



FALL 5783

ב"ה Volume 4, Issue 1

EMBRACE

Uniting and inspiring the worldwide community of Bais Rivkah Alumnae



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**A WANNA-BE ATHEIST TURNED
BAIS RIVKAH TEACHER IS THANKFUL
FOR THE MEMORIES.**

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FIRST BAIS RIVKAH STUDENTS,
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**MANY CHILDREN CAN COME
ACROSS AS NEUROTYPICAL, BUT THEY
IN FACT HAVE MAGICAL BRAINS.**

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September 2022, Volume 4, Issue 1. EmBRace is published 4 times a year by Associated Beth Rivkah Schools. Postage paid at Brooklyn, NY and additional post offices.

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In the ever-growing, self-obsessed metaverse, Crown Heights is selfless.

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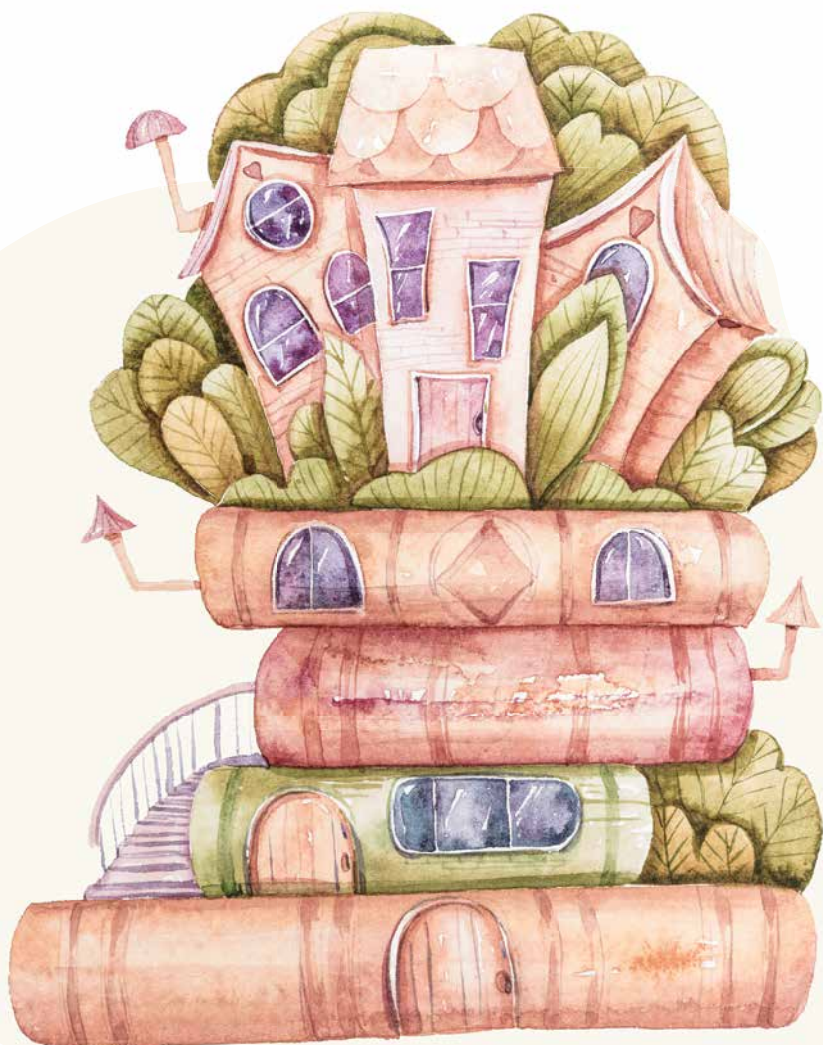
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INHERENT VALUE
Anonymous

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HACHI BABAYIT BA'OLAM

We are not in the business of impressing, but rather opening our home to allow others to see what goes into maintaining a frum, chassidic home and raising Chassidishe children, with Hashem's help.



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They might remember the delicious salad or the beautifully arranged bedroom, but most certainly and most importantly, they will not forget the warmth they felt being in your home.

ב"ה



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HOSTING WITH HIS HELP

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



I don't usually have guests in the summer. The summer is the busiest time of the year for me. Running camp along with multiple other responsibilities (such as getting this magazine out), by the end of the week, I simply crash and can't imagine whipping up a guest-worthy meal.

But then I got a different type of guest request. A fifteen-year-old teenage boy that I had met in California over Pesach texted me asking if he can stay at my house for two days. He was coming to New York to join the CTeen trip to Israel, and he needed somewhere to stay for that short time. I took a deep breath and responded, "Yes! Sure! Looking forward to having you!" and didn't really give it another thought. Until the morning of his arrival. It was Sunday morning, and he was coming Sunday night. The house was still filled with post-Shabbos mess, and I was feeling the stress coming on. But a guest was coming, and I figured I would do the best I could.

And then I saw a text on a local Whatsapp group. "Anyone need cleaning help just for today?" "No way!" I thought and immediately hit reply with a capital "YES!" I marveled at the *Hashgocha Protis*. I was feeling overwhelmed, and I felt like Hashem helped me out by sending the help that would put me at ease. By the time my guest came, I felt energized and relaxed to serve him dinner and chat.

As women, we always adjust with the cycle of life. When I had a baby two days before Rosh Hashona, I cherished the sicha of Chana not going to Shiloh while she cared for Shmuel. It was the time in my life to take care of my baby, not rush out to shul. Similarly, there are times when it is not practical or feasible to host guests. And then there are other times, when it may still be a challenge, but I persevere and put in the extra effort to fulfill this mitzvah.

Then there are other times, when it may still be a challenge, but I persevere and put in the extra effort to fulfill this mitzvah.

That does not mean we have to do it ourselves. Full disclosure: when my husband worked in Chovevei Torah and we had between five and twenty five bochurim for many, many Friday night meals (yes, getting a confirmation and exact number count is an article for another time), the bulk of the meal was catered food. The challah, the dips, and all the other time-consuming foods were store-bought. The most I was able to pull off was salads, soup, and a sprinkling of other items.

In this issue, you'll read about the beauty of the mitzvah of *Hachmosas Orchim*, as well as some tricks of the trade from women who host. Enjoy some recipes from Shluchos around the world and hear meaningful anecdotes and stories about the mitzvah. Get inspired as you read perspectives of hosting on shlichus, and what it is like to host in Crown Heights for the multitude of events and Shabbatons that are hosted here. But, the most important thing to remember is that Hashem does not ask you to host like Zushe, but to do the mitzvah in the way that [insert your name] can. And don't forget to ask Him for help. ■

Sara Blau

Sara Blau

From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

In the merit of hosting

5 Cheshvan, 5711, Brooklyn

The name of the recipient of this letter was not released.

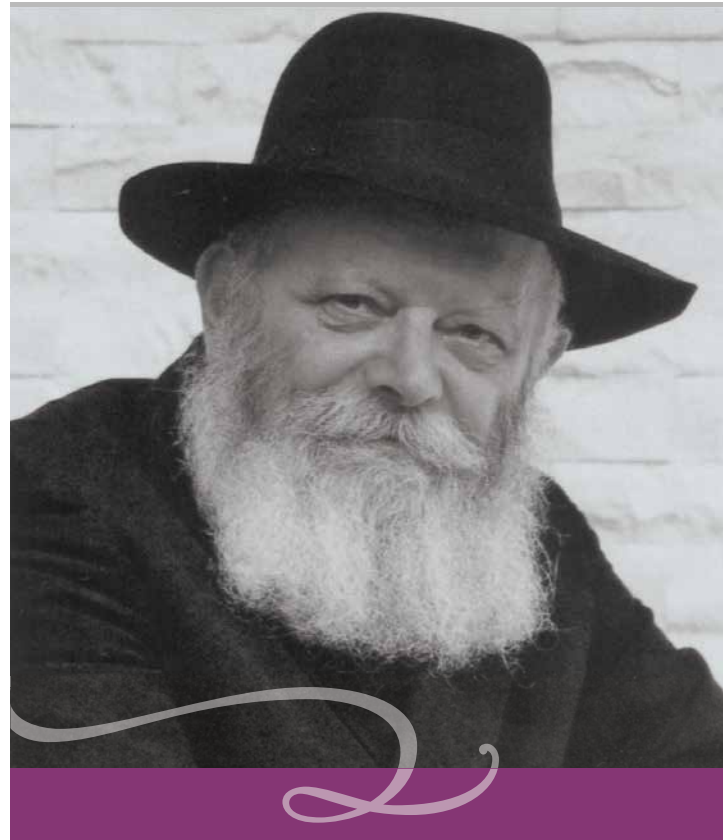
Greetings and blessings,

Ireceived your letter together with the pan. As you requested, I read it at the Ohel of my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, מ״ח, regarding your request to be blessed with viable offspring.

The “Tzaddik who has departed and who is to be found in all the worlds more prominently than during his lifetime” — as stated in the Zohar, Vol.III, p. 71b — will arouse mercy on your behalf to fulfill the desires of your heart for good.

I would be interested in knowing the opinions of the doctors in this regard. In my opinion, you and also your wife should consult doctors and act according to their directives.

I would also like to make a suggestion — based on the adage [told by] the Maggid of Mezritch to his student, the Alter Rebbe, the compiler of the Tanya and the Shulchan Aruch, when he asked him [for a blessing] for a son. [The Maggid] answered him, citing the wording of the verse: “With what will a youth... merit...” ([and interpreting it figuratively as:] “With what will one merit [a youth,” i.e.,] a son?)”



“The mitzvah of welcoming guests in particular... you will merit the birth of a healthy son.”

Through *orcho* ([which in the context of the verse means “his path,” but figuratively can be interpreted as] the mitzvah of welcoming guests).

May it be Hashem’s will that through the study of the Torah, the observance of *mitzvos* in general and the mitzvah of welcoming guests in particular, and also through following the natural means by following the directives of an expert in this field, you will merit the birth of a healthy son. I would be happy to hear good tidings regarding this.

I would be interested in knowing the particulars of your communal activities with which you are certainly endeavoring to bring merit to people at large in the appropriate manner.

[From] one who blesses you and awaits good tidings,

The Rebbe’s Signature

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Message from *the* Chairman

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov שיח"י



To our esteemed alumnae, תרנינה,
As we begin בעז"ה a new year in Bais Rivkah,
the year of *Hakhel*, it is an opportune time to
remind ourselves of the vision of the Rebbe זי"ע
regarding Bais Rivkah.

The Rebbe זי"ע teaches us that in addition to the national gathering in the Bais Hamikdash, Hakhel can and should take place in each community, family and individual, even as we are in Golus, awaiting The Geulah and the building of the Bais Hamikdash. The mitzvah of Hakhel is meant not only for us to unite those within our sphere of influence; it is also meant to inspire and empower each and every one of us to unite all the different aspects within our own personal lives. Our mind,

The other day, I heard a young Shliach describe the harrowing experiences of his family and community under fire in Ukraine. What impressed me most was how unimpressed he was.

heart, thoughts, speech, and actions can and must all be united and inspired by the King, namely the G-dly spark within us¹.

We can see from the Rebbe's addresses to the graduates throughout the years, as well as in other references, that Bais Rivkah was meant to go far beyond providing

its students with the knowledge and motivation needed to lead healthy and happy Jewish lives and homes. Bais Rivkah students were to be empowered and given the tools necessary to inspire and strengthen individuals, families and communities the world over, helping them connect to their core.

Indeed, to date, communities in over one hundred countries have benefited from the Bais Rivkah alumnae and their families living in their midst, either as Shluchim or by personal example.

Many of the students and teachers of Bais Rivkah are themselves the products of this vision, having been born and brought up in all types of communities throughout the world with their respective challenges. They bring with them experiences that add to the richness and depth of the Bais Rivkah Hakhel empowerment.

Several times a day we declare “*Hashem Echod.*” Why do we say that Hashem is *Echod*, “one,” rather than *Yochid*, “the only one”? Chassidus teaches us that *Echod* in this case² implies *absolute* rather than *only*. From the perspective—and in the presence—of the “only” truth, there is no room for anything or anyone else. Everything and everyone else is nullified and insignificant. When one looks at the world from the perspective of absolute truth, however, one can see themselves, everyone, and everything—and can help them see themselves as well—as unique expressions of the very same truth, *Hashem Echod*.

Bais Rivkah alumnae go out into the world not looking down at others as less than them, but rather as those who are different, yet as equally important as them. Every single human being and every component of creation is part of Hashem’s plan and must be harnessed in order to help bring about the Geula, fulfilling the purpose of Creation: transforming this world and all of its varied components into a *Dirah Betachtonim*.

At a farbrengen in the early years of the nesius, the Rebbe quoted the Frieddiker Rebbe זצוקללה”ה נבג”ם זי”ע who related that the Mittlerer Rebbe זי”ע נבג”ם זי”ע wished that when two yungelait walk in the street, the subject of their discussion should be *Yichuda Ila’ah* and *Yichuda Tata’ah*³. The Rebbe then concluded that a brocha given by a tzaddik and *Nosi Beyisroel* is certain to be fulfilled; it therefore only depends on the yungelait themselves, that when they walk in the streets of Brooklyn...etc., they should converse about *Yichuda Ila’ah* and *Yichuda Tata’ah*.⁴

Nowadays, we see that not only yungelait in Brooklyn, but even young boys and girls, living very far away from Brooklyn, desire and are capable of discussing “*Yichuda Ila’ah* and *Yichuda Tata’ah*” as well as so many other con-

We are reminded of the Rebbe’s initiatives regarding fulfilling Hakhel according to the Golus circumstances that we presently find ourselves in. This also intensifies our longing to be able to fulfill this Mitzvah literally.

cepts of Chassidus. Standards of behavior and commitment that were considered mesiras nefesh in days of yore are standard and natural for today’s young Chassidim.


The other day, I heard a young Shliach describe the harrowing experiences of his family and community under fire in Ukraine. What impressed me most was how unimpressed he was. It was so natural to him to have that degree of dedication to his shlichus and to helping others in need. *Elokus bepshitus*⁵.

It goes without saying that Bais Rivkah has been privileged to be at the forefront of implementing this inspired and unconditional degree of commitment, replicated over and over again in all sorts of challenging situations.

As we enter the year of Hakhel, when *Klal Yisroel* would gather in the Bais Hamikdash to see and hear the King read from the Torah, thus, in a way, reexperiencing Matan Torah⁶, we are reminded of the Rebbe’s initiatives regarding fulfilling Hakhel according to the Golus circumstances that we presently find ourselves in. This also intensifies our longing to be able to fulfill this Mitzvah literally, to hear our *Nosi* read from the Torah in the Bais Hamikdash, and to do *altz vos ir kent* to make it happen a moment sooner.

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

1. See *Michtav Kloli for Vov Tishrei 5748*, published in *Likutei Sichos Vol. 34*, pages 329-332
2. This concept is explained extensively in many sichos and maamorim. See for example the Rebbe’s maamor, *Atoh Echod 5729 (Sefer Hamaamorim Melukat)* and *Kuntres Heicholtzu 5659*.
3. Two perspectives of unity: Hashem’s perspective and our perspective, respectively.
4. *Toras Menachem vol. 4*, pages 156-161.
5. An expression in Chassidus that means that Hashem’s existence is obvious.
6. *Mishneh Torah, Chagigah 3:6*



Your *EmBRace* magazine has been very entertaining for my flights and free time in general. Thank you. I was quite surprised by the article, “Discovering the Daf”. I might appear old school, but I felt like the message of the article, of a woman aspiring to be consistent about learning Gemora and even the goal of completing the Shas, was out of place. It seems that the author is not “Makir es Mekomah”- she does not appear to know her role in the world as a woman. Yes, the Rebbe encouraged learning, and women can and should learn Chassidus, and even a blatt Gemora if they want, but the life goal of poring over pages of Gemora rubbed me wrong.

