

The child may become fixated on a particular topic and bore others with incessant talk even when other children have given clear signals that they are not interested. Some have difficulties tolerating changes in their daily routine and become agitated when faced with an abrupt schedule change. Change must be introduced gradually.

The Adolescent

In adolescence, social demands become more complex and social nuances more subtle. This may be the most challenging time for individuals with Asperger’s Disorder. They are so obviously “not with the program” that their behavior evokes ridicule, dismissal, or annoyance from peers. Because of his social naiveté, a teenager with Asperger’s may not realize when someone is trying to take advantage of him. He can be especially vulnerable to manipulation and peer pressure.

As individuals with Asperger’s enter adolescence, they become acutely aware of their differences and keenly sensitive to rejection. This may lead to depression and anxiety. Depression, if not treated, may persist into adulthood.



TREATMENT FOR ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Social Skills Training

This is one of the most vital components of treatment for all age groups with the disorder. According to experts in the field, the individual needs to learn body language with the thoroughness and consistency that one must learn a foreign language to cope with living in a foreign land.

Individuals with Asperger's must learn concrete rules for eye contact, social distance, and more normal body language, including posture and gait. Since many people with this disorder are clumsy and have terrible table etiquette, they must be taught how to conduct themselves at mealtimes without evoking distaste in those near them.

Since they lack self-awareness and have trouble reading other people, people with Asperger's do not realize that watching someone wolf down his food, eat noisily, or take second or third helpings when not everyone has had the first portion, can be upsetting.

They need concrete lessons in identifying emotions (their own and others), practicing good hygiene, phone skills, car and bus etiquette, and how to win and lose. They need careful instruction on how to take care of personal attire, how to respect other's ownership of belongings, make an appropriate gesture of affection, and know when it's *inappropriate* to give a hug or a pat on the back.

They need a great deal of practice and role-play regarding how to build a friendship; how to make conversation, how to share and to wait with patience; how to handle

being upset; what constitutes lying; how to win and lose; how to be part of a discussion group or project.

Avoid Criticizing, Ridiculing

It's easy (but a trap!) to turn social skill goals into a negative checklist of behaviors to be corrected. Don't fall for this; warn experts. The idea is NOT to make life easier for the parent or teacher. The idea is to make life easier for the child. That is why the emphasis should be on explaining, teaching, and practicing; not criticizing, ridiculing, or blindly correcting.

Simply put, these children desperately want friends but don't know how to make or keep a friend.

It's essential to make the lessons fun, helpful, and non-threatening. Use games, charades, jokes, cartoons, storybooks, field trips, or whatever else works so that the child will grow while feeling successful (as opposed to incompetent).

Asperger's covers a wide range of ability levels. Mainstream classrooms can include many children with Asperger's. But those with a more severe case of the disorder will need to be in small, self-contained classrooms or special schools.

Research shows that most children with Asperger's learn intellectually rather than intuitively. Instead of role modeling or subtle hints, they need factual information, explanations, and practice.



Shana first came to treatment in high school after experiencing untold ordeals of social isolation and loneliness. She was fortunate in having a relatively mild form of Asperger's and having the gift of using the medium of writing to overcome her impairment in social skills and communication.

On paper, she came alive—almost as a different person. Even her parents were astonished to discover what a vibrant life Shana led in her private writings. We helped her convert this talent, making it a tool for becoming more in sync with those around her. We taught her to dig deep into herself and discover the emotions behind the “child’s mask” she had written about in her poem “If You But Dared.”

We taught her to generalize these emotions to others. We helped her learn how to “read” facial expressions and interpret social situations through facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. A rigorous social skills training program over many months concentrated on helping Shana maintain eye contact and learn how to initiate a conversation with others.

The idea is NOT to make life easier for the parent or teacher. The idea is to make life easier for the child.

Perhaps the most heartening sign of Shana’s growth and progress came with a beautiful poem she wrote as she prepared to graduate high school. This poem had the same rhythmic cadence as her earlier one, but it couldn’t have been more different. This poem celebrated friendship. You felt the wind and sun and laughter in this poem. The tears it evoked were tears of happiness for the child who at last felt a part of humanity. ■

Mrs. Rifka Schönfeld is the founder and director of S.O.S., an educational program servicing all grade levels in secular as well as Hebrew studies. She also offers evaluations G.E.D. preparation, social skills training and shidduch coaching.



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The Children should be 'MUCHANIM'

*Hora'os from the Rebbe on chinuch, a conversation
with Mrs. Fradel Sudak of London, England*

Mina Zalamanov, Queens, New York
Graduating class of 5778 (2018)

This article is dedicated in honor of my dear bubby (and friend of Mrs. Sudak), Mrs. Laya Block a" h, about whom I can say: she epitomized what it means to fulfill the Rebbe's hora'os in chinuch with mesiras nefesh.

In 5706 (1946), Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov, along with his wife, Esther Golda (nee Futerfas), and children, finally left the brutal rule of Communist Russia and settled in London, England. He got engaged in 1927 but was then arrested and spent 4 years in the Siberian prison camps until his *kallah* came to Siberia and they wed there. His “crime” was that he arranged *chadorim* for boys to learn Torah in Communist Russia. Yet so

passionate was he, that even when no longer imprisoned, he still fought Communism, opened up more *chadorim* and assisted their families, until the Shemtov family eventually left in 5706 (1946).

However, all of these efforts were particularly for the young Jewish boys, and the girls were informally taught whatever their mothers knew. The first time formal *chinuch* for girls was introduced was in the DP camps in Austria, 5706/07 (1946/47). The Rebbe shipped over boxes of *seforim*, including books to learn Hebrew and Yiddish, with the intent to make formal classes for girls to learn. The Shemtovs moved to France in May of 5707 (1947), and there the Rebbe established a Bais Rivkah in two locations, complete with a formal timetable of classes and curriculum. When they moved to England in 5709 (1949), Rabbi Shemtov was directed by the Rebbe to settle in London to establish a girls' school. There was a Jewish elementary school at that time in London, but no Jewish high school, so his goal was to establish a top quality Jewish school, so that no one would even think of sending their daughters to a non Jewish school.

Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov was an extremely devoted and loyal soldier of the Rebbe, so even though it started out small with only three students, he continued to operate out of his home without question.



Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov and family, photographed on Erev Yom Kippur 5710 (October 2, 1949) at the behest of the Friediker Rebbe, who had requested photos of his chassidim and their families "וי ישיען" (standing).

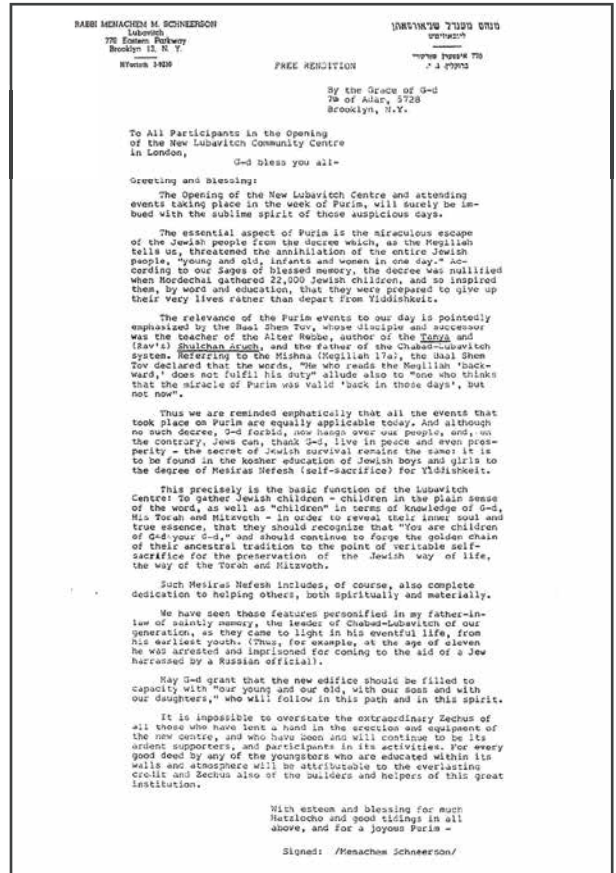
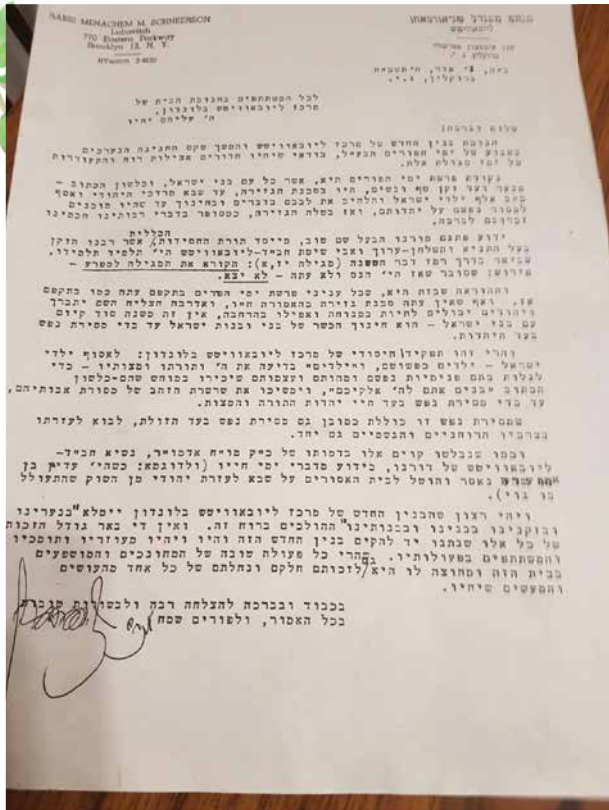
Photograph of the Shemtov family on Erev Yom Kippur, 5710 (October 2, 1949) at the request of the Friediker Rebbe. Mrs. Sudak was ten years old.

It was challenging at first to obtain visas to enter England and to negotiate the logistics of opening a school as the Rebbe instructed, with both *Lemudei Kodesh* and *Lemudei Chol*.

During these years, Mrs. Sudak spent time in Crown Heights to be near the Rebbe. She fondly remembered her days in France, en route to England with her family, where she had spent time in Bais Rivkah. The Rebbe was very well acquainted with the chinuch of those young girls. Mrs. Sudak can still recount what she learned there, back in 5707 (1947). She decided to become a teacher in this flagship school and enjoyed teaching third grade at Bais Rivkah on Stone Street.

Ten years after her initial arrival to London, the Rebbe instructed Rabbi Nachman *a"h* and Mrs. Fradel Sudak to get married in London and immediately continue the work of her father in establishing a Lubavitch school. They eventually opened the girls school in 1959 and one for the boys in 1960. "It was the biggest disappointment for my husband not to have the Rebbe be Mesader Kiddushin at his wedding, but as a soldier, he did exactly as the Rebbe said," she recounts.

The Sudaks received clear and thorough instructions from the Rebbe, via Rabbi Hodakov, regarding opening the school. He would call every Thursday with different hora'os on *chinuch*, which Rabbi Sudak would share with others. These letters came from the beginning of their work in England until Chof Zayin Adar, ultimately consisting of two hundred double-sided pages. It was London that the Rebbe used as a role model for other chinuch mosdos. They felt that the Rebbe had very specific goals for the *chinuch* of the girls in London and felt his continuous support



throughout.

Mrs. Sudak started out working behind the scenes and overseeing that all was going well, eventually becoming the headteacher. It took all of eight years from its inauguration for Lubavitch of London to become a tremendous institution, complete with four buildings and separate schools for boys and girls of all ages. She ultimately became principal under the directorship of Rabbi Sufrin.

The Lubavitch London Centre started as just a girls' school and has evolved into a tremendous establishment, with schools for boys and girls at elementary and senior school levels. It has been many years since those days, and now she is reviewing her *Shlichus* and recently became more involved. She was looking through their correspondence and came across a letter from the Rebbe sent in honor of the inaugural ceremony of their new school building. Mrs. Sudak and I went through that letter, noting that the Rebbe

mentioned *mesiras nefesh* a few times and discussed how each of those mentions was her guide and integrated into how her school functioned.

"*Shluchim*, who are my age, never had any specific instruction to open a school. We, however, did, as you can see in this letter," she points out. "The Rebbe's *hora'os* were very precise. The Rebbe wanted us to implement them as our initiative. For the first two years, the Rebbe answered every individual question. We were a young couple and not as experienced. We asked, and the Rebbe answered. Then after two years, the Rebbe said he won't be doing that anymore, and my husband would have to work on his initiative. He could write to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe would comment if he had anything to change. The Rebbe would give that over to Rabbi Hodakov, and Rabbi Hodakov would give it to us."