A subliminal message of the article left a reader feeling that women in the past who did not learn were deprived and miserable. I think the whole outlook of the article needs a shift. Women have a specific role, and while they can learn, their primary role is as an *Akeres Habayis*. Aspiring for other things, even holy achievements, is simply not a women’s tafkid.

In other words, Hashem has a plan for this world and for us; that’s why He created us and we exist. In order to bring that plan to fulfillment, He gave us Torah and mitzvos. Women weren’t given the obligation to learn Torah (obviously, I am not talking about the parts of Torah that we are obligated to learn) because that’s not what Hashem needs of us. He has a long list of other things. If a woman enjoys learning and enjoys intellectual stimulation, she should go right ahead and take care of herself by learning a blatt Gemora. However, I think it has quite little (maybe nothing) to do with her *Avodas Hashem*, and with what a woman’s mission in life is - and that’s not degrading! Hashem needs us to do holy, important, and prestigious things, not only to learn.

Thank You,

– *Anonymous*

Dear Anonymous,

Thank you for your letter and for sharing your thoughts. Although you wrote that perhaps it is an “old school” belief that women should embrace their primary role as the Akeres Habayis, I believe that it is as true today as it ever was. With worldly influences at every turn and right and wrong growing more difficult to decipher, the role of the Akeres Habayis is fundamental. Her unique ability to affect the environment and atmosphere in her home through her character and her actions enables her to impart Ahavas Hashem and Yiras Hashem to her entire family. This sets the foundation for how they will feel toward Yiddishkeit, even as the world comes knocking.



Letters and symbols scattered on the left side of the page, including 't', 'o', 'r', 's', 'i', 'd', 'E', 'a', 'r', 'e', 'D', and a heart symbol.



Since we agree on a woman's primary role, I question why you feel that a goal of Torah learning is any sort of contradiction. As Mina wrote in her article, "Learning Gemora... helps keep me focused and connected to Hashem and to my neshoma. It contains timeless wisdom, and I'm constantly finding points that resonate with my life." Can this new-found connectedness and focus be anything but an enhancement to her role as the Akeres Habayis? Given the extraordinary influence a woman has on her home, this focus and connection must impact her family as well.

Furthermore, when you wrote that a woman's goal of learning Torah is nothing more than an intellectual pursuit and doesn't amount to Avodas Hashem, you seem to imply that there is no inherent value in Torah learning for its own sake. This doesn't jibe with what we learn in Chassidus' that Torah is the manifestation of G-dly intellect and that learning any part of Torah unites our human minds with Hashem's infinite wisdom. This refines our minds and brings us closer to our purpose of becoming more G-dly, an integral part of Avodas Hashem for anyone with a neshoma - men and women alike (whether they can feel the connection or not).

Lastly, you wrote that the article implies that women in the past were miserable and deprived because they couldn't learn. Although that certainly wasn't the author's intent, you do raise an important point about the difference of our generation versus our ancestors'. When the Rebbe encouraged women's learning², one of the main reasons was because many (most?) women nowadays are deeply involved in all sorts of worldly pursuits - be it business, career, academia, the arts, etc. Most of us no longer get to stay at home and focus solely on our families, and even those that do are undated with secular influence. The simple reality is that we have lost the purity and simplicity of our Bubbies who whispered words of Tehillim by heart while they churned the butter, and there's no going back now. For that reason, it is essential that we become at least as sophisticated and knowledgeable in our understanding of Torah as we are in



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Letters, comments, questions and suggestions are welcome!

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our worldly knowledge. Without a deep, personal, and involved relationship to Torah, how can we expect to remain focused and committed in our relationship with Hashem?

Torah learning, especially the kind that engages our mind and our senses, is the most powerful tool that we have to keep ourselves and our families focused on our mission in this world.

Zeldy (Nemanov) Friedman

1. *Tanya, Chapter 4-5*
2. *Sichos in English, Volume 45, A Woman's Place in Torah, 5750*

Iso enjoyed reading the article about the history of the girls coming from Iran. I remember that day in Bais Rivkah High School very clearly. I was in twelfth grade when this part of history unfolded. It was very interesting for us New Yorkers, but terrifying for the Iranians! They were uprooted from their homes, sent to a new country and culture to literally save their lives. As mentioned in the article, English was not their language, but there was one girl, Chemda, who spoke English and addressed the school upon their arrival.

NCFJE did many great things to accommodate this group. In addition to providing the basic living necessities, they had parties to help them forget the anxiety they were living with and just the plain old homesickness of being so far from home and family.

Lubavitch was completely foreign to them. I even remember a “demonstration” that was orchestrated in front of the Rebbe’s house! These teenagers were grateful for leaving the turmoil of their country, but they weren’t prepared for a frum, Chassidic community either. It was really hard on them. I recall plenty of tears shed by the girls who were staying in my

childhood home.

Crown Heights opened their doors and stayed in touch with many of the youngsters who lived in their homes (to the extent of being *untefirer* for their wedding or just very involved in their lives for many years). Those youngsters who stayed and became part of the Crown Heights community are indeed fortunate to have done so. Additionally, it’s always nice to see those who have left Crown Heights, yet return for a simcha of their friends who are still part of the fabric of Crown Heights life.

– Tzirl Goldman

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Thanks for the Memories

Rivkah (Couch) Chilungu, Rochester, NY

Article credits to Sara (Dinerman) Stiefel, Lipetsk, Russia

Photo credits to Ety (Pinson) Bogomilsky, Maplewood, NJ



When I walked into Bais Rivkah Girls High School in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, on the afternoon of my first day teaching twelfth grade history in Elul 5763 (September 2003), my stomach was twisted in so many knots I could hardly climb up the stairs. Girls seemed to swarm like honeybees, some finishing lunch on the run, many clustered together singing, and others clumped together comparing schedules. It seemed that every brick and bit of mortar in that old building was straining to contain the energy it held inside. Girls continued streaming in from the front doors, from the cafeteria, from every level of the school. I fought through the crowd, trying to smile despite my nervousness

at the countless pairs of curious eyes checking out the new teacher. Squeezing my way into the office, I found my crisp, new punch card and checked in. The adult faces of the office staff seemed to drown in the waves of girls in green and white. I grabbed some sticks of chalk and set out to find my class.

Although I wasn't sure what to expect when I agreed to take the job, I was excited about the challenge. My life story had recently taken crazy and unpredictable swerves and turns, and I had learned to just embrace rolling with it. Before I got to Crown Heights, I had gone from this weird mix of Communist - wanna-be atheist - revolutionary type to Observant Jew in a matter of a few years. What was another twist in the plot? Teaching in a Chassidic girls' high school was just one more adventure.

I spent the summer before school reading history books and cooking up lesson plans. Once the school year began, I continuously reevaluated and adjusted the lessons as needed. Some days, teaching was overwhelming. I didn't have a computer, I didn't have access to certain supplies I wanted, and some things I wanted to do were just impossible. The workload grew every day, and the hours I spent preparing stretched later and later.

As the year progressed, teaching got easier, though not in a way that might first come to mind. The people who surrounded me--the other staff and administration--were very supportive, Mrs. Laine in particular.

In addition, it turned out that teaching in this school was fun! The energy and life - and yes, even the chaos - was incredible. Young people are wonderful. Teenagers are wonderful. I much preferred dealing with the pluses and minuses of live-wire kids with questions and challenges, doubts and joy, and the whole wild mix of emotion and runaway energy, than with kids who have been drained of all that. Because even when they are off the rails, that energy and life can be redirected. What can you do with a lifeless lump?

I learned over time what the students needed, and though I am certain I made mistakes, I strived to ensure that every one of the students learned the material, did well in class, and passed the New York State Regents exam. Some girls were too hard on themselves; some were not taking themselves seriously enough. Some needed to read, others needed to hear and see. But every student needed—in fact, every human needs—to feel that they matter. I put myself totally into the job and the only reward I expected was for my students to pass the

Before I got to Crown Heights, I had gone from this weird mix of Communist - wanna-be atheist - revolutionary type to Observant Jew in a matter of a few years. What was another twist in the plot?

Regents. I had no idea how much more I was to receive.

About three quarters of the way through the year, I became engaged. After returning from the Ohel, where my chosson and I had asked the Rebbe for his brocha for our engagement, I began calling every friend and family member in my phone book. When my roommate, Faiga, went to buy some refreshments in the local ice cream/candy store, high school girls overheard my name as the bride in question. Unbeknownst to me, they immediately set to spreading the word.

I returned to school the following day, unaware that my students knew I had become engaged. I walked up the stairs, lesson plans in hand. A few of the other teachers smiled knowingly at me, but I kept quiet. When I walked into my first class of the day, I found four classes of girls crammed in, the desks pushed aside, and food and drinks on my desk. The girls burst into song, screams echoing down the hall. At first I thought about calming them down - I had lessons to teach, the other teachers had lessons to teach, and we were headed into the homestretch towards graduation. Every effort, though, was futile. With permission from the principal and with the recognition that the girls were in charge this time, I sat with them in a circle on the floor, and we spent the time singing, laughing, and having much more fun than we would have had studying the Kennedy administration.

A word of explanation about my background at this



Because even when they are off the rails, that energy and life can be redirected. What can you do with a lifeless lump?

point definitely adds to this story. I am a convert from a small town in Ohio, and my husband is a convert as well. Though our families were planning to contribute to our wedding, the cost of a kosher wedding and setting up a kosher home is much more than they were able to afford. I had no idea how we were going to pay for everything, but June was a ways off, and I hoped that by the time the wedding came along, those concerns would be put to rest.

One evening, about two months after becoming engaged, a friend begged me to walk with her to a house near Bais Rivkah. She was nervous about walking alone at night. As we were walking, she told me that she needed to give something to a friend who was at an engagement party at the school. I was getting suspicious. We walked into the school cafeteria, and I was greeted by all four classes of my students, as well as some fellow teachers. Even the principal was in attendance! I was caught in a swirl of girls. We danced

and sang and more friends and students filtered in. The girls had set up table after table of food, much of it homemade by themselves or their mothers. They had fundraised and had contacted charities for brides, and they had gone shopping. Everything I needed to set up my home was carefully and expertly wrapped and placed on tables draped with elegant tablecloths. They even produced a skit in my honor! After the party was over, one of the student organizers came to me with an envelope. It was the remainder of the money that they had pulled together but hadn't spent.

There was still another surprise in store for me, though. At my wedding, after the chupa and dinner, 110 seniors and a few other girls from younger grades flooded into the hall, filling the dance floor, lifting me in a chair, swirling me around, grabbing my shy family and dancing with them as well. The girls didn't leave until the band packed up. I left thinking that I must concentrate on remembering every single unforgettable moment of this day.

It's been eighteen years since they threw that engagement party for me. My husband and I have four kids k"ah. Now it is my daughter who is in the middle of taking Regents exams! We live in Rochester, NY which is great because that allows me to sneak down





Everything I needed to set up my home was carefully and expertly wrapped and placed on tables draped with elegant tablecloths. They even produced a skit in my honor!

into Crown Heights every now and then. I'm teaching again, too, but now I'm teaching art and the school I teach at --Ora Academy-- is a drop smaller than Bais Rivkah. We have 8 students- TOTAL! And our uniforms are long blue pleated skirts, not green.

I've been asked to give a few talks here and there, and I've written a bit about how I ended up Jewish. I like to share the positivity and hope I experienced at Bais Rivkah High School and express appreciation to those involved. My Bais Rivkah students played such a huge part in how I got to be who and where I am now that I never leave them out of the story.

As a final note, I did get my original wish - every student passed her Regents exam! And I still haven't thrown out my grade book filled with the names of those unforgettable girls... ▀

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A First Student's Quiet, Proud Service

*The story of
Mrs. Devorah Krinsky, a "h*

Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine



Four generations of Beth Rivkah students: Mrs. Krinsky (center), with her daughter Mrs. Sheine Friedman (left), granddaughter Chanie Fischer, and great-granddaughter Ettie.

Always with a sefer in hand, the unassuming Zev “Velvel” Kasinetz became an early activist for Bais Rivkah when it was no more than a fledgling school. His neighbor and fellow Chossid, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson, had been tasked by the Rebbe Rayatz to establish the school, but funds were scarce. Velvel answered the call, voluntarily raising funds that helped the school keep its doors open.

Velvel hailed from Russia, where he was a student in Lubavitch, and later joined the yeshivah as it drifted through various cities after it was outlawed. Several years earlier, his father Baruch traveled to the United States trying to earn money to bring back home to the then Czarist Russia. But with communism's rise, he realized that returning was a poor option, and instead began seeking an escape route for his family.

After more than a decade of separation, in 5684 (1924), the Kasinetz family received exit papers from the Soviet Union and a visa for the United States. Velvel, twenty two, wrote to Rabbi Abraham Axelrod, rabbi of the Tzemach Tzedek shul in Baltimore, Maryland, to ask him what he would need in the United States. A fellow student from the yeshivah in Lubavitch, Rabbi Axelrod responded, "Sacks of *yir'as Shamayim* [fear of Heaven]...".

Before leaving, Velvel went to bid farewell to the Rebbe Rayatz. At that fateful meeting, the Rebbe instructed Velvel to become a *schochet*.

The family arrived on the free soil of America in 5685 (1925). A year later, at the age of twenty four, Velvel moved on his own to New York. While many frumme Yidden were forced to work on Shabbos, Velvel's skills as a *schochet* eliminated the issue.

After marrying, he settled in Brownsville where he was known as a gentle and discreet person who did not shy away from speaking when he felt that someone was acting unjust or nefariously. Of utmost importance to him was Yiddishe chinuch which, at that time, was focused on boys and young men.

When Bais Rivkah was founded in 5702 (1942), assimilation in the United States was at its height, and apathy regarding Jewish practice and education was the norm. Of even less importance was the education of young Jewish girls. Velvel's son, Rabbi Moshe Kasinetz, recalled, "Even for a real Torah Yid, it wasn't in fashion yet." Thus, when the Rebbe Rayatz founded a girl's school, many reacted with skepticism.

"It was a phenomenal dream to make happen," Rabbi Moshe Kasinetz said, "and it was a struggle every which way." The early days were replete with challenges ranging from a location for the school to staff salaries and student recruitment. Nonetheless, the expansion was rapid.

While Rabbi Jacobson was devoted and creative, Rabbi Moshe Kasinetz recalled, the school struggled financially. "He could start something," he said,

"Even for a real Torah Yid, it wasn't in fashion yet." Thus, when the Rebbe Rayatz founded a girl's school, many reacted with skepticism.

describing how he worked hard and fast to make it succeed. When it did grow to the size it did, "it was beyond his capabilities."

When Velvel saw Rabbi Jacobson struggling with the school's finances, he stepped in to assist. Many a night, after a long day of work, he would voluntarily raise funds door-to-door and in neighborhood shuls.

It was in this atmosphere of genuine love for assisting the other, that the Kasinetz's daughter Devorah was raised in.

American Marriage

When news broke that the Rebbe Rayatz would be coming for an extended visit to the United States



Velvel and Ethel Kasinetz.

“She was a steadfast companion and serene influence on the fast-paced and constant activity prevalent in the Rebbe’s office.”

in 5688 (1928), there were a handful of devoted Lubavitch Chassidim in the country.

While there were dozens of Nusach Ari shuls founded by descendants of Chassidim from the various branches of Chabad, with many of them named Tzemach Tzedek, Anshei Lubavitch, or Babroisk, for Velvel the Rebbe’s visit was personal. It had been five years since he had seen his Rebbe. Thus, on the day the Rebbe’s ship docked in New York, Velvel borrowed the uniform of a longshoreman so he could go aboard and help the Rebbe disembark.