Greeting and Blessing,

The opening of the New Lubavitch Centre and attending events taking place in the week of Purim will surely be imbued with the sublime spirit of those auspicious days.

*The essential aspect of Purim is the miraculous escape of the Jewish people from the decree, which, as the Megillah tells us, threatened the annihilation of the entire Jewish people, “young and old, infants and women in one day.” According to our Sages, ob”m, the decree was nullified when Mordechai gathered 22,000 Jewish children and so inspired them, by word and education, that they were prepared to **give up their very lives** rather than depart from Yiddishkeit.*

The relevance of the Purim events to our day is pointedly emphasized by the Baal Shem Tov, whose disciple and successor was the teacher of the Alter Rebbe, author of the Tanya and (Rav’s) Shulchan Aruch, and the father of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. Referring to the Mishnah (Megillah 17a), the Baal Shem Tov declared that the words, “He who reads the Megillah ‘backward’, does not fulfill his duty,” also allude to “one who thinks that the miracle of Purim was valid ‘back in those days,’ but not now.”

*Thus, we are reminded emphatically that all the events on Purim are equally applicable today. And although no such decree, G-d forbid, now hangs over our people, and, on the contrary, Jews can, thank G-d, live in peace and even prosperity- the secret of Jewish survival remains the same: it is to be found in the kosher education of Jewish boys and girls to the degree of **mesiras nefesh** (self-sacrifice) for Yiddishkeit.*

*This precisely is the basic function of the Lubavitch Centre: To gather Jewish children – children in the plain sense of the word, as well as “children” in terms of knowledge of G-d, His Torah, and Mitzvot – to reveal their inner soul and true essence, that they should recognize that “you are children of G-d, your G-d” and should continue to forge the golden chain of their ancestral tradition to the point of veritable **self-sacrifice** for the preservation of the Jewish way of life, the way of the Torah and Mitzvot.*

*Such **mesiras nefesh** includes, of course, also complete dedication to helping others, both spiritually and materially.*

We have seen these features personified in my father-in-law of saintly memory, the leader of Chabad-Lubavitch in our generation, as they came to light in his eventual life, from his earliest youth. (Thus, for example, at age eleven he was arrested and imprisoned for coming to the aid of a Jew harassed by a Russian official.)

“It was the biggest disappointment for my husband not to have the Rebbe be Mesader Kiddushin at his wedding, but as a soldier, he did exactly as the Rebbe said.”

May G-d grant that the new edifice should be filled with “our young and old, our sons and our daughters,” who will follow in this path and this spirit.

It is impossible to overstate the extraordinary zechus of those who lent a hand in the erection and equipment of the new centre, and who have been and will continue to be its ardent supporters and participants in its activities. Any good deed by any of the youngsters who are educated within its walls and atmosphere will be attributable to the everlasting credit and zechus also of the builders and helpers of this great institution.

[Signature]



Mrs. Sudak gleaned some important guidance in *mesiras nefesh* from this letter. She points out that in the times of the Purim story, Mordechai didn't necessarily open schools, but he did learn with children. He would just learn Torah with them (about the Egla Arufa), not necessarily even rel-

These children were even willing to 'למסור נפשם'- and it came from themselves. That's what chinuch is.

evant topics, but this is what would light up the flame in their hearts. That is how *chinuch* should be.

Additionally, Mrs. Sudak learned from this letter that the Purim story and its *hora'os* are still relevant today. "I always knew Purim was important," she mentions. "But the Rebbe wanted the

dedication and realization that the *chinuch* should come from our efforts. It says about the Yidden in the times of the Purim miracle- 'קיימו מה שקבלו' - *כבר* - the Yidden accepted on their own accord the Torah which they had initially received by Matan Torah. Mordechai taught the children to keep Torah and Mitzvos not because he told them to do so, but because of their own will. These children were even willing to 'למסור נפשם'- and it came from themselves. That's what *chinuch* is. The Rebbe did give us some noticeably clear *hora'os*, such as having separate boys and girls schools and having *Lemudei Kodesh* and *Lemudei Chol* set for separate parts of the day. As much as these were clear messages from the Rebbe, we were the ones that implemented them, making it ours. And we tried to impart this to our children, that *Yiddishkeit* must be theirs. Just like the Rebbe did not mean that people should want Moshiach because he said Moshiach was coming, but because they, on their own, really want Moshiach."

"My guide to *chinuch* is the *Der Rebbe Redt Tzu Kinder*," Mrs. Sudak continues, "The Rebbe



The first Lubavitch institution in Great Britain, circa 5717 (1957); still operating out of Rabbi Shemtov's personal residence.

Rabbi Bentsion Shemtov with the first students in his school, which was operated out of his home.



would tell the children to go home and respectfully tell their parents that ‘this is how Shabbos and Yom Tov’ should be. The Rebbe shows how every single concept in Torah can be brought down to children. They can learn a lot and are more receptive to the *emes* because they have no worries about providing a living. Through being *mechanech* the children, you can help your families grow and influence the parents. The children have power.”

And this is what the Sudaks tirelessly worked towards, that their students should be ‘מוכנים למסור נפשם על יהדותם.’ Mrs. Sudak notes that the biggest numbers of *Shluchim* are the ones that

Through being mechanech the children, you can help your families grow and influence the parents. The children have power.

were educated when the Rebbe started Tzivos Hashem; they were taught to be ‘*muchanim*’. That is how the Rebbe was *mechanech* the children and that was the priority of Lubavitch London. Even when it was complicated and exhausting, the graduating class was taken to New York, to see the Rebbe.

Furthermore, the *mesiras nefesh* imparted to students should not just be about their observance of Torah and Mitzvos but also about helping others. “Unfortunately, there is bullying.” Mrs. Sudak muses. “Children need to be taught to have *mesiras nefesh* for Ahavas Yisroel, and the lack is not good. Now, when I grew up in Russia, you didn’t even think of not being good to each other.”

In London, the Sudaks were the trailblazers. They came to a country cold-hearted towards Yidden and a *kehilla* of a total of five Lubavitch families. The Rebbe wanted them to create an empire, with its emphasis on *chinuch*; to build a beautiful build-

ing, complete with a swimming pool and library. And not just focus on the boy’s education, who will in any case learn, but to dedicate the building to educate the girls. *Chinuch* should be carried out in the most beautiful fashion, including the physical aspects of it! With sincerity and complete dedication to our Rebbe, the Sudaks succeeded and continue to see the fruits of their labor.

Her entire life, Mrs. Sudak shares, *chinuch* has been her top priority, whatever the circumstances. The Rebbe was imprisoned because of his work in *chinuch* and so was her father. The communists did not like the idea of Jewish education and learning, yet wherever they went, the *Chassidim* learned. Whatever situation they were in, they learned. Because *chinuch* is priority.

Mrs. Sudak concluded by relating how an inspector once came and reported how “It is known the Jews are a light to the nations, and in this school, we got to see that in action.” The Lubavitch of London empire has proven to be a lighthouse to Yidden of London and England as a whole. May it be that in the *zechus* of the precious children and the *chinuch* they so lovingly receive, all Yidden will come to recognize Hashem as His knowledge fills the earth, כמים לים מכסים. ■



Tanya Brings Me Home to **Bais Rivkah**

Chaya (Halberstam) Evers, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Graduating Class of 5764 (2004)



“I promise you, Morah Tiechtel, I did not pull the fire alarm. I was testing the mechanism out of pure curiosity. No, I didn’t pull a latch. No, let me explain. I stood on the preschool cots, and I was able to reach the actual bell. Yes, right, true, I should not have stood on those cots; that was a big mistake, true, okay, so as I was saying... I stood on the cots and inspected the bell

It wasn’t that I was looking for trouble, but that trouble seemed to always find me.

from close up; yes, it was Ivrit class. I was taking a break. True, true, okay, on close inspection, I saw the tiny arm that hits the bell to make a ringing noise for the fire alarm. I thought, *what would happen if I lifted the arm and let go?* I tried it three times, and it was just an unfortunate case of curiosity. I promise it will never happen again. I feel so bad, and I did not mean for the preschool class to flee the building. My apologies, yes, it will not happen again.”

If you went to high school with me, the chances are that you are familiar with this story or some other story highlighting the shenanigans that I may have been involved with in my years at BRHS. It wasn't that I was looking for trouble, but that trouble seemed to always find me. I was in the office on September 11th when Morah Korf came running in to share the tragic news with Morah Simpson trailing behind her, shocked and exasperated. I had no choice; I had to storm my Navi class and relay the report to the class. Never mind that my teacher had already sent me out of class for not bringing a Navi. As I said, trouble always came to find me. Despite this, my teachers and principals were kind, patient, and understanding of me. I was Chaya, the student who loved school but did not love doing school. I loved my *mechanchos*, my friends, production, and the *Chassidische Yomim Tovim*. I learned a great deal from walking the halls, talking with my teachers and principals, and making memories with my friends. They were indeed the most wonderful years of my youth, yet I didn't always recognize that at the time. There were days where I complained and had it out with a teacher or days where I felt alone, anxious, and worried about things that worry teenagers. There were times where I questioned, cried, and almost thought that *Yiddishkeit* was not for me.

Years later, now that I have grown, only the warm memories surface when I reflect on my time at BRHS, because they were more abundant than the hardships. Just thinking about french fries with ketchup and tuna gives me a feeling as deep as the “*Ahava Betaamugim*” Morah Zirkind taught us about. How is it possible that this combination tastes good in Bais Rivkah and nowhere else? Next year's reunion menu should be french fries and tuna and potato knishes. No joke, I have a picture of my 12th-grade class crowding the kitchen worker bringing out the first tray.

I was far from a star student, but somehow, the messages of Chassidus had seeped in and found a place in the recesses of my brain.

I recently joined JNet and began learning with a woman who is frum but not Chabad. She wanted to learn Tanya, and despite my not having learned Tanya for almost a decade, I jumped right in. We opened the books and the words came spilling out. The history of *Chassidus*, the reason the Alter Rebbe wrote the Tanya, and all of the backbone that I never knew was laying deep inside my soul. As we learned together, the Tanya that lay in my foundation resurfaced! Only this time, it felt more applicable. I noticed that each time I finished learning, I felt a fire inside me that was almost extinguished for so long. I suddenly understood my *Nefesh Habahamis* in a way that I never had before. I was far from a star student, but somehow, the messages of *Chassidus* had seeped in and found a place in the recesses of my brain. During my chavrusa learning, I remember all of the “Tanya Terms” we used in high school to describe someone: “She's in *atzilus*” or when you tried to have “*iskafya*” when you were on a diet. These terms seemed so normal at the time, and we used them in both serious and trivial contexts. As time passed and life transpired, the lingo changed, and life became “grown-up.” Studying Tanya brought me back to memories of my time in Bais Rivkah. It warmed my heart to remember Morah Gluckowsky passionately using a slice of pizza as an example for *taavos* and Morah Zirkind teaching us about making cheese from milk. In fact, after learning about making cheese, my friend and I got together after school to try and make the recipe, which was likely an attempt at making ricotta cheese. It did curdle, but we were both too afraid to taste it. Learning Tanya reminded me of the hysterical giggling fit we threw after completing the cheese recipe.

All jokes aside, I am constantly reminded how applicable Tanya is to my daily life. The *Nefesh Elohis* has many faculties, but what stands out, is how each person's *neshamah* is unique, even though it comes from the same source. The greatest Rasha,

I may not have been the star student of Bais Rivkah, but my experiences have prepared me to succeed in the school of life.

or a true simpleton, may have higher capabilities *b'ruchnius*, more than I could ever dream of reaching. That is humbling! As a teacher of small children, this message invigorates me, as it forces me to wonder about the endless possibilities that my pupils may have. They truly may be the next Moshe Rabeinu and I have the opportunity to stir them in that direction. This concept is simple in Tanya terms, but to me, it yields so much power.

Tanya truly applies to every Yid at every stage in life, yet somehow, now, as an adult, mother, and wife, my mind has expanded to understand these ideas as practical concepts. As a creative person, I can physically feel the ChaBaD working through all my faculties, and I can value finishing a project as it languishes through the *Da'as* stage. When my children engage in negative *middos*, I am reminded that whatever struggles they are having with their *Nefesh Habehamis*, it is mirroring their *Nefesh Elokis* and its endless capabilities towards *ruchnius*. Learning Tanya again, at a stage where I feel it can be practiced in my daily life, brings me home to Bais Rivkah.