The Rebbe traveled with his most precious manuscripts, only allowing specific individuals to handle the suitcase which housed them. Disguised as he was, the Rebbe did not immediately recognize Velvel and hesitated to allow him to carry the precious suitcase. After being informed that it was Velvel Zhebner, as he was known in Russia, the Rebbe said, “*Velvel meg trugen dem tchimidan.*” (“He may carry

the suitcase.”)

Later, while in the car with the Rebbe, who was in the back seat, Velvel respectfully sat with his back twisted backward so as to be facing the Rebbe. Noticing this, the Rebbe remarked to him, “Velvel, *zitz vee ah mensch.*” (“Sit like a mensch.”)

Living in Brownsville was another shochet named Hillel Dovid Robkin. In 5693 (1933), someone suggested that his daughter Ethel might be a good match for Velvel, then thirty three years old. Hillel Dovid was enthusiastic about the match, since it was increasingly difficult to find suitable religious bachelors, and his daughter was advanced in age. Being a part of the same Shochtim Union, Hillel Dovid knew that Velvel was scrupulous in his practice of mitzvos and Torah study.

Like Velvel, the Robkins were immigrants. Ethel was born in Uretche, White Russia, in 5662 (1902). Like Velvel’s father, Hillel Dovid came to the United States in 5671 (1911) looking for employment opportunities. Three years later, he sent tickets for his wife Devorah and their daughter to join him.

With World War I raging, the two were captured while trying to leave Europe, and were held captive in a German refugee camp for six months. During the difficult journey, Ethel, twelve, kept her spirits high with imaginations of a country paved with gold. Upon arriving in America, she was shocked to be greeted by her father dressed in shabby clothing. She soon learned of the struggles new immigrants faced, and the long, tiring hours her father had worked in order to unite the family.

While Hillel Dovid was a trained *shochet*, he struggled to find a full-time position. For years he earned a living by selling food to factory workers, which allowed him to keep Shabbos. Nonetheless, money was always short. In 5685 (1925), Devorah died of a stroke, leaving father and daughter living alone.

After high school, Ethel worked as a seamstress in a clothing factory. Highly skilled, the factory owners agreed to keep her on despite her refusal to work on Shabbos. Even with both employed, Hillel Dovid and Ethel struggled to support themselves. They were always in search of better employment and affordable housing, moving frequently between the boroughs, from Bronx, Harlem and finally to the Brownsville neighborhood in Brooklyn. There, Hillel Dovid was finally able to secure a full-time position as a *shochet*.



Over those difficult years, Ethel learned to advocate for herself and others. When she saw that the factory owners were taking advantage of the women, she formed an advocacy group that championed worker's rights and they were soon a part of a union. In turn, the owners respected her tenacity.

After Ethel and Velvel married, they settled in Brownsville. They had two children, Moshe in 5695 (1935) and Devorah in 5698 (1938). When the first grade class of Bais Rivkah opened, Devorah Kasinetz was one of its first students.

A School is Founded

In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, more and more immigrant children with single parents were enrolling in the school.

Devorah closely observed her parents' activism on behalf of the refugees. Her mother often cooked hot meals that her father would deliver to refugees still waiting on Ellis Island to be allowed to enter the United States. Emulating what she observed at home, little Devorah reached out, befriended her refugee classmates, assisting them with their studies and with adapting to their new life and language.

After completing her studies at Bais Rivkah, Devorah went on to the Bais Yaakov High School of Williamsburg. Once she graduated, she returned to Bais Rivkah as a teacher, and where her mother assisted in the financial office.

Quiet Strength

Growing up in a home in which establishing Chabad in America was always front and center, Devorah often shared that she was deeply influenced by her parents' open home and the trust people placed in them. Frequently, strangers and friends alike would turn to her mother for her sage advice, also knowing that she would keep the matter in complete confidence.

Her brother, Rabbi Kasinetz, said that Devorah learned much from their parents' style of activism. "To have this quiet strength, and you don't give up. You sustain, you support and you move ahead in steady progression."

After her engagement to Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky in



Mrs. Krinsky with the Rebbe.

5717 (1957), she quickly learned what it would mean to be married to someone in the Rebbe's inner circle. The night before their l'chaim, Rabbi Krinsky was informed that the Rebbe planned to visit Camp Gan Yisroel, the newly established Chabad boys' camp in the Catskills. They were scheduled to return with ample time before the engagement party.

On the day of the engagement, Rabbi Krinsky drove the Rebbe to camp, where the Rebbe addressed the children and distributed siddurim. After the visit at Gan Yisroel the Rebbe visited Camp Emunah, the girls' camp, and by the time the Rebbe returned home and Rabbi Krinsky arrived at his l'chaim, it was well after midnight, when all the guests had already departed.

"There were some suggestions from out-of-town relatives," Rabbi Krinsky recalled, "that maybe Devorah should reconsider getting into this union, saying that something was not right." But Devorah greeted Rabbi Krinsky with her classic smile and shrugged off any suggestions of calling it off. The following night, a festive engagement was held and a few months later they married. But, Rabbi Krinsky said, this experience "set the tone for her whole life."

On that summer night, their son-in-law Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman said the Rebbe gave them "extraordinary brochos." For Mrs. Krinsky the brochos were "her treasure, her joy," and were a motivating factor in their home for many years.

For close to four decades, Mrs. Krinsky had a front row seat of the Chabad movement whilst her husband

served the Rebbe. During this entire time, Rabbi Friedman said, “She was a steadfast companion and serene influence on the fast-paced and constant activity prevalent in the Rebbe’s office.”

While she shared a close relationship with the Rebbe and Rebbetzin, she embraced her role with humility and made every effort to remain out of the spotlight. When out and about, Mrs. Krinsky would refrain from divulging her last name. “This was part of her insistence on staying out of the bright spotlight of being married to the Rebbe’s secretary and right-hand man,” her daughter Sheine Friedman said.

On one occasion, the Rebbetzin shared with Dr. Ira Weiss, that the Rebbe and her “consider the Krinskys as our children.” Dr. Weiss said that his privilege being the Rebbe’s cardiologist, “was enhanced by my being taken care of by the Krinskys. Mrs. Krinsky was very energetic, very tireless and yet did not expect any honor.”

A gracious hostess to a constant stream of visitors and guests, family, journalists and prominent people, Mrs. Krinsky would cheerfully greet her guests, and always had encouraging and positive words for them. “To say that she judged people favorably is wrong,” said granddaughter Chana Vigler, Shlucha of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. “She didn’t judge people [at all], period.”

While raising her children, Mrs. Krinsky operated an apparel and home goods boutique on Kingston Avenue, in Crown Heights, where many recall her patience, counsel, and friendly demeanor. She continued this service when she worked at Sole Imports; her daughter Sheine’s shoe store. Over the years, the

The Rebbetzin shared with Dr. Ira Weiss, that the Rebbe and her “consider the Krinskys as our children.”

Rebbetzin would ask Mrs. Krinsky to have her in mind while shopping for clothing for the store.

The Krinskys had an understanding that no matter what was occurring in the community, their home would maintain a calm and loving atmosphere. “I cannot remember a time when my mother was involved in any discord in any form or fashion,” her son Hillel Dovid said. “If there were any issues in the community, you never heard it from her.”

Her younger daughter, Chanie Futerfas, recalled that her mother kept her cool, enjoyed laughter, and always had an available shoulder. She wouldn’t force her opinion or meddle in the affairs of others; “She had the rare ability to live and let live.”

Proud History

Chana Vigler grew up a block away from her grandmother’s home and spent countless hours in her company. She recalled her grandmother’s pride in being an early student at Bais Rivkah. This fact became an essential part of the family fabric, and was later inscribed on Mrs. Krinsky’s matzeivah after her passing in 5773 (2012).

Mrs. Krinsky played a significant role in her grandchildren’s upbringing. Chana learned the importance of being thoughtful, hospitable, and generous in every interaction. Despite earning a modest income, Mrs. Krinsky beautified their home and their Shabbos table was always set to perfection.

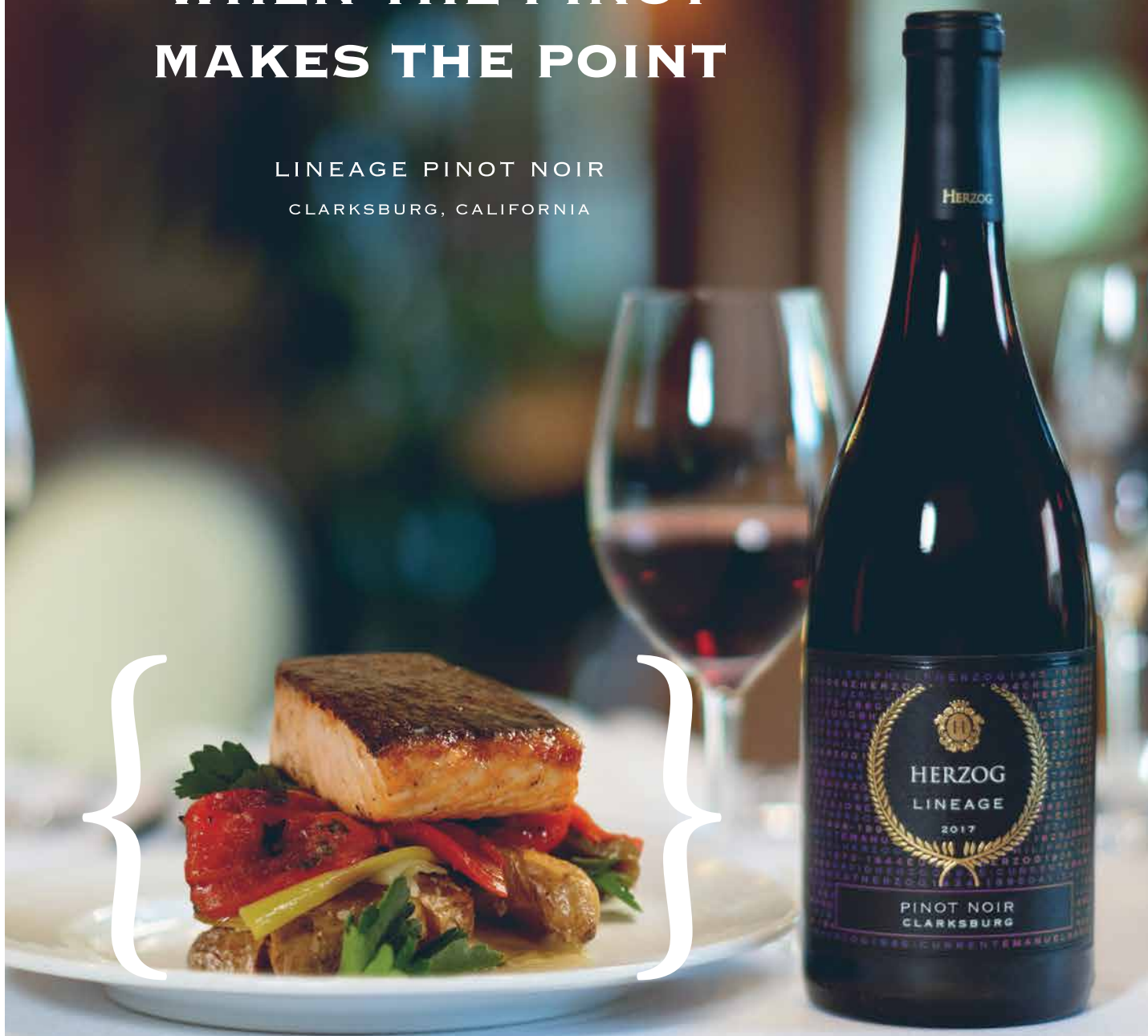
As Chana grew, she realized the central role her grandfather, Rabbi Krinsky, maintained by the Rebbe’s side. He was on-call 24/7 and Mrs. Krinsky often had little indication when he was coming or going. She accepted this reality wholly. “She always made us feel proud and lucky that we had this opportunity. It was never a yoke on her, or something that was difficult.” ■



*Mrs. Devorah and
Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky.*

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The Story of Rabbi Pinchus Cunin

Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine



Young Rabbis Pinchus and Shlomo Cunin.

One of the long term effects of the creation of the Soviet Union was the lowering of an “iron curtain” on its citizens, effectively banning most from leaving the communist state. Over the years, efforts to pressure the communists to permit immigration, besides for several spurts over the years, did not succeed. This was especially true for Jews who wanted to leave the oppressive country that for the most part placed a lid on public practice of Yiddishkeit, forcing children to receive a Soviet education and forbidding Zionism.

A turning point was the 5734 (1974) Jackson-Vanik amendment, which tied trade with human rights, particularly towards the Soviet Union’s treatment of its Jewish citizens. The effect was almost immediate, and throngs

of Jews immigrated to the United States. Under the auspices of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), they were dispersed in cities across the country, including New York. They were also greeted there by Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe (FREE), a Chabad organization headed by the Okonov brothers, themselves immigrants from the Soviet Union.

While previous waves of immigration from the Soviet Union included several religious families, the current wave had few. With that, there were parents willing to send their children to religious schools, and learn what they once could not. The Okonov's turned to the two local Lubavitch schools and camps for boys and girls: United Lubavitcher Yeshivah, Bais Rivkah, Camp Gan

“We will accept any Jewish girl at any level in our school, regardless of her previous Hebrew background and knowledge.”

interview. “The only requirement we have is a willingness to follow along with the school rules and to keep the basic tenets of Judaism.”

One of the teachers at the program, Mrs. Zlata Okonov, said that it would be difficult to try to integrate the girls



Pinchus's grandfather Reb Mendel Cunin.



Pinchus' grandmother Mrs. Esther Wilsker.

Yisroel, and Camp Emunah. The institutions all agreed to open programs for them at their respective schools and camps.

“We will accept any Jewish girl at any level in our school, regardless of her previous Hebrew background and knowledge,” Rabbi Pinchus Cunin, Bais Rivkah’s administrator, said in a 5735 (1975) radio

coming from totally non-frum families into the school. “It was very new for them,” she said. “All of a sudden, they discovered that they were Jewish.” But it was not just knowledge they needed to learn, they also had to become accustomed to a completely new world; a world where they would be free to practice religion, where they could experience the feeling of freedom

“What do you want? He wants that his hand should be a merkavah for chessed d’atzilus,”

without the authorities breathing down their backs, and at the same time attempting to acclimate to basic Western norms that did not exist in their hometowns.

When the Zegel family arrived in New York shortly before the summer of 5736 (1976), Yoshe and Jenia asked a family friend where to send their only child for camp. They suggested Camp Emunah. At the camp, the young Raya met Mrs. Okonov, who was in charge of the Russian program.