It could be that I had teachers in the past, who may have thought that their teachings did not leave an impression on my mind. I want you to know that you did a great job! I joked, I daydreamed, and sometimes disturbed, but through it all, my batteries were loading, and today, Bais Rivkah will always be a place that charges me when I need it the most. I may not have been the star student of Bais Rivkah, but my experiences have prepared me to succeed in the school of life.

Bais Rivkah is the blood inside my beating heart and the one that keeps my fire burning. It is the voice that tells me to turn over the world, even if I am not on '*shlichus*' and the world I live in is a small one. I learned that every person is a universe that has the opportunity to bring forth light. It is my mission to do it! I owe a lot to Bais Rivkah and the teachers who were kind, smiling, and understanding of me. And to those who found me as a challenging student, I understand you. It wasn't always easy to have a student like me in your class. I get it! Hashem, in His infinite kindness, directed me towards a calling I never imagined I would have. I, too, am a teacher now, and I see myself in some of my students; and sometimes, I worry about them, and what the future holds for them, but then I realize that I made it through the school system with lasting impacts on my life, I trust that they will too! ■



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My Struggle with Primary Infertility

Anonymous



Dear Family and Friends,

I know that you want to hear from me. You desperately wish you could do something to help. I sense your goodness and there's so much I always want to say, but I feel safer keeping it tucked inside. I jotted down some notes of my experiences along the way, and I'm sharing them to help you understand why I keep this quiet and why this is so complex. Of course, everyone experiences things differently so it's important for me to note that these are my personal feelings.

Your sister, your friend,

It's 9:00 PM... And the medication needs to be in by 9:15 every night. I go upstairs to the bathroom and stare at the overstuffed container on the bathroom counter, spilling over with needles. I need to measure and prepare each injection. I lift my shirt, dab my bruised stomach with an alcohol swab, and get ready to inject myself again – like a lab experiment. I just breathe really slowly until all the medication is in, and then remove the needle, breathe a sigh of relief, take a minute to feel the sharp stinging pain of the medication and check if it was a smooth injection this time - or did I leave a bruise? Once the medicine goes in, I go back downstairs and continue with my life. Sometimes it's not that simple if I am unable to be home at 9:00 PM. Sometimes I measure syringes in the car and inject myself as we drive down the highway. Other times I sneak away to a relative's bathroom and do it there.

Sometimes I measure syringes in the car and inject myself as we drive down the highway.

It's Lag B'Omer. We find out mid-set up for our big Chabad House BBQ that my cycle was unsuccessful. I had been dangerously optimistic because of the day's association with miracles. The nurse had also told me that the doctor wanted to pause treatments until we ran another test, which would take weeks. I didn't want to cry on the phone, but I did want to yell, "What do you mean? I'm going to lose another whole month?" We want to move ahead — but we can't. The petrifying, frightening thought creeps in again. Will we ever merit to be parents? Luckily, I don't have the ability or time to cry. Our guests are arriving.

It's finally 7:00 AM on Monday. I barely slept last night. I need to get a hold of the doctor — I've been waiting to speak with him since Shabbos. My Rav needs to clear a few last-minute halachic concerns before my procedure that's supposed to take place today. A few desperate emails and phone calls later, my doctor calls me to say that he spoke to the Rav and all is good. I relax for the first time since Friday.

Today was supposed to be the day. Bloodwork day — to find out if I'm pregnant. I stop in at the Ohel and then head to Crown Heights. When I walk into the grocery store there, I bump into two friends. We're

The petrifying, frightening thought creeps in again. Will we ever merit to be parents?

chatting when the nurse calls with news. I'm too afraid to pick up, so I continue chatting with my friends and wait for her to leave a message. When they walk away, I open up my voice messages. I go numb from the familiar sound. Was the news ever going to be positive? My spirit was so crushed that I couldn't even call my husband. I just forwarded the voicemail and waited for him to listen on his own.

It's 7:30 AM. I am practically asleep as I drive to the clinic. It's the third time this week that I'm going for monitoring. I pull up, park the car, and say hello to the man who's vacuuming the floors — he recognizes me. I'm called in by the kind nurse I see all too often. They call me into the exam room. I sit on the table and wait for the doctor to come. He knocks gently before entering, we talk for a minute, and then he does the ultrasound. We check out how my body is reacting to the medication, and based on what he sees, the doctor instructs me when to trigger. We go through the steps, and I leave.

It's 6:30 PM. I am crying on the couch. I can't believe this cycle didn't work. I *davened* so hard and it went nowhere. And most of all I feel all alone. Literally so alone, I don't see any value in life if this keeps on failing.



I feel especially purposeless because everything we learned was to prepare us for this mission — to be a mother. Many *halachos* are adjusted based on the assumption that women have children to care for, but what happens when they don't? There seems to be little space for women who do not have children, and it hurts.

It's 1:30 PM. My phone is ringing from my most frequently contacted caller — Pat, my nurse. She says the blood work came back normal so I should continue injecting myself, albeit with a few adjustments. I receive another call just as I'm hanging up. It's Sarah, my counselor from Bonei Olam. She's calling to find out how things are progressing.

It's 5:00 PM on Erev Shabbos. My husband calls from the pharmacy. There's an insurance issue and they won't give him the pills I need for the month. If I don't get the meds before Shabbos, I will lose another entire month of treatment. With less than an hour to play with, we both get on the line with insurance. For 30 minutes we go back and forth, being put on hold by different people on the phone. I am crying, a complete wreck. Our Shabbos guests will be coming soon, and meanwhile, I'm falling apart from anxiety. With literally a few minutes to Shabbos, my husband walks in the door with a bag — he convinces the pharmacy to let him pay out of pocket. A huge weight lifts. Thank you, Hashem.

It's been quite the ride. I live in anxiety, worried and concerned, wondering what will be. What will the next

My spirit was so crushed that I couldn't even call my husband. I just forwarded the voicemail and waited for him to listen on his own.

phone call bring? What does this funny twinge in my stomach mean? And I've learned a lot along the way.

I've learned to take things one day at a time. Some procedures can only be scheduled a day or two in advance, because intense monitoring must be done to time things perfectly, so I don't know one day from the next. So much is up in the air. When's my next procedure? Will I have to cancel my women's circle? How will my body react this time? Should I invite guests for Shabbos or will I be in the hospital on a Friday morning? It's pushed me to live in the moment. Today I woke up healthy. Today I'm feeling good. Today was productive. Today was a good day. And when the days aren't good, I know it's just a matter of time until the day passes. I can make it through. Living in the moment also taught me an entirely new meaning to gratitude. I've never been as grateful as I am these days. I've learned how to appreciate every big and little *brachah* that Hashem showers me with.

I learned a lot about faith. Probably more than anything, I have discovered what real *emunah* is. I am unbelievably honored to have been born into a Lubavitcher family and been taught the teachings of the Rebbeim, which shed light on *emunas Hashem*. I didn't come to any conclusions, very far from it. It's a process. But I'm learning what it means to believe in Hashem when a lot of things seem unclear. *Yiddishkeit* has become more real to me. Specifically during the chaos, I feel lucky and privileged to have Torah as a guide. I try to study a lot about this topic of *emunah* and *bitachon*. It's a very difficult topic to delve into, because it requires me to get in touch with a very deep part of myself, which takes a lot of concentration. I do believe that Hashem put us in this situation for a reason, and that this challenge is bringing out a part of me that wouldn't have been accessed otherwise. I can't say I fully see this as good, although I do believe that there is something much larger that I am part of and for whatever reason we were chosen to carry this load. I constantly think about how I hope this will shape me into a better person, because I believe that this is part of what needs to happen.



I am also certain that whenever Hashem wants me to get pregnant, and for us to become parents, it will happen. The treatments and the medicine are important, but although it may seem like we control the situation, I know that a “successful cycle” will only come when Hashem decrees. Knowing this is relieving. It’s stressful to feel like you have to make all the decisions and determine the future, so knowing that it’s completely not up to me takes the pressure off. I know that it’s not the treatment that will get me pregnant. It makes me think of one of my favorite quotes from Pirkei Avos, “לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה.”

I know it’s difficult for you that I’m usually silent

I do believe that Hashem put us in this situation for a reason, and that this challenge is bringing out a part of me that wouldn’t have been accessed otherwise.

about all of this. But I’m silent because you’re the only one I can be silent with. Most days I drain all my energy talking to the doctor, the nurse, the *rov*, and the Bonei Olam counselor, so after that I don’t usually have the energy that sharing takes. It’s also incredibly private. While infertility is *also* a medical condition, it’s not *only* a medical condition, and that’s something that I think many people forget. It’s something that involves the most vulnerable, intimate, and deeply private parts of a person’s life. So, I don’t want to discuss it with you just as you won’t want to discuss your marital challenges with me. And on a side note, sometimes, I’m scared to open up. If I do, I’m afraid I may crumble, and I’m not ready for that to happen.

So, what should you do if you are not part of the very small pool of people who can directly help this situation? (Namely *Rabbonim*, doctors and organizations that provide financial or emotional help): Everyone experiences challenges differently and there often isn’t one right way to respond. The following reflect my personal experience and preferences:

BE SENSITIVE. Try not to make insensitive comments. A friend and I were talking right after she had a baby. “Can you imagine how crazy it would be if

I got pregnant again right away,” she asked. “Two babies so close together!” I laughed with her and agreed that it would be crazy, but what I wanted to say was, “No, I can’t imagine it at all!” Yes, please speak about your life, including about your children, but try to be mindful.

BE NORMAL. There’s a lot to life, other than pregnancy and kids, so let’s bond over that. The conversation doesn’t have to be tense or pretentious. There’s plenty to talk about, so let’s talk!

SHARE YOUR NEWS. We are hypersensitive so we know when you’re trying to hide it. If you’re telling everyone that you’re pregnant, please tell me! It’s nothing to feel bad about, it’s exactly what is supposed to happen, we’re all expecting and hoping for our friends and families to have babies:). Personally I prefer if you tell me over text so that I can process it on my own without having to react right away, but that’s just my preference. Others may prefer a sensitive conversation.

DON’T BRING IT UP. Everyone is different, and it may be important for you to reach out generally at some point and let your relative or friend know you’re there for them if they need. But my feeling is, if I want to unload on you, I will find my own way. You don’t need to start the conversation, even if you’re trying to create an opening for me to unload. This is especially important because you have no idea what’s happening



at that very moment. I may be just recovering from an invasive procedure or maybe I'm anxiously awaiting a call from my doctor.

DON'T TELL ME THAT YOU'RE DAVENING FOR ME. It's so kind of you to be part of *Tehillim* and Nishmas groups. Although others may feel differently, I prefer that you please not let me know that you're davening for me, or that you had me in mind while you gave birth to your baby because it's an *eis ratzon*. It's kind of awkward to have to say "oh wow, thanks so much for splitting the *Tehillim* for me!":)

You may laugh at this, but please DO NOT LOOK AT MY STOMACH. Practice looking at people's faces ONLY. It's super hard, I worked on it a lot. It's also a nice trait, regardless of everything else. No matter how swift-split-second you are about it, I can pick up on it. It's terribly humiliating to see everyone looking at my stomach and to feel the need to suck in, just because I ate some extra dessert last night and my stomach is bulging now.

THE LESS YOU ASK, THE BETTER. Questions like "Do they know whose issue it is?" are completely inappropriate. Do you really think I'm going to tell you? Also, prefacing it with "You don't have to answer if it makes you uncomfortable" is not helpful. That's already uncomfortable. If I want to share, I'll find a way to.

DON'T GIVE ADVICE. Suggesting a medication or a natural approach method is unhelpful at best and

I know it's difficult for you that I'm usually silent about all of this. But I'm silent because you're the only one I can be silent with.

unnerving at worst. I spend my mornings, nights, and in between, on the phone with everyone who can help me. Do you really think I never heard about that medication or an alternative to medicine approach? While some may feel differently, and might welcome sensitive suggestions, proceed with caution.

DON'T ASK ME TO BE KVATTER. Some women appreciate the opportunity and *segulah*. Personally, the first time I was a *kvatter* by someone's *bris* was a few months after my wedding. I was honored to have the *zechus*. But as time went on, I did not appreciate being offered to be *kvatter* by *brissim*. So many hours of my day are consumed with me dealing with infertility — early doctor appointments, afternoon phone calls, etc. My nephew's *bris*, for example, is my oasis in time. I am excited for the two hours I have to relax with my family and forget about my infertility. But when you ask me to be *kvatter*, this precious time turns into time that I once again spend reflecting on my challenging situation.

LET'S HAVE FUN! It's a lonely journey and I need healthy social interaction more than ever. Arrange a lunch date or see if I'm available to go out one evening with only one goal in mind: having a blast together! You can't help me navigate infertility, but you can certainly help me detox and get in a good dose of laughter.

This ride has kept us busy with a mix of indescribable fear and pain and overwhelming gratitude. Everyone has their challenges, and I never once wished to switch spots with anyone, as I feel incredibly lucky for all the beautiful *brachos* that Hashem showers me with. I'm grateful for the upside of this challenge, having more time to bond with my husband (by now, though, Hashem, we've got this covered - we're ready for the kids!) And while it means so much to me to know that my family wants to help, there isn't really anything that anyone can do - so my preference is not to talk about this. I hope that very soon we will all be *bentched* in a revealed way, with the *brachos* we are all waiting for. ■





PROUD SUPPORTERS OF

Bais Rivkah

DOVID BERNEY

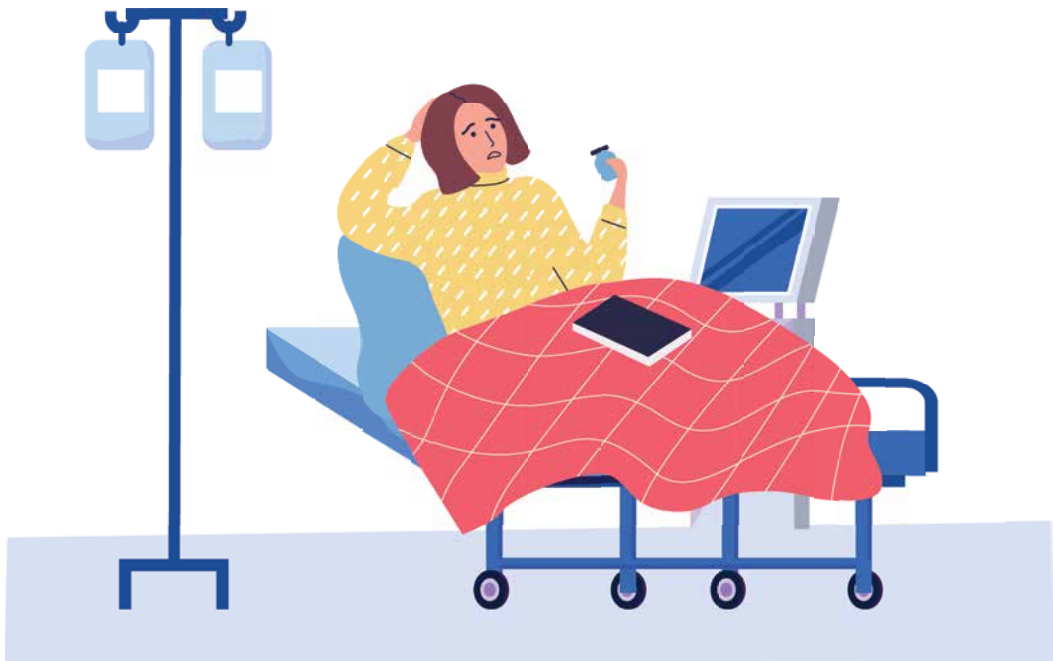
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Letting Go

Golda (Lew) Junik, London, England
Graduated Seminary Class of 5748 (1988)



Have you ever experienced that ‘Aha Moment’ when you recognized how a challenge led to something greater? Did you ever overcome a difficulty by looking for the message that it conveyed?

As I go through life, I strive to recognize the Divine Hand that leads me. I seek out the wisdom within each situation and how I can use a particular challenge to enhance my *Avodas Hashem*.

This past Kislev, I was struck with Covid. Although I was feeling unwell, with fever and no taste or smell, I was grateful that these were just uncomfortable symptoms that I could manage. I was forced to get off the merry-go-round of my hectic life and to rest. During that first week of my illness, I had time to think, and I wondered what message Hashem was trying to send me. I thought about it as I willed myself to recover quickly without the virus escalating into a more severe stage.

One morning I received this text from my dear friend, Leah Namdar:

“Goldie, I dreamed of the Rebbe last night, and you were there! *Es zol zein a gutte siman!*”

Little did Leah know that at that very moment, I was hospitalized with Covid, afraid, alone, and feeling helpless.

It had come as quite a shock when I deteriorated quickly and was hospitalized, requiring oxygen support to draw each breath. There I lay, alone and so weak that it was difficult even to hold the phone to reach out to my family or advocate for myself. I knew that only Hashem could get me through this and that I needed to find the strength and the will to fight to live. I was extremely blessed and fortunate to be surrounded by a very dedicated team of doctors and nurses. They worked tirelessly and selflessly

On the very evening of my admission, Leah had dreamed of the Rebbe and me.

to treat me and all those around me, despite being rushed off their feet. I truly felt these were angels disguised as humans, acting as Hashem’s messengers to facilitate healing.

And on the very evening of my admission, Leah had dreamed of the Rebbe and me. “Oh wow!” I responded, “that’s so beautiful. I’m actually in the hospital with Covid. I now have my *brachah* from the Rebbe.” I was too weak and breathless to speak, so Leah then wrote out her dream in vivid detail. She was at the Ohel with many people, and the Rebbe was also there, in person. Leah described how her *Pan* was very thick and contained many names. She went outside the Ohel to see the Rebbe himself, looking so marvelously well.

“While I was waiting, suddenly the middle page of my loosely folded *Pan* flew away over a barbed wire fence! Before anyone could say a word to stop you, you were bravely running and scaling the fence to retrieve that missing page from the *Pan*. When you handed the paper to me I saw that it was, in fact, YOUR handwriting; it was your *Pan*, Goldie!”

Leah continued: “In my dream, I was so amazed and said, ‘Goldie, you had *mesiras nefesh* to help someone

Ordinarily an energetic, active woman, I was reduced to sleeping most of the day due to post-viral fatigue.

else, and it turns out that you helped yourself!’ And so ended the dream.”

This exchange was a lifesaver; I experienced such relief and calm and truly felt that the Rebbe had sent me a message. This whole ordeal had been very frightening and traumatic, but *Baruch Hashem*, I was now armed with the Rebbe’s *brachah*, and I knew that whatever happened, I had the power to fight, stay connected and make it through this *nisayon*.

In my efforts to channel positivity and inspiration, I offered all the hospital personnel who entered my room a coin to give to *tzedakah*. Doctors, nurses, cleaning and catering staff, everyone felt empowered when I offered that they could do something to aid my recovery. I also explained to them that when we *daven* for someone in a similar situation, Hashem will answer us too.

Being in that situation allowed for the opportunity to inspire others, to demonstrate how a Yid conducts himself, in every manner or struggle, by being mindful and deliberate, with acts of goodness and kindness. How our every action connects with Hashem, and how Hashem loves to hear our *tefillot*, whether they be for ourselves or others, and we end up helping ourselves through a positive and intentional mindset. Taking that message to heart for



I was trying to control the situation.

myself, it's clear to me that Hashem put me into that situation to inspire others, and make connections that continue to unfold.

Towards the end of my hospital stay, a new roommate was admitted. We became friends, and I learned that she was Jewish. I helped her order *kosher* food and put in great effort to be *mechazek* her. Before I left, I gave her a picture of the Rebbe and took her number, hoping to stay in touch. *Baruch Hashem*, more than five months later, we still communicate regularly and have subsequently met up. She has often mentioned how my positive attitude and my comforting and reassuring words supported her through her recovery. *B'hashgacha Protis*, it turned out that the connections run even deeper as we discovered that her sister teaches in our community nursery, Gan Menachem.

Although, *baruch Hashem*, I was discharged from the hospital, my recovery did not go as expected. I was frustrated and felt trapped. Ordinarily an energetic, active woman, I was reduced to sleeping most of the day due to post-viral fatigue. I was suffering from severe brain fog-- at times, even unable to string two words together--with shortness of breath and constant infections due to a weakened immune

system. Was this what I fought for? I felt betrayed by my body and did not know how to cope with my limitations. I davened that Hashem should direct me and enlighten me on the purpose of my recovery. I begged that this illness should miraculously disappear. I lacked the energy to pull myself into a positive mindset but knew it was the only way I could overcome this challenge.

I recalled Leah's dream with the Rebbe again, and I worked to find the strength and support I was desperate for. I verbalized my frustrations with those close to me and tried finding good in the situation. I committed myself to saying extra Tehillim in the *zechus* of other sick people and I grasped at anything that would help me come to terms with my limitations and enlighten me as to what Hashem wanted of me. I was trying to control the situation.

One evening I was suddenly struck with an epiphany: Golda, you keep thinking this will lead to something good, that Hashem has a plan, and that this bad thing will make you stronger and more resilient. But you're forgetting one thing. Nothing from Hashem is NOT good. So I began recognizing how my struggle itself was a GIFT from Hashem! Not just that the results of the struggle will be good but that the challenge in and of itself is GOOD! This thought was a game-changer for me. It was a massive paradigm shift, one which enabled healing and *menuchas hanefesh*.



You can be uncomfortable with displaying something not to your taste, or you can learn to appreciate it because someone who loves you so dearly chose this for you!

I even created an analogy for myself which helped me accept all these months of ups and downs, setbacks and advances. Months of frustration, anger, and disheartenment. Imagine someone very close to you, who loves you very much, comes to visit and brings you a gift. You unwrap this present and discover the most shockingly gaudy vase. You can't think of anything worse than the pattern, design, and appearance of this vase. You can't throw it out or even give it away, and you can't even put it away in the back of your closet and forget it. In fact, you have to keep it in your house! On full display! The following week your relative comes over again, this time carrying a huge bouquet of fake flowers, even uglier and tackier than the vase itself. You now have a choice. You can be uncomfortable with displaying something not to your taste, or you can learn to appreciate it because someone who loves you so dearly chose this for you! So you learn to make it work and learn to appreciate its beauty (or lack thereof).

I realized that I was feeling stuck in this situation and pushed against the proverbial wall. I could be upset and complain, or I could learn to appreciate the challenges I have been BLESSED with. Covid was my unwanted gift; I didn't ask for it; I was not too fond of it; in fact, I was frustrated with it. And the long-term residue of the illness was an added, even more hideous, unwanted gift. With extra frustration and pain. But it was given to me by the One Who loves me with infinite love, and so I will learn to accept and appreciate it with love.

As someone who has always been active and organized, I have constantly pushed my limits (and beyond) to complete my myriad of responsibilities. I strove not to waste a second while filling my time suitably. Of course, the priority has always been towards my husband, family, and running the home. My daily schedule would include running a school, community, teaching, *chesed* projects, counseling individuals and families, in addition to personal study. I was unstoppable; nothing felt too much for me or

stood in my way.

For a while, people would tell me to slow down and take time away from everything I was doing. I always said to myself that one day I would relax and ease up on all my responsibilities, but for now, there was too much to accomplish. And I was driven to keep on going and to keep on giving. To keep utilizing my time to its fullest. And then I was forced to stop! I was not given a choice. Everything came to an abrupt standstill. Since being diagnosed with Covid, I have not been able to keep up with my commitments. I have been unable to be there for my family, unable to work. I have been forced to slow down.

Once I recognized that this was a gift from Hashem, I began to appreciate my life's lack of stress and frenzy. I am learning to pace myself, listening to my body, and enjoying a slower, more meaningful way

I am learning to pace myself, listening to my body, and enjoying a slower, more meaningful way of life.

of life. I am learning to tap into my gift and use it to recognize *Yad Hashem*. I have created new friendships with other Jewish women I have met during my subsequent visits and stays in the hospital, helping them and supporting them through their journeys. I see it as my *shlichus* at this time to bring them closer to Hashem.