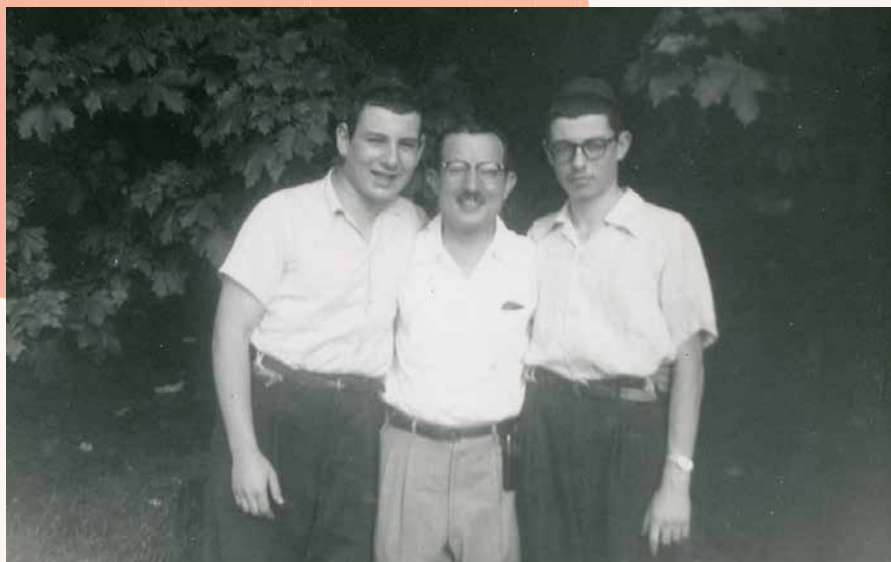
The twelve year old knew nothing about religion, only that she was Jewish, because in the Soviet Union “they beat me up because I was Jewish.” After the summer, when they asked a local rabbi where to send Raya, he recommended the Abraham Lincoln High School, a public school not far from their home on Ocean Parkway. The aggressive behavior at the school was a

shock for the young girl and she told her parents that she would never return there. The parents once again turned to their friends, who suggested she go to Bais Rivkah.

At the school, which Raya would travel to on a bus from Brighton Beach, there was a parallel preparatory program. “These girls are in special classes with specially trained teachers who teach them at their own level,” Rabbi Cunin said, with the hope that within two or three years, they would reach the level “to enter a normal class together with children of their own age.”

There, Mrs. Okonov was Raya’s teacher, and they studied the basics of Yiddishkeit, such as how to read Hebrew, and learning Chumash. Mrs. Zegel reflected how their teacher’s dedication to them, including inviting them for Shabbos and Yom Tov to her home, had the utmost effect on her. “It was fascinating,” Mrs. Zegel said, saying how they learned about Shabbos and Yom Tov just from the way that Mrs. Okonov conducted herself. “It was a learning experience in the way of Yiddishkeit.”

Going to shul for the first time, she realized that her



Rabbis Pinchus (right) and Shlomo Cunin with their father Dovid.



A young Pinchus Cunin.

grandparents, Leah and Yaakov Kanievsky, back in Kharkov, were clandestinely frum. “I remember my grandmother’s chicken soup and gefilte fish,” she recalled. “I didn’t know that it was Shabbos food.” She also recalled that on certain days, men would gather at their home, wearing shmattes and singing. “I thought it was a singing club.” At Bais Rivkah she learned that, in fact, it was an ad hoc shul at their home, and they were davening.

While there were various organizations that assisted the new immigrants, Rabbi Cunin explained, while “Their efforts are to be highly applauded,” they did not provide funds for Jewish education. “Their funds were limited, and they could only provide them with the basic necessities of furniture and an apartment.”

At the time of the radio interview in 5735 (1975), there were sixty children in several classes attending the school with no obligation to pay tuition. The school did not only care about their education, but, as Rabbi Cunin said, “These families lacked the barest necessities of Yiddishkeit,” and they purchased them basic books of Torah.

For Raya, her time at Bais Rivkah “was a positive experience,” while she was not integrated into the secular studies classes. At one point, she felt that she was not going to be able to navigate life after she graduates if she did not know proper English. She thus transferred for a year to a public school, thinking it would be better there. Looking back, she said, she benefited more from attending Bais Rivkah than from public school. “In yeshivah, you had a name; in public school you were just a number.”

It was not just Russian immigrants that the administrator contented with. The school was a veritable United Nations. “We have girls from Iran, from Israel, from Libya, from all parts of Canada, and naturally, from almost every state in the United States.”

It was an arduous undertaking for the administrator, who was already dealing with a difficult financial situation at the school. But for Rabbi Cunin, seeing the students who had just arrived a year earlier, and watching them learning the entire story of Esther, Mordechai and Haman for the first time in their lives, is what kept him going.

For Rabbi Cunin, this sort of benevolence wasn’t anything new. The push that kept him motivated to keep the school seamlessly caring for the students’ needs both inside and outside Bais Rivkah’s four walls, was

the long-standing Cunin family tradition of giving.

Grandfather’s Influence

Born in 5699 (1939) to Dovid and Rochel Cunin, Pinchus was the oldest of two children. His father and his brother Julius ran a successful exterminating company in the Bronx, where they lived. His grandparents, Esther and Mordechai Wiskler and Sara Rivka and Mendel Cunin, both moved to the United States in the early twentieth century. Despite the winds of secularism, they both kept their Chassidic garb, and fervently frum home. Pinchus would later

“Rebbe, I have over \$400 in the bank. Who should I leave it over to [when I die]?” The Rebbe responded, “Why do you have to wait, when you could give it away now?”

say it was because both of them “were tough guys,” not only physically, but also spiritually, and thus able to face the many challenges facing frum Yidden.

When his grandfather, Mendel, resided in Harlem, he would go to the Tzemach Tzedek shul, where Rabbi Eliyahu Simpson was the rabbi. The two families became close, and when Dovid and Rochel married, the wedding took place in the Simpson’s backyard. Later, when Sara Rivkah passed away, Mendel moved near the Simpson’s in Borough Park, where Rabbi Simpson reestablished the Tzemach Tzedek shul.

When it came time for Pinchus and his brother, Shlomo, to go to yeshivah, both grandfathers went to see the local Jewish day school. They were not pleased by what they saw, and decided that it would be better for them to go to a public school.

The grandfathers recruited the Simpson’s son, Sholom Mendel, to travel to the Bronx daily to teach their grandchildren *Limudei Kodesh* studies several hours a day.

When Pinchus was twelve, his parents were in a private

“I felt that he slept in the building. He was there from the morning until the evening.”

audience with the Rebbe. The Rebbe told them that it was time that their children go to a proper yeshivah, suggesting that they register at the United Lubavitcher Yeshivah on Bedford and Dean in Crown Heights. Upon hearing the suggestion, Rochel burst into tears, lamenting that her children were too young to leave her and be in a dormitory so far from them. “Who will care for their basic needs?” she asked. “Who will make sure they eat?”

The Rebbe explained to her that they would be well cared for, and able to return home for Shabbos. The family went to visit the yeshivah beforehand. When they arrived, in a show of demonstrating how the yeshivah would take care of them, Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson greeted them with an apple in hand for each of their children.

Seeing that the place was clean and orderly, the Cunins registered their sons for the 5712 (1951) school year. Pinchus would later joke, “That was the last time I saw an apple in yeshivah.”

After being tested, the yeshivah concluded that they were academically up to par for their age, and they joined their proper classes. Being in Crown Heights and in close proximity to Borough Park, Pinchus became close to his grandfather, Mendel.

For many years, Mendel was a *schochet* in Long Island City. The owner of the slaughterhouse wanted him to be there soon after Shabbos ended in order to begin work. To reach his workplace on time, he would walk the long trek over the bridge on Shabbos.

Rabbi Mendel’s frequent giving of tzedakah was the talk of the family. After the Rebbe Rayatz returned to Europe in 5689 (1929), in order to raise funds the United States branch of Agudas Chassidei Chabad auctioned off many of the items the Rebbe had used. Mendel scored the Rebbe Rayatz’s pillow case. To pay for it, against the advice of many, he sold the stocks he owned. A few months later, the stock market crashed.

When the Rebbe Rayatz came to the United States in 5700 (1940), every Friday he would bring a paper bag filled with money to 770, saying that it was for the Rebbe. As he was contributing most of his earnings, R’ Mendel’s children complained to the Rebbe Rayatz, who responded, “What do you want? He wants that his hand should be a *merkavah for chessed d’atzilus*,” a chariot for the level of kindness of the highest spiritual world of atzilus.

Once he retired, he would give his pension and social security checks to Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch, and the United Lubavitcher Yeshivah. His children would provide for his personal needs.

When he was older, R’ Mendel moved to Crown Heights, and Pinchus would bring him to 770 to daven mincha with the Rebbe. Once when they finished davening, he asked the Rebbe, “Rebbe, I have over \$400 in the bank. Who should I leave it over to [when I die]?” The Rebbe responded, “Why do you have to wait, when you could give it away now?” The next day he went to the bank, took out the money, and gave it to Tzedakah.

Rabbi Cunin, Mr. Jack

Pinchus dedicated himself to his studies, but was never scared to do physical work. When it came to camp, he volunteered to do the laundry, which gave him time to quietly study Chassidus. He would also be willing to do the plumbing or fix a table. Already as a young man, he took on managing positions, including running the Released Time program. This landed his photo in the Jewish Press, when a car was donated to NCFJE.

When the neighbor of the Felder’s in Borough Park, Israel Eckhaus, suggested Pinchus for their daughter Bina, the young woman recognized the name from the Jewish Press. Her parents, Rabbi Tzvi Mordechai and Rebbetzin Chaya Felder, were pillars of the Jewish community in Borough Park. When she was younger, her parents had sent her to a Bobov camp and she appreciated the Chassidishe warmth. Meeting Pinchus, she was taken by his liveliness, graciousness, and sensitivity.

Before their wedding in 5726 (1965), they went for a private audience with the Rebbe. After giving the Rebbe’s brocha, telling them to create warm surroundings, Bina asked the Rebbe if she should continue teaching secular studies at a yeshivah in Borough Park. The Rebbe answered that she should continue,



Rabbi Cunin (right), together with real estate broker Rabbi Mottel Bryski, at the closing of the Beth Rivkah building on Crown Street.



Rabbi and Mrs. Cunin.

since “teachers who teach general studies can also have great influence on their students.”

Mrs. Cunin, a Bais Yaakov graduate, took a liking to the small Lubavitch community in Crown Heights. “It was very warm, very lively,” she said.

Rabbi Cunin went to work in business, which was not a position that he liked. He wanted to go on shlichus, which Mrs. Cunin said “sounded exciting,” and she agreed. When they asked the Rebbe, they received an answer noting how Pinchus’s brother had just moved to California, and it may be difficult for their mother to handle both of her children living far away from her.

Several years later, Pinchus took over the ailing Rabbi Yitzchok Goldin, who had been the administrator of Bais Rivkah for over a decade. While his official title was administrator, those who worked at and attended the school had a hard time defining his position. Jack of all trades, the man who did everything, the go-to guy, and custodian, were some of the titles they gave him.

“Rabbi Cunin was in charge,” Mrs. Brandy Naperstak said. “I felt that he slept in the building. He was there from the morning until the evening.”

Unknown to Mrs. Neparstek, at times Rabbi Cunin did in fact sleep in the building. On cold nights he

would sleep over in order to be able to turn the heat on early in the morning, so that the building should be warm by the time the students arrived.

“The school had so many principals,” Mrs. Fayge Duchman said of the school’s difficult financial situation, yet one person from their school years was a constant: Rabbi Cunin.

Rabbi Cunin was the one shoveling the snow when the caretaker would not come on time, or dealing with a stuffed toilet. On days when there were no buses, he was there to take the students in his station wagon. On the first day of school, they recall going to his office if they did not have an admission card.

He also substituted their class when the teacher did not arrive. “I just remember having *rachmonus* on him standing with a science book trying to teach us,” Mrs. Duchman reminisces. Mrs. Naperstak remarks how it gave her a new respect for him. “I remember thinking, ‘Oh, I didn’t know this man knows this.’”

“Rabbi Cunin stepped up to the plate with whatever had to get done,” Mrs. Sarah Shusterman said. “It did not matter how menial it was, he never complained.”

Rabbi Cunin, she said, did not care who you were, nor how much money you had. “You were a person

and he was there to help you.” Mrs. Shusterman, who taught at Bais Rivkah before moving to Los Angeles, reflects on his selflessness. “There was no *yeshus* there whatsoever.”

Walking through the hallways of the buildings, Rabbi Cunin related to each student on an equal level. His goal was to make sure the students had what they needed and were happy. As a teacher, Mrs. Shusterman recalled, she knew that money was very tight. Once, the school was out of stencil paper, and she had no way to make worksheets for the students. At first, she was hesitant to ask, but when she did, Rabbi Cunin managed to find the stencils she needed without saying a word about the cost or bother.

Good Energy

“He had good energy,” Mrs. Duchman said. “Could you imagine that he did all that for the school, I can’t remember any bad energy coming from him.”

She recalled that once, someone came to fix the boiler, promising that it would work, and then it didn’t. Already an older student, she was sure that

Rabbi Cunin would be fuming. She wondered, “Why was Rabbi Cunin never angry?”

At a farbrengen in 5771 (2011), Rabbi Cunin told of how when he was a teenager he used to struggle with getting angry. In a private audience with the Rebbe, he asked for advice on the matter. The Rebbe told him that every time he feels himself getting upset, he should think of the beginning of chapter 41 of Tanya, where it states: “Hashem stands over them,” and “The whole world is full with Hashem’s glory,” and scrutinizes them, and “searches their reins and heart if they are serving Him as is fitting.”

“Once you start thinking about that,” the Rebbe said, “your anger will go away.”

Rabbi Cunin then diligently practiced this technique, and “It worked.” From then on, he said, “It takes a lot to get me mad.”

By 5730 (1970), there were too many people who wanted to have a *yechidus* with the Rebbe for their birthday, and slowly this *minhag* was being phased out. In 5735 (1975), when Rabbi Cunin called the Rebbe’s secretariat, Rabbi Leib Groner told him that most were not going in for their birthdays; however,



Mrs. Cunin with her grandson Pinny Cunin.



Mrs. Cunin during her interview for Embrace.

because he was dedicated to Bais Rivkah, he would give him an appointment, “But don’t you dare tell anybody you went in.”

In that yechidus, Rabbi Cunin recalled, the Rebbe didn’t answer any of his questions. “He spoke to me as if he was saying goodbye.” The Rebbe gave him brochos, including that he should have personal success, health, and nachas from his children. A few months later, when the Rebbe said that no one would go in anymore for their birthdays, he understood: that was his last private audience.

Not Just School

By the mid-5730’s (1970’s), under Rabbi Cunin, the school doubled to six hundred students and was bursting at its seams. The school was located in three separate buildings and they were working on purchasing an additional location in Crown Heights. At the time, to accommodate the out of towners, the school would arrange homes for them to stay in. But, with large families themselves, it fell on Rabbi Cunin’s shoulders to make sure they were okay.

Rabbi Cunin humorously recalled how he once received a frantic call from one of their students at 11:30 at night. She said that she was in grave pain, and she was sure that she had appendicitis. “You must immediately come to our apartment and take me to the hospital,” she told him.

He said that he rushed over to the apartment with one of her teachers and took her to the hospital. Sitting in the hospital’s emergency room, he was sure that he would have to wait hours before a doctor would see her. After spending over an hour there, the student suddenly said, “Rabbi Cunin, I just remembered, my appendix was taken out two years ago.”

While Rabbi Cunin had many duties, one issues that arose was when several of the school’s principals did not see why the students from the Soviet Union were the school’s responsibility. Most of these girls were not progressing enough to be able to join the regular classes, and there was no connection between them and the other students. “It was a different mentality,” Mrs. Zegel said, “we didn’t really connect.”

While the students didn’t feel any hostility, Mrs. Okonov felt the undertones among them and tried to explain to the students that her family, too, were once immigrants. “They were born in Russia?” she added, “so was the

Rebbe. They speak Russian? So does the Rebbe.”

Rabbi Cunin knew that this sort of integration was what the Rebbe wanted. He himself would say that he felt more Russian than American, and strongly advocated to keep the program going. “It was a big challenge to take them in,” Rabbi Leibel Newman, a long time school principal said. “[Rabbi Cunin] went above

“He never did it for the money, the kavod, or the appreciation. He simply lived for doing good.”

and beyond to make sure it was going to happen.” This effort was not just for the benefit of their educational needs, he said, but for many of them, it was also to be able to help provide for their financial needs.