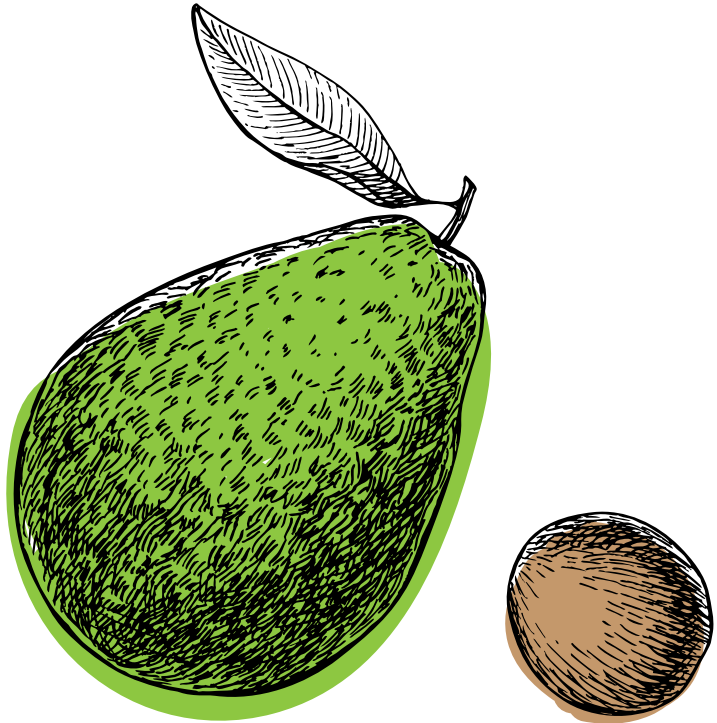
And most importantly, I am learning to let go. To allow Hashem to run His world precisely as He sees fit. To connect to Hashem on a different level. One of awe and love, grateful every moment for the gift of life and all the other gifts Hashem chooses to endow me with. ■

I am happy for people to be in touch with me for support or advice in connection with Covid, Long Covid or any chronic illness.

To contact Golda Junik, email Goldie@Junik.org or WhatsApp +447946377262

Tree Trimming

Danit (Friedman) Schusterman, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5757 (1997)



When we moved into our home in Maui, Hawaii almost 16 years ago (we don't currently live there anymore), aside from the incredible bicoastal views and lots of space, one of the best things about this house was the huge avocado tree growing in the backyard.

This tree gave the most delicious, buttery avocados I have ever tasted. The avocados were huge, about the size of a large grapefruit, and some years, we had so many avocados we had to send friends home with 8-10 avocados each time they came over.

I lived on these avocados when I was nursing my first child, absolutely terrified to eat anything that might cause the poor baby indigestion or any other side effects I had read about.

Fresh mashed avocado was the very first food for all of my kids.

On Pesach, we always had an abundance of the most delicious avocados.

This tree was so huge, it cast a massive shadow over our back porch, giving it a natural shade from the strong Hawaiian sun. It was truly our magical tree. Until one day when the Maui Health Department arrived on our doorstep, telling us that our dear avocado tree was too large and needed to be trimmed for various reasons.

In New York, you get in trouble if you don't shovel the snow off your sidewalk. In Maui, you get in trouble when your trees are too high. Go figure. Okay, we didn't actually get in trouble, we just had to take care of it right away.

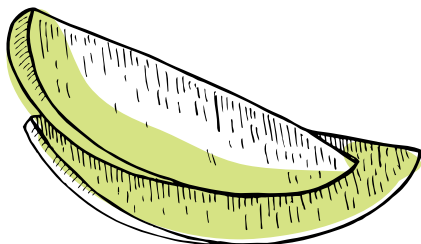
So, along came the tree trimmer. A trimmer. You go to the salon for a trim and she cuts an inch off, maybe two. Apparently, tree trimming in Maui means cutting most of the tree down leaving just the trunk and a few stubby branches.

It was so depressing to see. I know, it's just a tree you say. But this was a huge gorgeous tree, now just a brown stump. Okay, not a stump, it's still the tree but imagine a huge tree with no branches or leaves. I was sad. The kids were all sad. Anyone who came over who looked at our tree got sad too.

Well, the tree trimmer didn't seem too concerned. And any of our friends who knew anything about landscaping and trees would exclaim, "Wow, that is the best thing you could have done for that tree!" "It's going to grow back and be so much healthier!" "Your next avocados are going to be insane!"

Yeah, okay, whatever. The tree is gone, stop trying to make me feel better. It's really not working.

But...



A few mornings after the tree was cut down, I noticed this rather unusual influx of monarch butterflies flying around the yard. The kids would lay in the grass and have butterflies fly all around them and land on their noses. We soon discovered a tree that had been somewhat smothered by the avocado tree was now just blossoming, and I guess it was a tree that butterflies eat from and build their cocoons on, because after cutting the tree, our garden was filled with these gorgeous butterflies.

It was so depressing to see. I know, it's just a tree you say. But this was a huge gorgeous tree, now just a brown stump.

And then the next morning, sitting at the kitchen table, the sun just came streaming in, creating this really gorgeous warmth. A warmth that had been blocked by this huge tree all these years.

Not only that, after about a month, I started to notice these tiny green shoots coming out of the cut branches. These shoots eventually turned into full-on luminous,



green leaves.

I guess the tree trimmer wasn't just a chainsaw happy meanie who destroyed our tree. I guess he knew what he was doing. Because since then, our tree looked really happy. And we had sunlight at the breakfast table. And there were butterflies flying around our garden all day. I started to feel like it's all going to be okay.

Kind of like life.

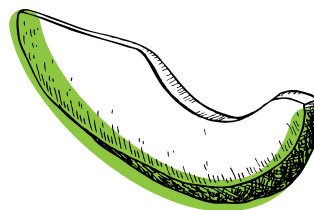
Sometimes, it seems like things are really good. And then something happens where it seems really really not so good. And it makes us really sad. We reminisce about the old life we had. How we wish things could just go back to the way they were.

But little do we know, that what seems really difficult is actually Hashem's way of making us stronger. It's Hashem's way of bringing in the butterflies and the sunshine and the new brighter leaves.

It's called having faith. We ask that Hashem should only send revealed good to everyone, but the next time you feel like a tree that has just been cut down, hang in there.

Hang in there really tight, because Hashem truly does have a plan. An intricately detailed blueprint for each of us.

Hang in there really tight, because Hashem truly does have a plan. An intricately detailed blueprint for each of us. Our job is to be ready and open to receiving the good and the *brachos* Hashem is prepared to give us, even amongst the difficulties. ▀



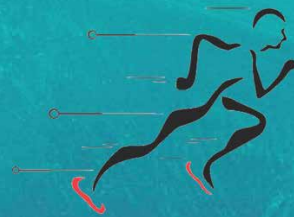
Danit Schusterman is the author of A Jewish Homeschool Blog, a 4th-grade teacher in Bais Rivkah, and an Education Consultant. She helps parents advocate for their children in the school system.



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What *am I* Missing?

Mushka (New) Krasnjansky, Maui, Hawaii
Graduating Class of 5772 (2012)



i dream i am driving with my babies in the backseat. it feels all wrong. i realize with horror i am sitting in the passenger seat with the gas and brake pedals at my feet but no steering wheel.

i start to panic, there are other cars on the road, i must keep moving, but with no steering wheel i cannot control where we are going. what will i do? what will happen?

i wake cold and desperate
and i am handcuffed

the sweetest and stiffest chains known to human

you need more housekeeping help you need a babysitter you need a preschool you need a chabad house you need a bigger house you need to take care of yourself you need boundaries you need to talk to your husband you need to organize you need to create better structure and routine you need to do more events and programs you need to just focus on home you need to read this book hear this podcast listen to this lecture you need to start learning again you need to do laundry you need to bake healthy snacks you need to communicate you need to write to the Ohel you need to *daven* you need to breathe you need to get off instagram for good you need a support system you need to host you need community playthings furniture you need to make play dates you need to exercise

im melting

a sweaty panicky puddle of polluted expectations

what am i missing??

hiding deep down under this desperate, suffocating morass of needs and shoulds is something

Someone?

so begins the great gritty labor

it is not pretty

it looks nothing like i want it to look

and that is painful

baby steps, toddler steps - falling, skipping in one place, standing on my head

steps, nonetheless

surrender, healing, trust; such clean words

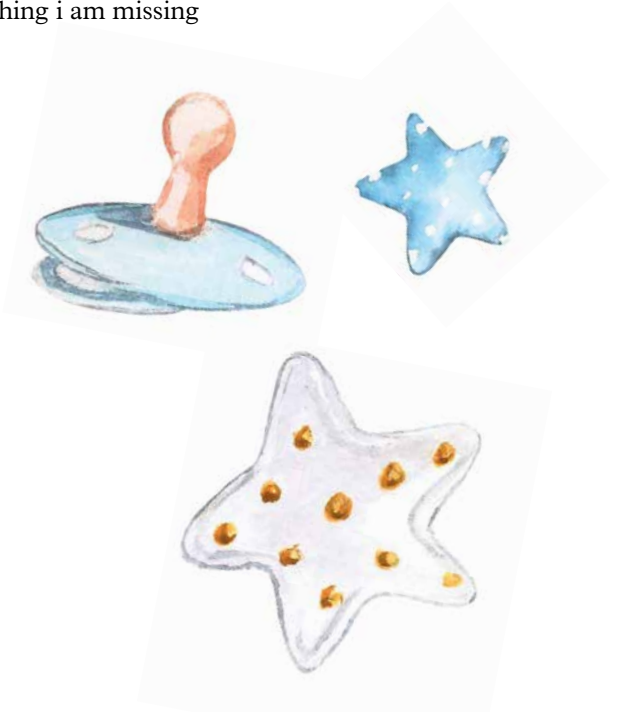
to define a sink full of dirty dishes, sticky floors

and me,

sitting under a precarious blanket structure tickling twenty tiny toes

and there it is-

the thing i am missing



my children are incredible. they demand me.

nothing more, nothing less

they demand my simple purity, my honest joy

they demand, and they deserve

me

to witness them - as they are, in their glorious untainted wholeness

as i am only able to do when i am gathered in,

when i have dusted off the illusory fragments of my ego's foolish pursuits

only then, in my own soul's calm, quiet presence

we are sure, we are safe, we are holy

and i am seeing how that is what this life, my G-d wants, too

just me.

and so, i am being found ■



What Makes

A Great

Tanach Teacher?

Mrs. Leah Kahan

*Erev Shabbos Nachamu
Shnas Nifla'os Avenu*

Dear Morah Kahan,

*We, the Bais Rivkah family,
administration, faculty, alumni, and
students join Klal Yisroel and the
Lubavitcher world in nichum aveilim
for Reb Yoel Kahan z"l.*

*Morah Kahan - from you we learn
to be passionate and adamant about
making the Rebbe's reality our reality.
Please continue to teach and inspire in
good health and good energy.*

On behalf of your colleagues.

Mrs. C Gorovitz



**In honor of Morah Kahan, we are sharing one of her handouts ->*



ime and all of me. Wh

ows me to travel to where it all took place. She makes me see the people who were there; hear their voices, feel their pain, enjoy their victories, and helps me experience the moment. I have a chance to take in many details and create a whole picture. She encourages, yet does not allow any sloppiness. I feel that I want to do my best. I feel a relationship with the people I have learned about; I identify with them, learn from their mistakes, and become inspired by their accomplishments. Many times I wish that I could have lived in the times of the people we are learning about.

en she has finished all of her research, everyone receives a complete picture of who I was, what I did, all the reasons behind these actions, and the circumstances surrounding them. She explains why I am mentioned in those holy pages. I don't always come out looking good, but I do come out looking right. I feel that nothing in my life was wasted, because whatever I have done, now serves as a double example. Sometimes it's what to do in a difficult situation, how to overcome the temptations. While at other times, the lessons learned from my behavior show the class what NOT to do.

Fahmidah: The great

her transports me

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Hoda Lanza:

This teacher goes through a lot of trouble before presenting me to her students. She talks to and interviews anyone who has remote-

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ALUMNAE

Who, What, Where
Of Tanya, Shidduchim, and Substitutes



Chani (Hurwitz) Vogel, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5748 (1988)
Current substitute teacher in Bais Rivkah

EMBRACE: TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

Hi, my name is Chani Vogel. I am a grateful mommy to my three children, *B"H*. I am a proud Bais Rivkah graduate of 5748. My graduating class had 52 students. This year, 120 students graduated! How Bais Rivkah has grown!

I work as a substitute teacher in Bais Rivkah. I love what I do because I am in a very unique position to give unconditional love to every Bais Rivkah student from grades 1-12. I run a Tanya group, and I am a *shadchan* too. I also write professionally, and have written for the EmBRace magazine.

EMBRACE: A SUBSTITUTE? DON'T GIRLS MAKE TROUBLE FOR SUBSTITUTES?