He was extremely dedicated, Rabbi Newman said, giving his entire neshoma to the school. “I don’t think you really see people like that. He took [his mission] to heart.”

In a 5736 (1976) letter to the Bais Rivkah alumnae, Rabbi Cunin expressed his vision for the students of the school:

I would like to offer the following idea: Chinuch is not limited to a classroom or school building; even a chance meeting with a fellow Yid at work, while traveling, etc. can be used as an opportunity to educate someone else. A child is not necessarily someone who is under twenty one. All of us surely have something to offer our fellow Yid and should use every opportunity to educate and uplift someone else.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita has mentioned on several occasions that a person is responsible for educating himself. This is a process which continues for the rest of his life, not considering the high level which he has obtained. We are to strive to perfect our past deeds and continually uplift ourselves both in conduct and knowledge.

Not Forgotten

In 5738 (1978), Rabbi Cunin left the school. Decades later though, and ten years after his passing, he is

still remembered for the profound lessons he taught others with his selfless actions.

Sitting around a large table, Mrs. Naperstak, Fayge Duchman, and Sheine Friedman, three Bais Rivkah classmates, tell of who they called a giant. They had an agenda that morning. "I always felt that the man never received credit for what we witnessed," Mrs. Naperstak said. "It was a one-man show, and he got no glory."

Mrs. Cunin said that her husband would work very long hours, as well as learning throughout the entire night on Thursday nights. In addition to all of his other work, much of it not a part of his official job, she recalled her husband taking care of families whose homes were broken. Even when he was home, the phone calls were constantly coming in; from teachers, students, and even the board.

Her father, she said, was also someone devoted to the general Jewish community, traveling across New York as one of the rabbis of The Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada. Learning from her mother, she tried to make her home a calm place where Rabbi Cunin could recharge his batteries. She recalled going to the dining room to feed her babies in the middle of the night so as not to wake him during the few hours he had to sleep.

At home, he would take their children to the park; later, their daughters to Kings Plaza. When he had free time, he would learn, and during the summer months, he would also plant.

Mrs. Cunin recalled the time when she also worked for Bais Rivkah, and they had little money, "We used to always owe money to the butcher store, to the grocery store." To make ends meet, she would do additional work at home. She said that money was a non-issue for her husband, and he never complained about his work.

"No one ever forced my husband to do what he did," Mrs. Cunin said, "He never did it for the money, the *kavod*, or the appreciation. He simply lived for doing god." ■

This article was prepared with the assistance of Rabbi Shalom Dovber Cunin, Ahron Liberow, Shevi Liberow, Dovid Leib Marasow and Shimon Sabol.

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Rabbi Pinchus Cunin.

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Brush Hour

Shoshana Borisute, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5782 (2022)



BRHS girls perform at Brush Hour open mic



Brush Hour Paint night



BRHS girls perform their favorite Shabbos songs at Brush Hour Open Mic



Brush Hour team leaders set up the first mivtzoim booth in Williamsburg

Bais Rivkah High School girls have broken ground in Mivtza Neshek. They have opened new frontiers and will be a growing success for the upcoming year, scaling new heights! However, let's first understand how this revolution started.

One of the most prevalent challenges that Shluchos and N'shei Chabad are faced with is communicating the richness and depth of Yiddishkeit to someone who has never actually interacted with authentic Yiddishkeit.

This frustration particularly resonated with Bais Rivkah girls when they would go on mitzvaim. How can we communicate the mitzvah of Neshek in a compelling way?

Lighting Shabbos candles is a powerful and emotional experience for Jewish women. When large conventions take place in Crown Heights and unaffiliated women join with hundreds of others to light Neshek together, that powerful and emotional moment seamlessly turns into many practical *hachlotos*—many resolve then and there to light Shabbos candles on their own from then on!

How do we “duplicate” the Shabbos Candles experience, allowing unaffiliated Jewish women a taste of lighting Shabbos candles?

With an innovative idea in mind, Rabbi Mendy Wolf, director of Young Jewish Leaders, approached Bais Rivkah. He suggested launching a revolutionary initiative that would not only give the girls the zechus of helping a woman light Shabbos candles once, but also help curate connections and maintain impactful relationships that will grow to include even more mitzvos. Instead of “selling” Shabbos candles, let Shabbos candles sell themselves!

And so, Brush Hour was born.

We all have a rich and deep emotional connection with Shabbos candles. Whether it’s a child’s innocent question of “Is it Shabbos yet?” or a busy mother’s break from the hectic grind, whether it’s the image of a regal Shabbos table set for guests, or the anticipation of gathering together with family and sharing a Shabbos meal together, Shabbos candles is a collection of moving moments and memories.

Instead of “selling” Shabbos candles, let Shabbos candles sell themselves! And so, Brush Hour was born.

These moments captured will allow Shabbos to sell itself.

Being that art is one of the most effective ways of capturing and communicating emotions, Brush Hour is a program that allows the experience of Shabbos

Being that art is one of the most effective ways of capturing and communicating emotions, Brush Hour is a program that allows the experience of Shabbos candles to be shared through the arts.

candles to be shared through the arts.

Brush Hour started in two phases.

All too often, when we are used to something, we stop



BRHS girls painting and smiling with CTeens from Woodcliff, NJ



Neshek-art booths with the grade representatives.



appreciating its beauty. Shabbos candles are no different.

The first phase was focusing on those Shabbos candle lighting moments and trying to capture them. The Bais Rivkah girls gathered to discuss and reflect what Shabbos candles meant to them. They then communicated those feelings through different methods—through poetry, creative writing, and art.

They were also challenged to become ambassadors themselves, and take extra Neshek to share with their friends and family.

The second phase was to share their art, and by extension *what Shabbos means to them*, with others. Brush Hour launched a program that would allow the Bais

Rivkah girls to share their art with CTeen chapters across the tristate area. The art served as a springboard for meaningful discussion about Neshek. The Bais Rivkah girls would present a multimedia presentation, showcase the art they had created, and share what Shabbos candles meant to them. The inspired CTeeners would then create their own art.

The twelfth grade team that spearheaded Brush Hour included Shoshana Borisute (myself), Miriam Friend, Chana Goldstein, Chanale Halperin, Fayga Mangel, Esther Niasoff, and Nechama Schapiro. The team was led by Chana Yerushalmi, Brush Hour coordinator, and directed by Rabbi Mendy Wolf.

The inaugural CTeen event was hosted by Estie Orenstein, Shlucha in Woodcliff Lake, NJ, around Purim time. The Bais Rivkah girls came to Woodcliff Lake and set up the entire event. It was a mix of ninth graders and seniors, and they ran the event for the twenty secular teens.

“I can’t even begin to tell you how impressed I was; I was blown away,” says Estie Orenstein. “I’m a Bais

Rivkah alumna, and I am so proud of our school. They explained Shabbos in such a beautiful way. They did an amazing job, far beyond their years. The multimedia they shared was great, and their warmth and message really inspired the teens!”

Each girl left with Neshek to take home that week, along with Brush Hour swag and the artwork they created. They were also challenged to become ambassadors themselves, and take extra Neshek to share with their friends and family.

During the following weeks, the phones of the Bais Rivkah girls buzzed with selfies and updates of the ripple effect their Brush Hour experience had caused.

After Pesach, Brush Hour expanded to two other CTeen locations in Great Neck, NY and Allentown, PA.

“This was something that was not done enough in the past,” says Tzivi Baumgarten, Shlucha in Great Neck. “The combined energy of the Bais Rivkah girls with the CTeeners was so powerful!”

A consistent piece of feedback the Brush Hour team heard from the Shluchos was that the message was as effective as it was because the CTeeners were hearing this from girls their own age. This made the Brush Hour program uniquely relevant and especially impactful.

An additional benefit the Brush Hour team noticed was that not only did the Bais Rivkah girls have an increased passion in mitzvot, but they also deep-

A consistent piece of feedback the Brush Hour team heard from the Shluchos was that the message was as effective as it was because the CTeeners were hearing this from girls their own age.

ened their appreciation for lighting Shabbos candles tremendously.

Looking ahead, the Brush Hour team aims to continue to expand this special project, partnering with the dozens of CTeen programs existing all across the tristate area.

“We want to create follow up programming that will keep the teens engaged,” says Chanale Halperin. “The CTeeners all asked us when is the next time we were going to come and host an event. We would love to do wall murals next!”

Brush Hour is a fresh and different way of sharing the beauty of Neshek. It may not be able to truly duplicate the Shabbos Candle lighting experience, but it will be sure to inspire the participants to try out this life changing mitzvah for themselves. ■



Brush Hour in Great Neck, NY





ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

FINDING THE BALANCE



DEAR CHAYA,

For many years, my coworkers and I were a close-knit group and I absolutely loved going to work. Recently, the company hired someone new and I just can't seem to get along with her. I don't know if it's her high-pitched voice, because she's from another country and she doesn't understand our social norms, or something else. I used to love going to work, and now I just feel sad that we don't have the same group dynamic that we used to have.

Ironically, my daughter is going through a similar experience with her new class. The school added some new girls that she can't seem to get along with for some inexplicable reason. Perhaps there might be a smidge of jealousy, too.

But here I am, struggling with how to handle it in my own workplace and unsure how to guide my daughter as well.

Any advice is welcome. Signed,

Not getting along with my coworker



DEAR NOT GETTING ALONG,

So you have a new coworker and she's just... different. No more can you just be your lighthearted self, surrounded by people who get you. Now there's a new dynamic and it's definitely off. She doesn't get you, or you don't get her, or both. Awkward. Ugh.

What now?

We are taught that the circumstances of our life are precisely designed for us; for our souls. Everything that happens to us, and around us, was intentionally planned by Hashem to help us fulfill our life's mission.

From the fact that you are asking this question, it is clear that you recognize this. You are finding difficulty in a social situation at work, but instead of wishing (or plotting) to get your coworker to change, which might understandably be many people's default, you are asking for advice. You realize that you can change your own approach to one that aligns with your values, and make the situation better from your end. Good for you!

We are taught that the circumstances of our life are precisely designed for us; for our souls.

The reality is, you probably won't get the old dynamic between your colleagues back. But surely there is a way you can change things to be a little less uncomfortable every day at work. And who knows, you might just become friends with your new colleague one day!

The first step in making this happen is changing your attitude. Take a minute and think about the idea that this is a growth exercise for you designed for you by

Try to look at her as an old friend and find what makes her tick. Because everyone has some virtue that is unique to them in the world.

Hashem, rather than an annoying burden that you don't deserve.

Next, come up with some strategies to create a better dynamic with someone that's really not your type.

A few ideas:

Take a cue from others.

Often a person that absolutely drives you crazy doesn't seem to bother other people somehow. The most annoying people usually still manage to have friends. Try to see what her friends appreciate about her and aspire to look at her in the same way. Maybe behind that annoying voice is a kindhearted listener. Maybe her tendency to talk too much (for example) comes along with an insightful mind, or even just pure entertainment, if you'd be open to it. Try to look at her as an old friend and find what makes her tick. Because everyone has some virtue that is unique to them in the world.

Be forgiving.

The Torah tells us to love our fellow as ourselves. We all have idiosyncrasies. Perhaps you don't know how to be on time or you tend to speak too quickly. Maybe you walk heavily or sneeze in a weird way. Somehow, we find a way to forgive ourselves for it and look past it, focusing on the parts of us that really matter.



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

And since we all learn best from example, once you work this out on your end, it will be simple to encourage your daughter to follow suit.

Try to apply that same forgiveness to your co-worker. It may be true that she is annoying in some ways. But just as you aren't defined by your own shtick, she shouldn't be defined by hers. There's more to her than that, and if you'd give yourself the opportunity, you'd be fortunate to get to know more about her.

Hashem has given you this challenge because He decided that now is the time for you to stretch yourself in this area. Know that you have the strength to pass this test and that by doing so you'll be fulfilling your soul's mission in this world by refining it in a

deep and meaningful way.

I am not familiar enough with you, your friend, or your workplace to suggest anything very specific. But, I am certain that you can come up with some great ideas on how you can make things better.

Whatever your strategy will be, think of it as a spiritual exercise because that's exactly what it is. And since we all learn best from example, once you work this out on your end, it will be simple to encourage your daughter to follow suit.

Wishing you much hatzlacha in this meaningful step in your journey of life.

<3 Chaya ■



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Ushpizim

WELCOMING GUESTS
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Serving your SHLICHUS



Sara Matti Kievman, Crown Heights
Bais Rivkah High School Junior



Interviewer Sara Matti sits down with Shluchos Chaya (Brennan) Goldberg of Playa Del Carmen, México and Rosie (Kievman) Lipskier of Tuscaloosa, Alabama to get a glimpse into life on shlichus and what their experiences have been like hosting and organizing events.

Twenty four hours of complete chaos comes to a halt. She waves her hands in a welcoming motion three times, covers her face and recites the brocha. Candles glistening, the Shabbos Shechinah rests, wrapping her home in a warm embrace. Now, as she takes a deep breath, revealing her face, there is a glow in her eyes. Slowly, her guests arrive for Kabolas Shabbos.

Joyous melodies are heard from the neighboring room as davening comes to a close. Groups of people flood inside, taking their seats around the tables. Scanning the room, she sits

beside her husband and for just a moment leans back, acknowledging her hard work. Beautifully set tables, lined with glass china and shimmering silverware. Blossoming flowers decorating each table overflowing with delectable Shabbos foods. Smiling at her guests, she squeezes her hand softly and whispers quietly, “Thank you Hashem.”

Chaya Goldberg and her husband Mendel are on shlichus in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico. They have six wonderful children ka”h and have been on shlichus for around twelve years. On one of her weekly drives to Cancun, I took the chance to call Chaya up and hear all about her shlichus.

WHAT WERE THINGS LIKE WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT ON SHLICHUS?

I like to joke around and say that if I survived the first year, I can survive anything! We were the typical new Shluchim; our home was our Chabad House, our children were our helpers and things were pretty tight.

My favorite story that I like to share is that once we went for a walk out on our main avenue with our two little children and Starbucks cups in hand, hoping to meet Jews along the way. The most ironic part of it all was that as we would meet one Jew at a time, each thought they would be the only one at our Shabbos table that week, since there are no Jews in Playa. As it turns out, there is an abundance of Jews that live in Playa, yet each not knowing of the other’s existence! Boruch Hashem, we hosted twenty five people over that Shabbos, and it was a beautiful, uplifting experience for everyone. Most of them knew each other from business dealings, yet had never thought to inquire if the other was Jewish.

I would like to say that we had a very humble beginning. Shabbosos were very small and we usually hosted between three and five people; if we were lucky, we hosted between five and ten. Boruch Hashem, I can now say that we have up to six hundred people at our Shabbos meals during the summer months.

WHAT WERE SOME DIFFICULTIES YOU FACED WITH HOSTING IN THE FIRST YEARS OF YOUR SHLICHUS?

Practically speaking, we did not have a lot of kosher food back then; it was very hard to come by. So in

I like to joke around and say that if I survived the first year, I can survive anything!

the beginning we would ask ourselves, what type of chicken do we even have in stock that we can cook for Shabbos? Unlike Playa del Carmen, Mexico City is a flourishing community with a full supply of Kosher food, yet it is a two and a half hour flight away. The providers there did not understand why we needed them to send cargo shipments of kosher food all the way out to Playa del Carmen. Within the next eighteen months, we took a trip to Mexico City and met with the buyers and kosher store owners. This really helped to put a face to a name, and allowed us to build a solid relationship with them. Now, Boruch Hashem, it is a pretty seamless process, and we store plenty of kosher food from these shipments in our array of freezers.

WHAT TYPE OF CROWD DO YOU MOST OFTEN HAVE AT YOUR CHABAD HOUSE?

The biggest misconception that we had moving to



Honestly, it's very simple. I believe completely in my heart and mind that every single event that I do is the Rebbe's event.

Playa was that there would be times in the year that things wouldn't be so busy. We were very wrong. Playa is a natural attraction to Jews and tourists from all over the world. From after Pesach until after Tishrei, we have the bulk of the Israeli backpacker season, with July bringing in a large influx of American tourists and August bringing a massive influx of French tourists.

From after Tishrei until Purim time, we have American tourists that come and go. Additionally, we have our community here in Playa that live here year-round, so we definitely have an even amount of both frum and not frum people coming to our Chabad House.

DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO HAVE SUCH A BIG VARIETY OF PEOPLE AT YOUR SHABBOS TABLE?

Over time, I have learned to navigate the crowd. The frum Jews don't really need me to entertain them, so I usually give them a quick "Good Shabbos," and let them know I'll catch up with them the next day. This is because the not-yet-frum people don't tend to show up to the meals on Shabbos day, so at night I make sure to give them my full attention.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE REBBE'S HAND IN YOUR SHLICHUS?

Honestly, it's very simple. I believe completely in my heart and mind that every single event that I do is the Rebbe's event.

Before every event, I write a detailed Pan to the Rebbe, asking for brochos, and talking to the Rebbe about his shlichus.

Once when we needed to expand our kitchen in our Chabad house, my husband said to me, "If an employee has an issue, what does he do? He goes to his boss and explains to him what is not working in the office. When we have an issue, we go to our boss. Our boss is the Rebbe." So that is exactly what I did. I wrote a Pan and told the Rebbe we needed a certain amount of money for the kitchen equipment and being that this is the Rebbe's shlichus, I need the Rebbe to help us get the money. Boruch Hashem, my husband made some phone calls and he was able to raise the money needed.

WHAT DOES AN AVERAGE SHABBOS MEAL LOOK LIKE AT YOUR CHABAD HOUSE?

There is no such thing as an average Shabbos meal in Playa, but a typical Shabbos in the summer can be anywhere from two hundred to six hundred people. A typical Shabbos in the winter can be between fifty and ninety people. I would definitely venture to say that the summer is our busiest time of year.





DO YOU DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY FOR THE YOM TOV SEASONS THAN YOU DO FOR REGULAR SHABBOSOS?

For Shabbos we have one way of preparing, and depending on the upcoming Yom Tov, there are different sorts of preparations that take place.

Sukkos happens to be a very low season, so I make sure to focus on and spend time with my children. Pesach is generally a very busy Yom Tov. On the first night, we make a big Seder with over two hundred people, and the second night we make sure to dedicate to our family by doing a Seder solely with our children and my parents. It is important to me to ensure that my children get to have the experience of a real family Seder.

WHEN DO YOU USUALLY BEGIN ALL YOUR SHABBOS AND YOM TOV PREP, AND HOW DO YOU PACE YOURSELF?

Boruch Hashem, Mexico has very affordable labor, which allows me to have a full staff working in my kitchen. I have a chef and four workers who solely use the recipes I give them. In the past few years, I have not had so much to do with the food itself, but I am in charge overall and involved in many other aspects. It is definitely a better-run system now

I can't just snap my fingers and trust that the meals will get done.

that I'm not the one actually mixing the onions. On Wednesday, I will send a text to our chef letting him know what the menu is and what needs to be purchased. On Thursday, he starts all of the cooking and preparing. On Friday, I am usually in the kitchen all day overseeing all the preparations because some things just need a Jewish mamme. Even though I am not the one literally cutting up the food, things are often stressful being in the kitchen. I can't just snap my fingers and trust that the meals will get done. The workers need my guidance, and I'm there every step of the way.

WHAT ARE SOME STAPLES FOUND ON YOUR SHABBOS TABLE THAT THE COMMUNITY ENJOYS?

On Friday nights we have our signature salmon that the locals absolutely love! We usually don't make chicken soup on Friday nights because it's so hot in Playa, but in recent years, my daughters have very much enjoyed getting involved and making chicken

I would say that there really is no average Shabbos meal.

soup for Shabbos. They also take part in making and serving the desserts.

HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE YOU ARE GIVING ENOUGH TIME TO BOTH YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR SHLICHUS?

Everything in your life can be categorized into a glass ball or a rubber ball. If you drop a glass ball, it breaks. You cannot put it back together again. Even if you try to put it back together, there will always be spots of glue. If you drop a rubber ball, it bounces back up. In our lives, we try to treat our family like a glass ball and our shlichus like a rubber ball. For example, I make sure to read a story to my children every night and say Shema with them. Whereas, if I don't provide a women's class or push it off to another time, my shli-



chus will continue in other areas. My children need me in ways that no one else can provide and need to be attended to like a 'glass ball.'

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED?

Years ago, when I was just starting out on shlichus, Henya Federman and I were talking at the Kinus HaShluchos, and she gave me a priceless piece of advice. She told me that I need to make sure to constantly re-evaluate; every week, every month, and every year. Something that worked well one year will not necessarily work as well for the next. What worked for one Shabbos will not necessarily work the following week. Always re-evaluate so that you can better provide and constantly improve, both within your family and your shlichus.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST LESSON YOU HAVE LEARNED WHILE ON SHLICHUS?

Just recently, I was talking to Chaya Teldon from Long Island. I asked her, "What is there to do if I feel like I have turned into a caterer? I am serving people Friday night, I am serving people Shabbos day, and I am responsible for the kosher food we sell during the week. Sometimes it's just too much, and I ask myself, what am I even doing here?"

She looked at me and said, "Chaya, on our shlichus we have to be sure to teach people. As long as we





are teaching people, we are doing our shlichus and making the Rebbe proud.” Based on that, I turned my childrens’ playroom into a small classroom, and I started teaching the women in Shul in between Mincha and Maariv on Friday nights. This very much helped me feel like a Shlucha, and not just a caterer.

CAN YOU SHARE ONE OF YOUR SPECIAL RECIPES WITH US?

Sure!

Chaya's favorite biscotti recipe:

(Original recipe from Mushky Moskowicz)

- 3 Eggs
- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- (Cream it all together)
- 2 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- 3 ½ cups flour
- (Mix it all together)
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- Cinnamon topping:

- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup cinnamon

- Shape 3 logs onto a cookie sheet and bake on 350° F for 25-30 minutes.



THANK YOU Chaya for your time! It was fascinating to hear a behind-the-scenes view into the life of a busy Shlucha in such a popular tourist destination.

• • •

A couple of days later, I called up my sister Rosie (Kievman) Lipskier. She is married to Rabbi Kussi, and together they have been on shlichus for seven years in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. We spoke about her experiences living as a campus Shlucha.

We love when the table is beautifully set because it has a very positive effect on the mood of the meal.

WHAT WERE THINGS LIKE IN YOUR FIRST YEAR ON SHLICHUS?

It was definitely a reality check for us! We assumed that right away things would be booming and meals would be full, yet things started out quite small. It was also a big culture shock to move down south, since the people there are mostly very religious Christians who have never met a religious Jew. There was a lot of learning for us in the beginning, mainly in getting the students to trust us and building a relationship that they would like to come back to. It was a very positive experience, yet it was a learning experience.

IS THERE KOSHER FOOD WHERE YOU LIVE?

We have no kosher food in the state of Alabama. Obviously, we have basic kosher items that we can get in any grocery store, like things with an OU. When it comes to poultry and dairy, we do a bulk order from Florida together with the other Chabad houses in the state of Alabama, and once every four to six weeks we restock. We have three freezers; like most Shluchim, freezers are our best friend. We are the “Kosher Restaurant” in town. If anyone is passing through on business, they usually come to us for this reason.

WHAT DOES AN AVERAGE SHABBOS MEAL LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CHABAD HOUSE?

I would say that there really is no average Shabbos meal. We can have really big Friday night meals, where we'll have anywhere between fifty to eighty people. Those meals are very beautiful and lively. During football season, while things are hectic, meals tend to be a lot more low key and intimate. I like to call it ‘focusing on quality over quantity.’ Both are equally beautiful in different ways. I would definitely say though that the personal, long lasting relationships are formed during the smaller, more intimate meals.

WHAT DO YOUR SHABBOS PREPARATIONS USUALLY LOOK LIKE, AND HOW DO YOU PACE YOURSELF?

Generally, I start preparing on Thursday afternoon. I'll make my challah, chicken soup, desserts, and I'm usually up preparing pretty late into the night. Most of my Friday is then spent doing everything else. Occasionally, I'll have students come for a cooking club and help me out. Some years, the cooking club takes off and lots of students get involved, and some years, it's just not something that sticks, and I usually end up doing it on my own. Winter Shabbosos are much more of a hustle and very busy, but for the summer Shabbosos, preparations are pretty relaxed. I'm very much a list-writing person, so making my menus much earlier in the week really saves me. I like to have my charts; being prepared and knowing what I need to do is definitely a priority. An alumna from a different school is a computer tech, and he created a system that a lot of campus Shluchim use now. It's a texting system which we use to be in touch with our students. When we have a meal or a specific event, we send it in through this system which sends a message directly to the students' phones. They can choose to RSVP with a key word that we give them which automatically signs them up. This really helps us calculate how many people are coming and makes planning a lot smoother.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU ADD TO YOUR MEALS TO MAKE THEM DIFFERENT, AND WHAT IS SOME ADVICE YOU HAVE ON HOSTING?

If you want to make your meals look prettier, the little details matter tremendously. One example is having flowers on the table, which adds a lot. Having beautiful tablecloths are a game changer as well. We used to use plastic, but now we switched to real tablecloths. It takes a little more effort to wash but makes all the difference. If you really want to elevate the room, using velvet tablecloths makes the room look absolutely stunning. We love when the table is beautifully set because it has a very positive effect on the mood of the meal. It is a little bit of extra work to do all of this, but it's worth it! It makes such a big difference at the end of the day, when all of the work is done, to be able to look back at my table and see how beautiful it looks altogether. During the



actual meals, we like to change up the program to make each meal more enjoyable for the students. My husband usually says a nice Dvar Torah at the beginning of the meal and we sing songs with the students, which they absolutely love. Most of the Freshman students already pick up some of the songs by the third week.

On Yom Tov, we like to change things up. Instead of making chicken soup, I'll make a yummy blended vegetable soup that the students love. Our Yom Tov meals are much bigger, so we do them outside in the tent and that is something special on its own. We like to make those meals different from Shabbos, so we'll do something like shakshuka or poke bowls.

Regarding advice on hosting, I would say that getting help is the best thing you can do. Don't do it all on your own—if someone offers help, take it! Another important thing is to be sure to give yourself plenty of time. Always assume that things will take longer than they do, and that way you don't have to worry about not having time.

HOW DO YOU FEEL THE REBBE IS PRESENT IN YOUR SHLICHUS?

A specific story that comes to mind is when we first moved down here, we were renting a home, but we were always looking to buy a home. When we first moved into

I think that a healthy shlichus and a healthy family life are one and the same.

a neighborhood that we loved, we were about to buy a house and right as we were going to sign the contract, the owner went and sold it to someone else. We were very disappointed. We had written to the Rebbe, and at the last second we had to move into a different rental home even farther from campus. Around two years later, a house that my husband and I had had our eyes on since we moved to Alabama went up for sale. We dreamed of having this house and we never thought it would become available for us. To keep a long story short, we ended up signing a contract with them. When we wrote to the Rebbe and opened the Igros, the Hebrew date on the page that we had opened corresponded with the closing date of the house. We definitely felt the Rebbe guiding us through this situation every step of the way, especially with how all of the money came about and through the entire process of moving in and designing our new home.

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIAL EVENTS YOU LIKE

TO DO?

We have a student board with around seven to twelve students every year. This gives us a great opportunity to build more personal relationships, and they also help us with planning and preparing for our programs. Most of them are super excited to join! For them, their incentive changes; it's not just about the free meal anymore, but a chance to come back time and again to that special relationship with their Jewish family. We like to make it enjoyable for the students that are on the board. We start off with ice breaker games, and then, later in the year, we start Chavrusa learning and many other fun activities. In general, it is a struggle for all Shluchim to get people to want to come to their events. I feel that doing this really helps to bring in a crowd and builds friendships among the students, not just at Chabad but outside as well.

AS A SHLUCHA, DO YOU HAVE A ROLE MODEL THAT INSPIRES YOU?

Boruch Hashem, I have many family members who are Shluchim on campus. My Aunt Sarale Deitsch (campus Shlucha at Ohio State University) has been one of my biggest inspirations and has definitely helped me a lot, whether it's with an event idea or a new, fun recipe to add to our meals. I also have four other sisters-in-law, all of whom are on campus shlichus. Whenever I have a question or I need something, I know I can always reach out to them. I am also part of a whatsapp group called "Freshman Campuses" that started when we were all relatively new to campus shlichus. Now, some of us are ten years in, some fifteen, so we're not really "Freshman" anymore, but we still speak often and send a message when anyone needs some advice or a new recipe.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR FAMILY AND SHLICHUS?

I think that a healthy shlichus and a healthy family life are one and the same. You can't have a healthy shlichus if there is something wrong with the family, and you can't have a healthy family life without the shlichus running well. Your family is your shlichus. In my opinion, a Shlucha should never sacrifice her family for her shlichus. Our children follow by example. They do what we do, not what we say. So when we practice having a healthy attitude and healthy perspectives, and we have healthy ways to deal with whatever is going on,

our children learn from that. When we love what we are doing, enjoy our shlichus, and include our children in that, they learn to love it, and they want to do it, too.

CAN YOU SHARE WITH US ONE OF YOUR SPECIAL RECIPES?

Rosie's homemade Matbucha dip:

1 onion
1 bell pepper, diced
1 can diced tomatoes
½ can of tomato sauce
Salt, garlic powder & cayenne pepper to taste

Directions:

- Sauté onions with a tablespoon of olive oil
- Add diced peppers followed by a can of diced tomatoes.
- Once peppers and onions are soft, add half a can of tomato sauce and spices.
- Bring to a boil, then lower to simmer and cover, stirring periodically.
- Cook for about an hour on low simmer.
- Matbucha is ready when it's thick.



THANK YOU Rosie for giving us some insight into the life of a campus Shlucha! It was incredible to hear all about the creativity and energy needed for your special shlichus. ■



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TRICKS *of* *the* TRADE

An insider's tips on how to be a host and a guest

Chanie (Minsky) Gurkov, Wayne, NJ
Graduating class of 5772 (2012)



If there's room in the heart, there is room in the home." Growing up in Crown Heights, our home was a constant hub for guests. Every Tishrei, my parents would host hundreds of bochorim. My mother would prepare enormous amounts of fresh, elaborate foods for the guests. Helping her for long hours in the kitchen, I would always wonder why chicken and rice wouldn't suffice. "Only the best for the guests" was her motto. My parents instilled in us that Hachnasas Orchim is one of the most important mitzvos one can do.

At ninety-nine, just after having a bris milah, Avraham Avinu was in the midst of a conversation with Hashem, when suddenly he saw three strangers (Malachim) passing by. Without hesitation, he ran, in the scorching heat, to call these three strangers to join him for a feast. Couldn't Avraham Avinu wait until he finished his conversation with the King of Kings?! From this, the Talmud concludes that welcoming guests — pure strangers! — is greater than greeting Hashem.

Whether it's for a meal or for a night's stay, hosting guests can seem overwhelming at times, but with the proper tools and preparation, it can make for the most meaningful and enjoyable times for both hostess and guest.

FOR THE HOSTESS:

Enjoy the Mitzvah!