As a former Bais Rivkah student turned Bais Rivkah

parent, I take pride in our school. I yearn to see success in every student. I love the girls, and they feel it. From the squeals of delight in the younger grades as they see me walking down the hallways and approaching their classrooms, to the vocal appreciation from the girls in high school, I get immediate gratification from the work I do. While I know that for some discipline is an issue, I am so grateful to Hashem that He chose me for His *avodas hakodesh*. At the end of the day, there are no shortcuts! If you genuinely love the students and care about them, then a firm hand in the classroom works.

EMBRACE: WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO DO WHAT YOU DO?

I see my work as the Rebbe's *shlichus*. I know that because I am working as a *Shluchah* of the Rebbe, he is my partner in everything, and that is what I attribute to my success. Even though I am a temporary teacher, I see what I do as life-changing for my girls, and that's why I put my heart and soul into every classroom I enter. Yes, there are *Shluchim* going out to all ends of the world, and they do the Rebbe's *shlichus*, but inspiring the future *Shluchah* in a Bais Rivkah classroom is just as important.

Before subbing in Bais Rivkah, I worked for Aleph Institute. I loved what I did there. I got to positively impact families of people who made mistakes in their lives. I was able to bring smiles to their faces amidst the insanity of their day-to-day lives. I remember one Friday, Erev Shabbos Nachamu, there was an important hearing, and I had to go to court. With a *tefillah* on my lips, I told Hashem that I was just His messenger, and that He should put the right words into my mouth. I had never spoken to a judge before, let alone the Chief Justice of Brooklyn! Quivering inside, I must

have said something right, because my client was released that day!

When I was reassigned to a different department at Aleph, I went to Bais Rivkah to substitute. Recently, the idea of going back to Aleph was on the table. I loved working there, but when I weighed my options, I realized that I can influence and help mold the future Aleph employee, future *Shluchah*, and most importantly, the future mommy of Bais Rivkah girls. My place is in Bais Rivkah.

EMBRACE: DID YOU EVER CONSIDER TEACHING ONE REGULAR CLASS?

I did that many years ago. I taught English to the graduating class of 5762, when they were in seventh grade. I actually broke all the rules of the day and became very friendly with my students. They would come over to my house for coffee on Shabbos morning just to chat.

Hashem gave me a special gift of connecting with girls and making them feel great about themselves. But teaching one class and one subject is not for me. Like this, I get to impact all the girls from 1st to 12th grade, and I love every minute of it! At most, I am in the same class for a few weeks, and then I am off to see the world through the next group of girls' lenses. Fulfillment works both ways.

EMBRACE: WHAT DID YOU LOVE ABOUT TEACHING ONE CLASS?

The relationships I forged with the girls. I felt very fortunate.

When one of my seventh grade students was in high school, she came over one Shabbos morning. She was on the verge of sliding down a slippery slope. We talked and talked. Years later, after her third child was born, I bumped into her on the street. She related to me that our relationship was the catalyst for her turning her life around, breaking away from her dangerous friendships, and *B"H* today she is happily married.

I will never forget a family trip to the Bronx Zoo one Chol Hamoed about four years ago. A former student of that same seventh grade class came up to me with her daughter and her husband. My former

student was already in seventh grade when I was the first person to realize that she could not read. She had slipped through the cracks in her *aidel*, quiet way. When I told her parents that she needed a tutor, they were adamantly against it. With Hashem as my guide, I began to tutor her myself. She would come over to my house in my free time, and I worked with her.

She then introduced me to her daughter very proudly, as she said her daughter had no reading issues, *B"H*. She is now a very involved mother because of her seventh grade experience.

EMBRACE: DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS TO HELP OTHER TEACHERS INSPIRE THEIR STUDENTS?

Stories! I prepare exciting stories to tell the girls. After we accomplish what the teacher wants us to, I reward the girls by telling them a story.

Last year, I taught the *shiur* in Bais Rivkah Day Camp. I told Mrs. Sara Blau, who was my director, that I would find out the theme of the week and tell *chassidische* stories to the girls that tied into the theme. At the end of the summer, I started feeling like maybe I should have done projects with my students. That week, my husband found a letter from the Rebbe stressing that stories are an important form of *chinuch*! It literally felt like the Rebbe was coming to tell me that I am doing the right thing. I pick stories that will have a real lesson in them as well as teach something that the girls don't already know. For example, I told the girls a story about a *sefardic* Torah. I showed them that it looks different than ours, but that is only on the outside. Inside, we are all a part of Hashem, and we are all the same.

EMBRACE: YOU SAID YOU RUN A TANYA GROUP. WHAT IS THAT?

Last *Shnas Hakhel*, Rivky (Losh) Levy contacted me. She was gathering a group of ladies to finish the entire Tanya every single day for 40 days in a row. I was hooked! After the first round was over, Rivky said that she was no longer able to run the group. Chana (Lew) Lipsker, a *Shluchah*, called me. She was adamant that we continue. I agreed. My husband and I wrote up

a spreadsheet to keep track of everything. Over 50 hours of work went into the first spreadsheet! There were about 78 ladies saying the entire Tanya, and some took as long as 45 minutes to say their part every day so we broke it up into manageable portions. I took to social media to get some more ladies. The response was fantastic! Another parallel group was started. During that second round, we saw some serious open miracles: secondary infertility babies, houses bought, and *shidduchim* made!

Since it was a *Hakhel* year, I made sure to include Yidden from every walk of life. *Chassidim*, *Litvish*, not-yet-shomer *Shabbos*, you name it. It was wonderful! Every time a day was finished, I would imagine all the *mitzutzim* (sparks) in the world being neutralized.

By the third round, Chana and I were running two groups, and another parallel group was formed by Chana Kaila Rabkin. She then started a group with Dvora Leah Gordon. This group was specifically for ladies looking for a *shidduch* for a loved one. *Shidduchim* exploded! Faigy Topp and Shayna Rochel Bialistok started another group. Rivky Levy did not take a long hiatus, and she began another group as well. There were about six parallel groups! I was constantly apprised of the life-changing effects of the Tanya groups.

Today, I have no idea how many groups there are. I stopped counting how many rounds we have done. I only know that the holy words of the Tanya are brought down into this world, and they give a *nachas ruach* to Hashem and our *Rebbeim*. As we come towards this upcoming *Hakhel*, I can't help but thank Hashem that this special project has accomplished many *Hakhels*, one day at a time.

As an admin of the Tanya groups, I was very busy with it. One day, my husband and I went to the Ohel. We don't usually watch the videos afterwards, but this time we did. Suddenly my husband's face drained of color, and he looked totally shaken up. It was alarming! "I just told the Rebbe that I want you to stop doing the groups because it takes so much of your time. Someone else can do it," he told me. When we went to watch the video, the Rebbe was saying that Tanya can affect the world in the most wondrous ways. A person can say Tanya here, and in another part of the world, a Yid can be affected in a positive manner. My husband got a straight answer. I would continue doing the Tanya groups, no matter how much time was involved.

About a year later, I got a call from Elisheva Engel

from Australia. She told me that when she came in for the *Kinus HaShluchos*, she saw her cousin Sara Feiglin saying Tanya and was interested in the Tanya groups. I told her that Australia is in such a different time zone that she would need to create a group just for them. She was happy to put in the work, so I shared my spreadsheet with her and helped her through the process.

In our initial conversation, I told her that she would see tremendous *brachos* from the group. She told me about her daughter in *shidduchim*. I decided to ask her about her daughter; I had a great idea! Less than a month later, her daughter was engaged to my nephew. While I had done a few *shidduchim* years ago, I became an active *shadchan* all over again! There was actually a *shidduch* made between two Tanya partners' children!

EMBRACE: HOW MANY LADIES DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE UP A TANYA GROUP?

Our group consists of 65 sets of partners, that we call Tanya sisters, plus a number of silent partners. A silent partner says a portion of someone's part if it is too long and the Tanya sister needs some help. We have a checklist every day to make sure that all the Tanya sisters have done their part.

EMBRACE: TELL US MORE ABOUT BEING A SHADCHAN.

At this point I have been *zocheh* to facilitate around 15 *shidduchim*, *B"H*, and when I look at the little ones that are born from those marriages, I am humbled. Anyone can have an idea. Ideas show up in the most random places, conversations, and thoughts. We have to catch them and work with them, and the rest is up to Hashem. When it is right, He will grant us *hatzlachah*.

Of course, *shadchanus* is hard. Last summer, I had six couples going out at one time, and none of them got engaged. Sometimes, I come up with a suggestion and it goes nowhere. I have to remember what the Rebbe Rashab said, that before a *neshamah* comes down to this world, Hashem considers who should be married to that *neshamah*, and various names are discussed. When it comes to getting married, that person has to have every name brought to them that sparked an interest in Shamayim. So in essence, my efforts are bringing them both one step closer to

their bashert.

Still, all the hours spent working on *shidduchim* and not seeing tangible results can be very discouraging. Logically, I know that Hashem chose me to bring the two names down into this world from above and He recognizes my efforts. Emotionally, however, it is hard to put in so much energy into something without the benefits of a success afterward. In frustration, I will tell the Rebbe that I want to stop. I am done!

It does not take long for the Rebbe to respond. I get the answer with a few really good ideas in my head. The feelings of humility, gratitude, and happiness collide when I see a couple on the street that I had the *zechus* to put together. I call their children my “grandies,” because although I am not a *bubby* to them, they make me remember how worthwhile my efforts are.

EMBRACE: WHERE DO YOUR SHIDDUCH IDEAS COME FROM?

They really come from everywhere, *B”H*. A few years ago, I was walking down Eastern Parkway towards 770 with a friend. As she was telling me about her daughter, I noticed the building where a certain *bo-*

chur’s relatives lived. My thoughts went to the relatives, then to the family, then to the mother of that boy, and I came up with the idea. How random is that? But we know that there is no randomness. That is how Hashem works; He makes it look like a natural thought progression. I am grateful to be His *shliach* for something so special.

EMBRACE: IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WANT TO LEAVE US WITH?

Sure. I believe that with substituting and teaching, intrinsically, girls know the truth. They are like precious flowers growing in a garden. The more we talk to them, the more love we show them, and the more attention we give them, the more vibrant their petals will be. Our love means that they will shine more and the more they will be able to give of themselves to others, like fragrant roses, spreading joy and happiness to all.

I invite you to join a Tanya group, think of a *shidduch*, or make a student feel good about herself. Together, we can conquer the world, one person, *shidduch*, or *perek* of Tanya at a time! ■



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FROM THE GROUND UP

Rivka Cohen, Crown Heights
Graduated Class of 5776 (2016)



I opened an online gold-filled jewelry store in Av of 5780 (August 2020). Building a brand from scratch has been exciting, rewarding, and challenging. During the course of this year I've played many rounds of this really fun game called guessing. I wrote out a list of eight things that have helped get my brand off the ground in an attempt to help you skip a few rounds. If you've been thinking about starting your own business, these tips may be helpful.

Tell everyone you know about your idea.

One of the best things I did when I came up with my first jewelry-related idea (which looked different from what Rivière is now) was talking about it. To everyone. I discussed the idea with friends, got their feedback and they became a part of the success. Discussing my thoughts was very helpful for two reasons. Firstly, my friends became my biggest supporters and pushed me to start the business. Secondly, they were so excited and supportive about the idea and the company that they became my “ambassadors” and Rivière’s most effective marketing.

Break down your vision into small steps.

Starting a business can feel incredibly overwhelming. It's important to break down your vision into something super small and bite-sized to begin. Say your dream is to create a *tznibus* department store—daunting, right? How about opening a website or a WhatsApp group where people can sign up to receive links of *tznibus* items that you've found online. Over time, your website may evolve into your dream department store, or once immersed in the field, your dream may begin to take a new form.

Start before you're ready; be prepared to own up to your mistakes.

If you've ever thought about starting a business, then you've read and heard this a million times. Start before you're ready. You'll make mistakes, which is awesome, because mistakes lead to growth! But, if you want your business to succeed, then it's important to be honest, own up to your mistakes, and take the loss instead of putting it on the customer.

Do something tangible as soon as the idea pops into your head.