Whether you're a veteran hostess or one that gets overwhelmed easily, my first piece of advice would be to relax and enjoy the mitzvah! Long after the guests leave and the stress fades, the only thing that will remain is the memories of the atmosphere that you created. Sure, they might remember the delicious salad or the beautifully arranged bedroom, but most certainly and most importantly, they will not forget the warmth they felt being in your home. Let them know that you are there if they need anything and treat them like they are welcomed and wanted, for it is they who are giving you this opportunity to fulfill this great mitzvah.

Your Best is the Best

Today I am, boruch Hashem, fortunate to live on shlichus, and I am no stranger to guests. At first, I would get overwhelmed, trying to achieve the best for my guests by cooking the most elaborate show-stopping dishes, for only the best would do! However, over time, I learned that my best is when I can be at my best and not overwhelmed with a mountain of tasks. So while I am thankful to my mother for showing me how to be the “hostess with the mostess:)” and I do love to host and make elaborate meals, I also know it's okay to go back to the basics and serve delicious, simple food that's made with love. If you are too exhausted to be present, then was that nine-step roasted rack of veal with demi glacé and a side of confit potatoes worth it? No, I do not have the recipe:)

Most certainly and most importantly, they will not forget the warmth they felt being in your home.

Get it on Paper

Being prepared and planning for every “what if” scenario is something I know all too well. A perfectionist by nature, I often spend time overthinking and overanalyzing, which can sometimes pose a challenge when hosting a lot. “Did my guests enjoy it? Did they eat enough? What if they think my house is a mess?” I can go on and on. One of the things that has helped me with this challenge are lists. Writing everything down on paper in front of me helps me compartmentalize and see what I need to get done or sometimes what is not necessary to do, and there is no better feeling than crossing a task off the list!

Note the Preferences

When having guests, an important thing I try to remember to do is to ask if there are any food allergies or preferences. That way, I know that my guests are comfortable and will have something that they will enjoy. They also find this very thoughtful.

Prepare Them

If my guests are not frum, I try to remind them



While a small gift is always appreciated, a simple “Thank you, that was delicious!” always hits the spot.

that if they do plan on bringing something to be sure to bring it before Shabbos as anything brought on Shabbos can not be used then. Doing this avoids any unnecessary awkward situations.

Mix up your Platters

Another wonderful tip I learned from my mother-in-law is instead of plating each food item on a separate dish, she makes platters of multiple dishes. So the chicken, kugel, meat, and sides all go together on one tray. That way, the guests get all the foods served to them at once, as opposed to having multiple dishes that do not reach them. This also helps minimize leftovers.

Close the Closet Door

Trying to get the house cleaned and prepared is a whole challenge of its own, but my husband often reminds me that the guests are not going to the upstairs linen closet to make sure all the towels are color-coded and folded neatly. While being clean and organized makes for a welcoming home, it does not mean you need to re-organize every nook and cranny before guests arrive.

Prepare in Advance

When guests leave, I like to clean and prepare the guest room immediately, as if a new guest is coming right away. That way, when I do have guests coming, their room is already prepared, and I avoid the last-minute rush and hecticness of preparing their room; one thing off my list!

FOR THE GUEST:

Have a Heart, Do your Part

Your hostess may not remember what color dress you wore or what you ate, but they will probably remember how you made them feel. Were you respectful, thankful; were you kind? Treat

their home with respect, clean up after yourself, and offer to help out to make sure that your stay leaves a positive memory. It's very helpful when guests strip their linens and put the used towels in the laundry bin. This jumpstarts the process of getting the guest room cleaned for the next guest.

Hakoros Hatov Goes a Long Way

Hosting might sometimes be exhausting, even when cooking simply, but the affirmation that your guests are satisfied makes the work worthwhile. Showing Hakoras Hatov is one of the most important things a guest can do. While a small gift is always appreciated, a simple “Thank you, that was delicious!” always hits the spot. That's not to say that the mitzvah itself is not enough of a reward, but as humans, it is okay and sometimes necessary to know that our hard work was appreciated.

Whether you are cooking, cleaning, organizing, or ‘patching’ for your upcoming guests, keep these tips in mind, and remember that inviting people into our personal space can sometimes pose a challenge, but it is one of the most rewarding and satisfying mitzvos we can do. So whether you are someone who is hosting or being hosted, open up your heart and your home and the brachos are sure to flow. ■





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HOSTING *Yom Tov Meals* AS A TEAM

Devora (Geisinsky) Krasnianski
Graduating class of 5748 (1988)



Leah was excited to finally have the space to host (and budget and help weren't an issue). She could just picture it—lots of people coming and going, just as it had been in her parents' home. She jumped right into the planning, assuming that Benny was just as thrilled as she was. Yes, she did know about Benny's negative experiences at his family's table, but she figured that he would run his table differently since he was so different from his father. But here it is, a few days before Yom Tov, and Benny isn't on board with all the hosting.

Benny was anxious. Leah was so excited about having so many guests at each meal. They finally had a dining room that was large enough to host as her parents had always done. She was talking about it for weeks—the menus, the shopping, the guest lists. All he could think about was how overwhelming it would be to run the meal, greet guests, and lead the small talk and introductions. He just wanted a quiet family meal the way they always had done in their smaller dining room. He knew that this was important to her, and she had been working for weeks on this. And she didn't even ask for his help much. Yet, he couldn't bring himself to be excited about it all.

They each have their perspectives and reasons. For Leah, Yom Tov was all about family and friends and sharing—it was hard work, but it was worth it. Benny's experience was different. They, too, had lots of guests at long meals where he and his siblings had to sit quietly as their father delivered long *divrei Torah* to the guests. His mother stressed for days before, and during the meals, both parents were constantly quieting the children. Hosting has different connotations for each of them.

While hosting people who have no other meal is a mitzvah, having friends and family as guests has an added element. Enjoying your seudas Yom Tov with friends and family can be a great time for connection, sharing family, and creating family memories. At the same time, it can be lots of work. While it may be that one does more of the preparation work (traditionally, the wife) during the meals, it is both who are interacting with the guests. Your spouse may have different perspectives about being hosts. To keep your sanity and shalom bayis intact, it is important that both you and your husband work as partners and are on the same page regarding your hosting.

It starts with conversations. Not about logistics and lists or who and how. Or menus and budgets. Your first discussions should be open and forthcoming about what each of you wants and needs as pertains to hosting for this Yom Tov. Your ideas and perspectives and circumstances may change through the years; it is worthwhile to have such conversations before every Yom Tov.

The deeper and richer these conversations are, the better you understand each other, and then the more accommodating you can be to each other's needs and wants. Listen with genuine curiosity and an open mind, with no agenda.

Start these conversations weeks in advance, so you can continue the conversation as applicable, make accommodations, and map out your plans. Be prepared to take

It starts with conversations.

in your husband's perspectives and insights. Listen to his visions for the Yom Tov meals—the before, during, and after. A little caveat: If you want your meals to be different from how they were in the past, choose your words carefully so that you aren't blaming or judging the past; keep the conversation focused on the future.

What does having guests on Yom Tov mean to each of you? What is the backstory? How did you come to those perspectives about having guests? Some people fondly remember being guests at certain families' homes and want that open home, too. Others want more intimate family meals. For some people, preparing the meals was full of family planning, working, and laughing together, and others remember only stress. What are your earliest memories of Yom Tov meals? What are some memories of meals through the years? What made those meals memorable? Who was there? Who was hosting? What was the vibe? Are there favorite foods? Songs? What would you like to recreate at your table? What do you not want to repeat, and what can you do to try to prevent that?

What is going on in your life this year, and how might these circumstances impact your hosting? Bigger dining space, new baby, heavier or lighter load at work, budget constraints, more or less household help—all these can impact how you host this year.

What is each of your temperament around hosting? Are either of you more introverted and find hosting and so-



cializing somewhat draining? Do either of you have a harder time welcoming and entertaining new people? What about your kids?

What do you hope people will experience at your meal(s)? What do you want the people at the meal to feel when they walk away? Do you hope they are inspired by the messages of the Yom Tov and Yiddishkeit in general? Feeling loved, welcomed, pampered? Do you want to help people meet others in the community? What do you have to do to make that happen?

What type of atmosphere do you want for your seuda: open house, formal, casual, family-friendly? Think of the first moments from the invite, to when they walk into your home, through the meal, until they walk out the door. What will they see, smell, hear, taste—the tablescape, the singing, the conversations, the children sharing in the meal.

How will you involve the children (and all their crafts and *divrei Torah*)? If you'd like your husband to thank you for your efforts, you may have to ask for that outright. "I work very hard on the meal, and I would like a public thank you. It doesn't have to be long." If you'd like specific songs to be sung, ask in advance. What topics should be avoided?

Once you have a sense of what each of you envisions for your meals, you can talk about the logistics. There are lots of meals throughout the month; you can compromise and try to address each of your visions and concerns at different meals.

What will your role be, your husband's, and the other

Nudging and cajoling may work, but it isn't good for your shalom bayis.

people's? Who will do the menu planning, shopping, and cooking? Who will set the tables, prepare the salads, clean up after, and put things back into the refrigerator? Brainstorm ways to make everything easier. How can you simplify your processes and get everyone on board? What can you do so that everyone knows what is expected of them? If you want the support of a team, talk about it in advance. As applicable, make lists.

Who/how will you address the inevitable children acting like children during the meals (think of each meal separately)? Who will take care of cranky, tired, hungry children during the meal? How will the meal proceed while one is tending to the children?

Who will you invite to each meal? Going back to your visions of your Yom Tov meals, you can work out who you would like at each meal. You can also talk about who you would not like to host at certain meals or even at all. Once your guest list is concluded, share it with your husband and children, so they are prepared.

Budgets and preparation time. This may go back to why you like to host, and the experience you want the guests to have. One of you may want larger, grander meals than the other. One of you may be more practical than the other. Be realistic about the money and time constraints.



Plan for potential obstacles, and then be prepared to laugh when something inevitably will not work to plan. Talk about your concerns and what you can do to mitigate those.

If you want guests more than your husband does (or vice versa), try to understand his perspective. Nudging and cajoling may work, but it isn't good for your shalom bayis. Schedule a time to have a conversation. "Benny, I'd like to talk about hosting this year. I'm excited about having guests this year in our larger dining room. When is a good time?" Give him time to think about it; don't spring the conversation on him.

Even if you know his concerns, start from the beginning by listening to his stories. Validate him. Only when he feels fully heard can you ask him what you can do to make hosting easier for him. And listen. And listen some more. Don't start offering solutions until you have fully heard, understood him, and validated his concerns. Remember, he is the one who needs to step out of his comfort zone; respect his concerns, and try to accommodate him. Be prepared to compromise. There are several meals, so you can try different things at each.

After each meal, thank him, "I so enjoyed having my brother and the kids over. I know it was hard for you

because you wanted a quiet meal. Thank you for going along with me on this." After Yom Tov, reflect together on the whole experience, and be prepared to tweak for the upcoming Yomim Tovim.

It can work both ways. If your husband wants more guests or more food or a different hosting experience (fancier table, kids better behaved, etc.), then talk about it. Your perspective and sanity are important, too. "I know that having lots of guests is important to you. At the same time, I am feeling overwhelmed by the thought of everything that hosting entails. Let's come up with some ideas to make it easier for it to actually happen." "I know you want your parents to come for the whole Yom Tov. In the past, it was a lot of work for me because I do want you and the kids to spend time with them, but I also need more help with the extra prep work. Let's try to come up with ideas to make this possible." "Forty people at every meal is too much for me—the prep, the noise, the mess, the smiling, the clean-up. I simply cannot do it. I can host ten people max. Thank you for understanding me."

These conversations are so powerful because you get to understand each other better, and together, you can come up with viable plans that can work for both of you. ■

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Dear Crown Heights

The CTeen experience shared from the perspective of the Director, a teen, and a Shlucha.

Leah (Fellig) Rivkin, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5766 (2006)



»» From the Director:

The busy mother of eight.

The role model to our Joshuas and Jeremies.

The humble balebuste who fuels both body and soul.

The unsung *hachnosas orchim* champion.

You are *Kan Tzivah Hashem Es Habrocha*, the hosting capital of the world.

Name more hospitable zip codes than 11213, 11225, 11203. Nothing comes close.

The Kinus times two. Tishrei. Yud Shvat. Gimmel Tammuz. CTeen Shabbaton. Campus Shabbaton. CKids Shabbaton, Chidon times two. Shabbat in the Heights.

You open your doors and hearts to us.

Welcoming — sharing — the beautiful world of your home and of Shabbos.

For over ten years, our Shabbaton feedback forms asked the teens to list the three highlights of the Shabbaton.

Who would think that a piece of warm potato kugel and a blow up mattress would compete with the likes of a Times Square concert or a show-stopping closing ceremony?

Yes, Kathelyn might prefer her Rebbetzin's sushi salad over yours. And the square footage of your cramped apartment equals the size of Jennifer's Pottery Barn bedroom. Yet, staying in your home is her highlight.

Why?

In the ever-growing, self-obsessed metaverse, Crown Heights is selfless.

In the era of 24/7 self care, Crown Heights is soul care.

And the teens are blown away by:

The Greenberg children doubling up beds to make room for complete strangers.

The Kesselman kitchen whipping out a three course feast for thirty.

Rabbi Deitsch patiently answering life's tough questions, ignoring the late tick of the clock.

Because of the rapid Shabbaton growth, we considered moving the International shabbaton out of Crown Heights (in decent proximity to the Ohel). We surveyed the shlichim on the matter. The long

In the ever-growing, self-obsessed metaverse, Crown Heights is selfless.

Plus, she thinks it's important for her kids to learn about having guests.

survey had only one fully shaded pie chart — Shlichim were unanimous about one thing — the Shabbaton must remain in *Kan Tzivah*.

The Gemora relates how when Moshiach comes, the walls will give testimony to its inhabitant's Torah study.

No doubt, the bricks of Crown Heights will proclaim: this home served the highest purpose. There are no floors, doors, sofas and tables as beautiful as these!

May all those involved in the holy shlichus of hosting the Rebbe's guests be bentched with *bonei chayei umezonei revichei* and may we very soon watch the Rebbe leading his guests, in the Crown Heights section of Yerushalayim.



» From a teen:

Be My Host

CTeeners weren't the only ones missing an in-person Shabbaton in 2021 when it needed to go virtual. Three veteran host families share on behalf of the entire Crown Heights community.

Katie Freedman, United Kingdom

The highlight of my year was always the Shabbaton. It brings the whole CTeen family together as well as creates the best atmosphere and the most enjoyable weekend! Because we were unable to have a Shabbaton in person in 2021, I wanted to look at this event from the hosts' perspective—to see if they are as disappointed as I am! I now appreciate how much time and effort goes into planning the Shabbaton, from arranging the complex sleeping arrangements

Their excitement is palpable, like watching kids in a candy store as some of them are keeping a full Shabbat for the first time.

to deciding which snacks to put in the lunch bags.

My first Shabbaton was the most thrilling experience, and I had the best weekend and host family ever. As soon as my chapter got to Crown Heights, we went straight to the Kesselman's house, our Rebbetzin's parents, who welcomed us all with open arms, and we had a lovely dinner with their family. If that wasn't enough, we then went to our own host families' homes and were once again greeted with the kindest smiles and warmest hugs! Without them, my Shabbaton experience wouldn't have been complete, and I think many teens can agree with me. Every morning and night, they would always say hi and offer me anything! I really miss the generosity and kindness that they offered, and I cannot wait to meet more families in my future years as a CTeener.

The Kesselman family has hosted on eight occasions, all for CTeen Manchester! They became a host family because Mrs. Kesselman's daughter, Mushky Cohen, who is now our Rebbetzin in Manchester, once led a CTeen group from the Poconos overnight camp, and they needed a place to stay for the shabbaton! "We were so happy to help," says Mrs. Kesselman. "It was our first time getting to know CTeen and all the beautiful energy it comes with."