Do a bit of research, ask around, create a website skeleton, make a logo. Do something to materialize the idea, and the rest will continue to flow. Either it will turn into something, or you'll scrap it and start again. Fun fact: I've worked on three other business ideas before Rivière. I had a twenty-three emails long exchange with a chocolate company in Australia about importing their products (I knew nothing about importing—honestly, I'm not sure how we had so many back-and-forths). I bought out a nut store to start a healthy dessert business (that was two years ago; my mother is still bringing up bags from the basement). I also sold custom sweaters and shirts, which I imported from a company in China that used kids' measurements for their adult sizes.

Always remember why you started.

I remember the first week after I opened my business; I had thirty-five orders to fulfill, *Baruch Hashem*, and I was going on vacation with my friends the following week (brilliant, I know. Launch a business and then fly away). All the merchandise I had bought to fulfill the orders was wrong, and to top it off, I had some jewelry-creating malfunctions. I was completely overwhelmed. I remember taking a step back and thinking, "I started this business to enhance my life; it's not going to be the cause of my stress." I really try to live with that. Obviously, there are times when it's stressful, like staying up until 2:00 AM and waking up at 6:00 AM every day for a week to fulfill orders (when it also happens to be the same week as a close friend's wedding). But overall, I try to make sure that the day-to-day tasks don't cause me (excess) stress by recentering and remembering why I started.

Don't lose sight of Who's really in charge.

This plays into the previous tip, but whenever I start to get stressed about something business-related, I

always stop to remind myself that Hashem is the one who determines whether I'm successful or not. I need to put in the work, but beyond that, it's not in my control. That thought is calming, and helps me have peace of mind.

Brand your product from the get-go.

The first order that I ever shipped was branded. I found someone on Fiverr to create my logo and asked her to send me the color IDs that she used and the font name. I then used that to complete all of my packaging pieces and website. While this was very amateur (my branding is still amateur—we just lost the "very" part), it created a cohesive look that people were impressed with. This helped me exceed my customers' expectations, making them happy customers who were more likely to refer the brand to their friends. If you don't have the eye to create your own branding, I think it is important to invest in this.

Customer service is key.

I don't have so much to say on this (*rambles for two pages*) aside that if you're not selling something wholly revolutionary and you're in a market where there is competition, customer service will set you apart from others. In marketing courses, you learn that 80 percent of your sales will come from 20 percent of your customers. The way to create a business that will continue to grow is to keep your current customers happy. It usually costs a lot less to keep old customers happy than to acquire new ones. Keep this in mind when communicating with your consumers. Their happiness is your success. ■

Hearing about people starting new businesses excites me. If you have any questions or think that I could help you in any way, feel free to reach out via email rioka@shopriviere.com.



A Taste of Bais Rivkah



Date: _____

Chanie (Halberstam)
Apfelbaum
Crown Heights

Graduating class
of 5758 (1998)

Chanie Apfelbaum is a food blogger, recipe developer, and food photographer. She is the author of the best selling cookbook, *Millennial Kosher* (Artscroll Mesorah Publications) and is currently working on her second book, to be released by Clarkson Potter, Spring 2023.



CHARCUTERIE STUFFED FIGS

- 15 fresh figs
- 2 cups chopped deli meat (see note)
- 1 Tbsp mustard seeds
- 2 Tbsp dark brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tbsp dijon mustard, plus more for garnish
- 1 tsp honey
- Pickled jalapenos, for garnish (recipe follows)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Trim the tips of the figs to remove the stems. Cut an X shape into each fig, as if you are cutting it into quarters, leaving the bottom intact. Set aside.
2. Add deli meat to a cold saucepan and saute over medium heat until the meat releases some of its fat, 6-8 minutes. Add the mustard seeds and toast for 1 minute. Add brown sugar, balsamic vinegar, dijon mustard and honey and stir until the meat is coated.
3. Stuff the figs with the charcuterie mixture and top with pickled jalapenos and dijon mustard.

NOTE: You can use whatever deli meat you have on hand. I used a combination of smoked turkey and salami.

PICKLED JALAPENOS

- 4 jalapenos, thinly sliced
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1½ tsp kosher salt

Add the jalapenos to a mason jar. In a small saucepan, bring the vinegar, water, sugar and salt to a simmer, stirring to dissolve the sugar and salt. Pour the hot brine over the jalapenos. Cool and store in the fridge for up to one month.



APPLE HONEY MUSTARD SALMON

This recipe came to me last week when I was preparing my salmon and I'm so glad it did because it's JUST. SO. PRETTY! I definitely have a thing with decorating a side of salmon, and I love how the apples resemble fish scales!

- 2 lb. side of salmon
- ⅓ cup apricot jam
- 2 Tbsp whole grain mustard
- 2 Tbsp Dijon
- 2 Tbsp honey, plus more for drizzling
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 red apple, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 green apple, seeded and thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- Juice of ½ lemon

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a small bowl, combine the apricot jam, mustards, honey, salt and pepper. Brush the mixture generously over the salmon. Decorate the salmon by overlapping the apples, alternating between red and green until the salmon is covered. Drizzle with olive oil, lemon juice and honey. Bake, uncovered, for 25 minutes, basting once with the pan juices during cooking.
2. Serve warm or at room temperature.

NOTE: I prefer this recipe served fresh, but if you want to prepare it a day ahead, you can serve the next day at room temperature (reheating cooked salmon tends to make it fishy and dry). ■

- BAIS RIVKAH - Tafent



שמחה בטהרה

Chani (Zalmanov) Vaisfiche,
Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5765 (2005)

How can I have pure joy
When troubles arrive
They block my way
They hold me back
They control me
Or wait!
Do they control me?
Or can I control them?
Maybe I can't control them.
But I can control my response to them.

Yes! There's a part of me that
can never be held captive.
I can dig deeper within myself
And discover that wellspring of true joy
From my pure, untainted soul
That deepest part of me where
Only the Infinite resides
And infinite joy!

*Reflections on the Rebbe's call to have simcha b'taharasa,
based on the sicha of Parshas Ki Seitzei 5748*

A MOTHER'S RESUME

Chaya (Hershkop) Stern,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Graduating class of 5766 (2006)

I'm a mother of three
and my day is busy as can be.
I'm a treasure keeper and scraped knee kisser.
I'm a baby whisperer, a planter, a baker.

I'm a bird feeder and a zookeeper.
I cook, I clean, I pay bills in between.
I have listening ears,
and I'm here for all the tears.
I'm a jungle gym but not a garbage bin.
I'm a teacher and a learner
and a school calendar scheduler.
I write glowing reviews for the *menorah* you
made and volunteer to drive in the Lag B'Omer
parade.

I hear you share about your day
and hope for the right words to say.

I'm a hairdresser, a waiter,
and a pizza warmer upper.

I'm a secret holder and a toy store shopper.

I'm an advice-giver and a problem solver.

I make menus and lists
and always give another kiss.

I clean up while you play
and wonder why the mess won't go away.

I do mountains of laundry
and endlessly nurse the baby.

I eat what you bake in school
and hope you followed some hygiene rules.



I hold worms and slugs
while you dig for more bugs.

I'm an entertainer and lost items finder.

I know the lyrics to all the songs,
and we have Alef-Bais sing-a-longs.

I scrape putty off my clothes
and wipe your runny nose.

We go biking and hiking, and fruit picking.

We play at the park, swim in the sea, and have
special time- just you and me.

I say *Shema* with you in bed, and collect the
books we just read. As day turns into night, I tell
you I love you and tuck you in tight.

I may complain about the things I need to be
and do, and then I hear you say, "I want to be a
mommy just like you."

Each morning I wake up and "*Modeh Ani*" I
pray; I thank Hashem with all my heart for an-
other busy day.

PRAYERS OF WOMEN ARE LIMITLESS

Naomi (Winner) Drizin,
Manhattan, New York
Graduating Class of 5773 (2013)

We pray with the words of the righteous,
The words of our hearts,
And sometimes, with no words at all.
Our *tefillos* are not limited
To words nor a space.
We daven in shul,
In our kitchen,
In the workspace,
In the car.

We open our siddurim:
"*Modeh Ani Lefanecha*"
"*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*"
"*Hashem Sefasai Tiftach*"
"*Refaeinu Hashem Veneirofei*"
"*Baruch Atah Hashem Shomeia Tefillah*"

When I send my child to school:
"Hashem, help my child make friends."
When I'm feeling stressed:

“Hashem, thank you for a husband who is calm.”

When I’m running errands as the stores are closing:

“Hashem, help me find a parking spot.”

When I’m expecting my second child and my friend is still waiting:

“Hashem, my friend needs a *brachah* for a baby.”

When I’m taking a walk on a beautiful day:

“Hashem, your world is glorious!”

When my business seems to be failing:

“Hashem, I need better *mazal*.”

When I’m planning an outdoor Lag B’Omer event:

“Hashem, don’t let it rain today.”

When I need the strength to be a mom:

“Hashem, give me patience to get through this tantrum.”

Important things.

Trivial things.

We turn to Him.

We sing.

We talk through our anger,

our joys,

our fears,

We daven through our disappointments,

our successes,

our tears.

As we bake *challah*.

As we light candles.

As we dip in the waters of the *mikvah*.

For strength.

For love.

For clarity.

For health.

For success.

For *parnassah*.

For connection.

For understanding.

For *nachas*.

For Moshiach.

We pray.

We beg.

We thank.

We cry.

We connect.

Our prayers are limitless.



KOL NIDREI

Sara (Herson) Brafman,
Morristown, New Jersey
*Graduating Seminary class
of 5744 (1984)*

Hues of blues and pink streak the sky

As the last rays of the sun disappear

beyond the horizon

Night falls

The pace of life slows

as all unwind from the day’s toil

Not so, though, for the shadowy figures

discreetly, briskly, ever so quietly,

making their way through the streets of Madrid,
Spain

Hearts pounding;

almost there...

Soon, they will join their brothers

in prayer

One by one, they enter

the secret cellars

It is the night of *Kol Nidrei*

The golden symbols dangling from their necks

tucked now beneath their clothes

Tonight

They will cease to live the lie

The dual existence

They are, always were, and will always be,

Jews!

Tonight, their hearts filled with searing pain

will cry out the words of *Kol Nidrei*

Tears will flow

Muffled sobs will reverberate,

filled with remorse over the oath they

were forced to take

They will annul those words

That vow to a foreign belief

Their words will ascend

And shake the very heavens...

Tonight we will recite *Kol Nidrei*

I pray with all my heart

that any vow I may have taken

be annulled

I pray that any words I have spoken

which in some way, any way,

inflicted pain upon another

be forgiven

By them

By You

Like foreign symbols hanging on golden chains,

Help me, Hashem, to remove them

To be cleansed of them, forever

Help me to forgive and to be forgiven

And though my tears may not shatter heavens

Let them mingle with those that do...

Hashem, see the innate goodness

and holiness of Your children

Please forgive

Help us to see those qualities in each other

Help us to live the truth

Today

Always...

Hashem, at long last,

Bring us and the entire world

to its ultimate purpose

Where the light that burns within all of Creation

bursts forth,

comes to life!

Let the duality

The darkness

The hiddenness

Turn into radiant, glowing light

Let *this* be the year of Geulah!

May we all be truly blessed with a *g'mar chasima tova, b'soch Klal Yisroel!*



EMBRACE MOMENTS



At a certain point in 10th grade, I was going through a bit of a rough time. Mrs. Chenny (Avtzon) Hus must have noticed that I was spacing out in class, not looking too happy, and she pulled me aside after class to talk to me. I remember how touched I was. It really gave me *chizuk*, and I'll never forget it.

Anonymous

Graduate of 5776 (2016)

.....

When I had a baby girl, Mrs. Gitty Rosenfeld bought me, at her own expense, a sweet outfit as a gift. I was very touched by how she acknowledged my *simchah* and made me feel valued as a staff member. Even though I currently don't teach, that moment has stayed with me.

A former elementary teacher

This story took place about 25 years ago, *Chof Beis Shevat* weekend.

I was a highschool girl, who came in from Pittsburgh, to join the Kinus.

I looked at the schedule and thought I read: Registration will take place at 11:30 in the lobby of Bais Rivkah High School, 310 Crown Street.

At 11:30, I walked into this huge building, with a very high ceiling. It was the first time I ever walked into the high school building. I felt a bit overwhelmed as the lobby was completely empty. Clearly, it was the wrong time.

I looked around.

I wasn't sure what to do.

I was alone and had nowhere to go.

Then a kind girl, with a sweet voice and a big smile offered to help me. I don't remember what she said, but I know I felt very cared for.

She brought me upstairs to her classroom. She was in the middle of Ivrit class. The girls were very sweet and I felt very welcomed.

Twenty five years later, and I remember the warmth I received from a Bais Rivkah girl whom I had never met before.

Thank you Rivky (Levy) Fogelman for taking care of me and for showing me the love and care that Bais Rivkah students have.

Shiffy Goldstein



Keepsakes

*Eighth grade class graduation
picture June 5721 (1961)*

Have more photos? Please send them to
alumni@bethrivkah.edu



Top Row L-R: Shoshi Gordon, unknown, unknown, Chana Heller, Malka Blonder, Chani Minkowitz, Cherna Pinson

Next Row L-R: Unknown, unknown, Rochel Blau, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, Rosalie Moskowitz, Toby Cytrin

Middle Row L-R: Don't know names of these teachers Zelda Weiss, unknown, Sabena Goldstein, unknown, Pearl Pupko, Mrs. Zirkind, Morah Blonder, Miss Garfinkel

Next Row L-R: Esther Gurewitz, Barbara Friedman, unknown, unknown, Eva Leffel, Libby Goldstein, Florence Kletzel

Sitting L-R: Faigy Shusterman, Alte Deutsch, Malka Reich, Dina Hennenberg, Osna Gurewitz, Rochel Buket, Shavy Wolf, Blima Fleisher

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THE TEACHER WHO REALLY MEANT IT

MEMORIES OF MRS. LAZAROFF A"H

By her student,
Chani (Benchemon) Belfer

As told to Alte Raskin,
Melbourne, Australia
Graduating Class of 5760 (2000)

"REBBE." "RUCHNI-
YUS." "TUMAH."
"KEDUSHAH."
"HISKASHRUS."

These concepts are so rich,
yet may be vaguely under-
stood. With such foundational
words being mentioned often,
a student can sometimes forget

to personalize these pivotal beliefs.

I will never forget the teacher who made them all real
to me.

In 5752 (1991), my classmates and I entered Mrs.
Lazaroff's 4th-grade class. With her sincere concern,
straight manner, and determined will, Mrs. Lazaroff
instilled values in a way I'll never forget.

We all knew Mrs. Lazaroff had injured
herself quite badly as a young lady.

Whether she had injured her
hip or foot was hazy, yet we
students knew she could
not stand for too long.

Despite her advanced
age and medical
history, no matter
what, Mrs. Lazaroff
paced up and down
the rows during
davening. There
she walked, up and
down the rows and





Mrs. Lazaroff with Bais Rivkah students by the Rebbe

up again, ensuring every finger was in the right place.

Her supervision was strict. Our fingers were only allowed to touch our *siddur*. If your hand brushed your leg, off you went to wash *negel vasser*. Once I touched my fruit roll-up in my backpack. Next thing I know, there was Mrs. Lazaroff. She took my fruit roll-up and sent me to wash. (And when my mother heard the story, she told me, “She is right. Listen to Mrs. Lazaroff since she is a very special woman.”)

She would quite often tell us the power we have. If there was any cause for concern, such as the Rebbe not feeling well, she would stop in the middle of



teaching. Out came our Tehillims as we pored over every word. We all clearly understood, even with the immaturity of a 4th grader, that our *davening* meant the world to her. Our *tefillos* mattered, so she paced the rows. And she never stopped monitoring *davening* throughout her teaching career; advanced age, weak legs and all.

Her defining character was her sense of justice, *tzedek*. That fruit roll-up she confiscated during *davening*? It was returned to me on the last day of school, along with all other knick-knacks. Any possessions she collected during the year were given back. She clearly remembered what belonged to whom. Each girl’s possessions were accounted for.

She was very straight. Every incident in class was a teaching moment. Who can forget the time she caught a girl copying answers on an Ivrit quiz? Mrs. Laza-

Despite her advanced age and medical history, no matter what, Mrs. Lazaroff paced up and down the rows during davening.

roff drilled the message home. “I’d rather you get an honest 0% than get 100%. It’s *terrible* to cheat. You do not need to know these words but you do need to know how to act and what to do.”

My class found out that parallel classes were translating Chumash into English. Well, we immediately began petitioning Mrs. Lazaroff to stop *teitching*. Clearly, we were not getting it, we claimed. Her response was classic Mrs. Lazaroff. “If you don’t know something, the Gemara says you need to review it 101 times. Not 99, not 100, *but 101 times*.” There was no way out. So, learn we did.

During partner time, Mrs. Lazaroff looked out for the girls who fell through the cracks. She made their partners first. When I interacted kindly with a girl who needed friends, Mrs. Lazaroff called my mother to tell her how proud she was.

She lived by what she taught us. Torah and Chassidus permeated everything she did and said. It *was* her. She constantly spoke about the Frierdiker Rebbe.

In fact, that was the reason she taught. After her leg injury, Mrs. Lazaroff was incapacitated. The Frier-

“I’d rather you get an honest 0% than get 100%. It’s terrible to cheat. You do not need to know these words but you do need to know how to act and what to do.”

diker Rebbe wrote to her that she should go back to teaching and she would live a long life. When she returned to the classroom, she should dance with the girls.

When *Shevat* rolled around, on the anniversary of that letter, Mrs. Lazaroff pushed away the chairs and desks and called us all to a circle. How out of character this was for our teacher! How unusual it was for us girls! Yet, with her true *hiskashrus*, she commanded us to dance. “This dance is what gives me *koach*. I know that if we dance now, I will be back next year to teach since it is the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *brachah*.”

Oh, we danced!

Recently someone posted on our class chat the most precious pictures. On *Yud Alef Tishrei* of 5752 (1991), Mrs. Lazaroff helped arrange a special trip to receive dollars from the Rebbe. This distribution was only for children under bar or bas mitzvah. Adults were warned to not try to sneak in line. When Bais Rivkah passed by, Mrs. Lazaroff stood right by the Rebbe, ushering students through.

We students came away debating who was older, Mrs. Lazaroff or the Rebbe? Throughout the distribution, the Rebbe showed Mrs. Lazaroff extraordinary respect. He waited for her to indicate when things should move along and she behaved very comfortably in front of the Rebbe. Of course, she seemed ancient to us and we knew she came from Russia. Could it be that she was really older?

While I still do not know the answer to that debate, her relationship with the Rebbe was markedly different from other adults we knew. While other authorities spoke to us about the Rebbe as a concept, a story, she related to the Rebbe on a very personal level.

Nothing showed us her direct connection with the Rebbe more than the incident with the Indians.

Our fourth grade English teacher was a sweet woman from Lakewood. One afternoon, she innocently hung

up a crude sketch of Indians around a campfire. The next morning Mrs. Lazaroff spied the addition on the wall.

She was shocked!

“How can we have such *tumah* in this school? How can there be a not-*tznius* image in the Rebbe’s school? How could the teacher allow this? Girls, what do you mean you didn’t know this is not acceptable?”

She tore the picture down.

A girl protested, “It’s just a painting.”

Mrs. Lazaroff faced the class, eyes ablaze. “What do you mean, this is ‘just’ a painting? How can you even look at this with your eyes?”



Mrs. Lazaroff with Bais Rivkah students by the Rebbe

The rest of the day’s lessons were put on hold. Instead, Mrs. Lazaroff told us stories of how she learned Torah in secret, hidden deep inside secret cellars in Russia. We listened wide-eyed. We had never heard of such adventures before! Mrs. Lazaroff was beside herself. She lectured us about the importance of a Torah-true *chinuch* until the English teacher showed up for the day.

Our *limudei kodesh* teacher was so sensitive to *kedushah*, the image truly bothered her. She meant every word she said.

Mrs. Lazaroff was horrified that this image was acceptable to anyone! “Do you know whose school this is? It is Bais Rivkah! The Frierdiker Rebbe’s school! When I go home I will call the Rebbe and tell him about this. This cannot be in any Jewish school at all. They should not be learning about the Indian culture.”

Nothing showed us her direct connection with the Rebbe more than the incident with the Indians.

Well, that solved the matter. If Mrs. Lazaroff said she would tell the Rebbe, we were all *sure* she would. We were convinced she had a direct line to his office.

I can't even tell you what an impression this incident had on the entire fourth grade. We knew we were under the care of a teacher who would fight for our *ruchniyus* wellbeing. She had an amazing backbone and was a real *chassidiste*.

Teaching was her life. Mrs. Lazaroff never wanted to leave the classroom despite the challenges she faced. There was a generation gap, a mentality difference, physical ailments, and audacious students. Yet, with the *brachos* of the Frierdiker Rebbe she persevered, implanting in us how our *ruchniyus* life matters more than all else in the world.

Ashreinu!

How lucky we were to be reared by such an incredible person! She meant what she said, what she lived, and what she taught, and now, my children get to live with Torah and Chassidus too. ■



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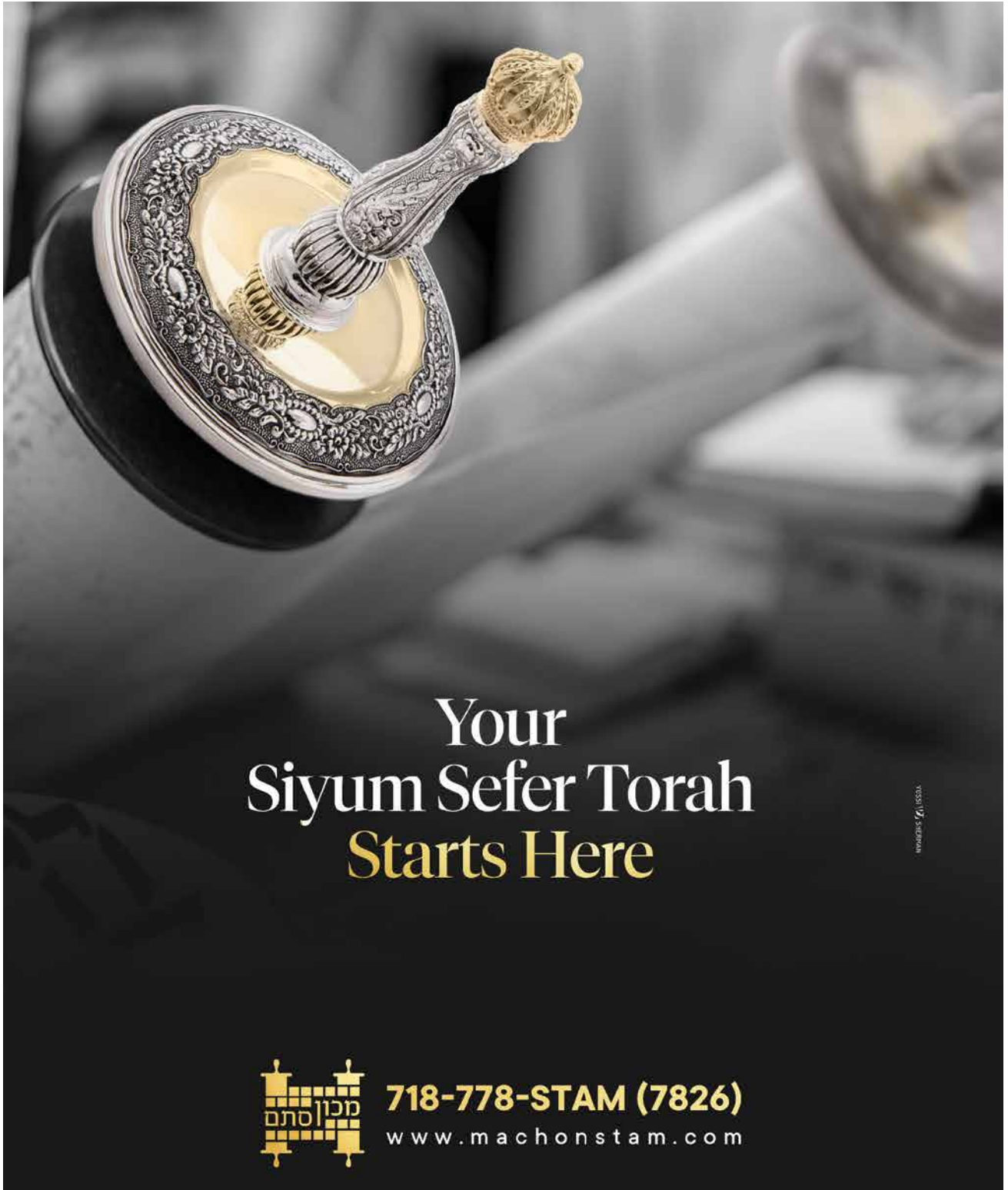
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