For the Kesselmans, hosting "brings happiness and joy to the house!" They love to see how the teens connect to the Torah and mitzvot and see how proud they are to be Jewish. I asked what they missed most about not hosting and they replied, "We missed all the excitement and the liveliness that fills the streets of Crown Heights. We missed the beautiful and inspiring Shabbat meals and nightly talks with the teens in our home."

Mrs. Kesselman continued to tell me about her favorite hosting memories. "I love the beautiful stories and songs sung throughout the Shabbat meals and the energetic Havdalah at our home before the teens head off to Times Square." More specifically, she remembers when the teens would come to her house after a long flight from the UK. Before splitting into groups, they would all recite the bedtime Shema together—it was so powerful!

She said it will be very sad for her and her family not to host. "We look forward to it all year!" They missed getting to meet all the teens, but she added, "We are full of hope that next year will be even bigger and better—and G-d willing in Yerushalayim!"

The Feldman family not only hosts CTeeners but also college students for their Shabbaton. They have hosted CTeeners on four occasions and love the different experiences each group brings. I stayed in their home during the 2020 Shabbaton and enjoyed my stay so much.

Alyson Feldman said that she started hosting because she herself was hosted many times. Plus, she thinks it's important for her kids to learn about having guests. "I want to show them what an open home looks like," she says.

Alyson loves to see their guests interact with her kids and watch them all get along. "Teens have a lot of questions, and it's really nice when they can watch our home in action." The Feldmans especially like it "when they don't just come for a meal, but they stay for Shabbos and we can talk to them in the morning."

Something the Feldman family missed about hosting was "seeing all the chapters walking down the streets of Crown Heights." They loved seeing how happy the teens were and hearing afterward from their Rebbetzin that they were happy in their



home. “We’ve met so many different types of teens over the years.”

The Friedfertig family first became CTeen hosts after a neighbor of theirs moved to Montreal and became the CTeen Rabbi and Rebbetzin there. Every time teens stay in their home, they “love the excitement and thirst to learn more about Judaism and our life in Crown Heights. It’s always so nice for our family to get to know the teens and really connect.”

I asked Mrs. Friedfertig what they missed about hosting and she replied, “We missed building a bond with the teens. They are so full of life. Their excitement is palpable, like watching kids in a candy store as some of them are keeping a full Shabbat for the first time.”

One of the family’s favorite CTeen memories has to be welcoming their guests back home after the Friday night dinner along with all of their friends who stay up chatting till the early hours of the morning. “Hearing from the teens about each of their journeys is truly inspiring.”

The Friedfertigs have hosted the same chapter for a few years in a row and can say they have become a part of their family. “They are welcome anytime here. Their beds are always waiting!”

There is no doubt that as a whole, Crown Heights will miss the teens. “Having them here brings a

special vibe to the community,” Mrs Friedfertig shares. “Not only can you feel it in the air, but every store, every tree and lamp-post has signs welcoming all the teens from their cities around the world. Yes, it may be the teens’ Shabbaton, but we all get to take some of their excitement home with us, too!”

We’re so grateful we were able to have a Shabbaton in 2022 and look forward to more exciting and meaningful Shabbatons in Crown Heights.



» From a Shlucha

Sterna Paris, Strasbourg, France

I felt terrible and so embarrassed that there was no food to eat for the Shabbos day meal.

One Shabbos, I was walking in a park and a little five year old told her mother, “Is that her? Is that Sterna from New York? I want to go to New York with CTeen!” Her cousin had been on the trip three years prior and she wanted to reserve her spot ten years in advance!

Boruch Hashem, we have had a large group of teens join our CTeen chapter over the past eight years, and every year, our CTeen activities have grown, including adding a Minyan for Shabbos and Yom Tov, attending the Shabbaton, and more. Without a doubt, one of the highlights of their year is the trip to Crown Heights for the CTeen Shabbaton.

This past year, I wasn’t so organized for the trip, and because of Covid regulations, I wasn’t sure if we would even make it. But the teens were so eager to go, so I quickly put together the itinerary. It was a little last minute but, boruch Hashem, I had a program from previous years, and I just needed to tweak it a little bit. During the planning phases, when I met with the parents, everyone was a little anxious that the trip would be canceled due to Covid regulations.



In all the last minute chaos, I forgot to confirm the Shabbos meal. And not only was the itinerary for my CTeen group, but also for my sister's, Rachel Rotshtein, who is the director of CTeen in Bry-sur-Marne, France. Between our two groups, the total number of teens was thirty four. I felt terrible and so embarrassed that there was no food to eat for the Shabbos day meal. I had spent all of Thursday night at the hospital with one of the teens who had broken their foot, and by the time Shabbos started, I was exhausted and with no plan. Nonetheless, I told everyone not to worry, as everything is *Hashgocha Protis*.

I recalled that when I had lived in Crown Heights for some years after seminary, there was one family, the Goldbergers, who always had their doors open for people on Shabbos. No matter the time, I knew I could always knock on the Goldberger family's door and have a good Shabbos meal. So I was sure that their daughter, Gitty Orimland, would help me find a solution. I ran to her house and knocked on her door. Tears rolling down my cheeks, embarrassed and exhausted, I explained to her our predicament. She already had about twenty people around her Shabbos table; she was hosting the CTeen group from California, Rabbi Resnick, and his mother, Molly Resnick, was there as well. Gitty told me to bring everyone over, and she set up a whole meal for our large group! She had made so much food, and

the teens enjoyed a deluxe meal of challah, salads, meat, desserts, and more. The teens were incredibly impressed.

While finding a meal so last minute was amazing *Hashgocha Protis*, that wasn't all of it. Earlier in the weekend, I had wanted our teens to hear Molly Resnick's story, hoping it would be really impactful for them. When I saw that she was at Gitty's house, I knew it was meant to be. She shared her story with the teens, in French! The teens were so moved to hear about her background and why she went from the world she came from to the frum world.

We left the Orimland home in high spirits, and believe it or not, after all thirty four of our teens and their original guests had eaten a full meal, the table was still laden with food! It was really amazing!

When asked what their favorite part of the weekend was, most of the teens shared that it was their experience over Shabbos. They had never seen such open hospitality from such amazing people. The way the hosts smiled and greeted each teen, asking them their name, about what they're up to in life, and getting to know them personally really touched so many of the teens. I feel so lucky to be able to experience and witness the amazing *hachnosas orchim* of Crown Heights. ■



T H O U G H T S T R E A M

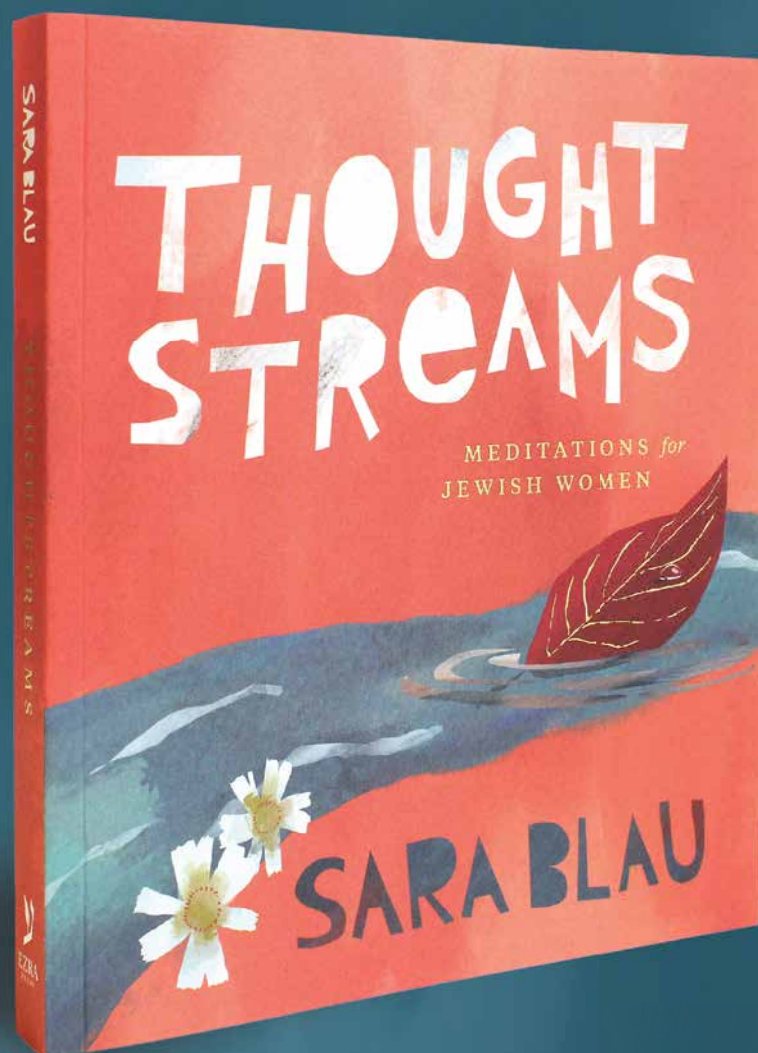
66 Today, I will remember that I am anything but regular.

*Every day meditations
for every day elevation.*



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-CHANA SILBERSTEIN, PH.D.



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Ushpizin Bites

Chanie (Gorkin) Denburg, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5776 (2016)



We've all heard of—and perhaps been granted—surprise guests; they are particularly prevalent during the every-day-is-Shabbos-or-Yom-Tov month of Tishrei, which of course adds to the excitement (and the frenzy) of the season.

But, have you ever heard of invisible guests?

Oddly enough, you have. Every year, as we pack guests into our *sukkahs* to share in the contagious joy of Yom Tov, we remind ourselves of the spiritual, exalted guests - the *Ushpizin P'lain* - who grace our presence in a very real, albeit much less tangible (and much more cost-efficient) way than our guests of flesh-and-blood.

But wouldn't it be even nicer if we could see these guests? If they could become a little more "visible"?

Well, they can become visible. That is, to the mind's eye. All it takes is a little bit of learning.

Not feeling that Tishrei is prime time for pouring over text to understand and prepare an award-winning d'var Torah? Fear not! Embrace has got you covered.

We present you with "Ushpizin Bites" - short Ushpizin snippets that you can snip (or rip, if short on time or scissors) out of the Embrace and bring to your table. These light but meaningful, informative insights will hopefully make the special *ushpizin* at your table a little more visible to you and your (physical) guests.

Cut, share, inspire. And have a *gut yom tov!*



Night 1 - ט"ו תשרי

Ushpiz: Avraham Avinu

Chassidische Ushpiz: Baal Shem Tov

Simchas Bais Hasho'evah involves the drawing and pouring of water, and water is something that tonight's *ushpizin* are both very connected to. Of Avraham, we say, "Remember [Avraham our] father who followed You like water." The Baal Shem Tov, as we know, was the one who initiated the *wellsprings* of Chassidus. Being that water travels downward, it represents the drawing down of forces from the loftiest of levels to the very lowest - alluding to the descent of a neshoma to this world, the lowest of all worlds. Every Yid has, as an inheritance from Avraham, a neshoma; the Baal Shem Tov further emphasized that this is true of even the simplest Yid. Our avodah is to ensure that this essence trickles down to and permeates all matters of our lives — down to the "lowest" of our faculties: our behavior¹.



Night 2 - ט"ז תשרי

Ushpiz: Yitzchak Avinu

Chassidische Ushpiz: Maggid of Mezritch

The similarity between tonight's *ushpizin* is that both never left their places of residence; Yitzchok remained in Eretz Yisrael for his entire life, and the Maggid did not leave Mezritch from the time he became Rebbe. However, we can also observe an area in which they differ; while Yitzchok is distinguished from the other

*Well, they can become visible.
That is, to the mind's eye. All it
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avos as being an '*olah temimah*,' we find that the Maggid is distinguished from all the other Rebbeim in that he is the only one whose connection to Chassidus came later in his life. Unlike the Rebbeim before him, the Maggid spent many years without any connection to Chassidus. The contrasting aspects of their backgrounds demonstrate how the quality of influencing the world even while staying in one place, can be possessed both by someone raised within a particular approach of avodas Hashem (Yitzchok) and by someone who chose their approach to their avodah through their own initiative (the Maggid²).



Night 3 - י"ז תשרי

Ushpiz: Yaakov Avinu

Chassidische Ushpiz: Alter Rebbe

In contrast to Yitzchok, Yaakov's *avodah* took place specifically *outside* Eretz Yisroel. And yet, even in the lowly place of Charan (home to Lavan Harasha), his avodah was complete and perfect. Yaakov's mission was to spread the holiness of Eretz Yisroel to the outside world. This mission is actually alluded to in his name: the letters of the word 'Yaakov' form the word 'Yiboka,' which means to 'burst forth.' This is the nature of kedusha: it does not remain within the boundaries of Eretz Yisroel, but bursts and spills forth *outside*. The innovation of the Alter Rebbe in revealing Chabad Chassidus had a similar effect. Chabad Chassidus provided an intellectual framework for the study of deep, esoteric ideas. Intellect is intrinsically cold, devoid of warmth and emotion, but Chabad Chassidus brought 'life' to it through the warmth of these holy ideas.³



Night 4 - י"ח תשרי

Ushpiz: Moshe Rabeinu

Chassidische Ushpiz: Mitteler Rebbe

Tonight's *ushpizin* are actually connected to an idea in this week's Chumash, which says, "The Torah which Moshe commanded us is an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov." This possuk stresses the

unity of all Yidden, because the word “inheritance” implies that the Torah is passed to all of us equally, regardless of our standing. Moshe’s connection to this idea is obvious, but what about the Mittlerer Rebbe? The unique quality of the Mittlerer Rebbe was that he elaborated on the ideas of Chassidus at great length. Being that Torah is an inheritance, every Yid, even the simplest, not only has an *association* with the elaborate understanding of Chassidus, but such an in-depth understanding of Chassidus actually *belongs* to every Yid (just as an heir inherits everything). At the same time, it is not enough to *just* inherit it - we must take it, learn it, and make it personal.⁴



Night 5 - י"ט תשרי

Ushpiz: Aharon HaKohen

Chassidische Ushpiz: Tzemach Tzedek

Peace is the quintessential quality of Aharon’s avodah. His avodah was, as expressed in the command to light the Menorah, “you shall *raise up* the lamps” — i.e. you should raise up the neshomos of Yidden and bring them close to Hashem. This was to be done in a way that “the seven lamps shall illuminate towards the center of the menorah,” which means that all of the seven lamps should be united in their illumination. This teaches us that although there are seven different categories of avodah, these different categories must be united. The idea of peace is also emphasized in the case of the Tzemach Tzedek, for during his times, there was peace among the Talmidei Chachomim, so much so that they actually helped one another. This was something that was not so apparent during the times of the previous Rebbeim.⁵



Night 6 - כ' תשרי

Ushpiz: Yosef HaTzadik

Chassidische Ushpiz: Rebbe Maharash

On each night of Sukkos, there is a special reason to add to the joy of Simchas Bais Hasho’eva. (The Rebbe explains many reasons for this for each night of Yom Tov.) What’s the reason for adding to the rejoicing of Simchas Bais Hashoeva tonight? It is actually obvious from the name of tonight’s *ushpizin* — Yosef — which means to add. This concept of addition is closely related to simcha; the very nature of simcha is to join together with another and share one’s joy. The Rambam even goes so far as to say that this is the only way to attain true joy. In a similar vein, the Rebbe Maharash is most frequently connected with

his saying, “The world says one must try to crawl under and if one does not succeed, one should try to climb over. My first impulse is to climb over.” This approach, although relevant at all times, is particularly applicable to matters of Torah and mitzvos, and especially to matters connected with joy, because joy strongly compels one to go above one’s boundaries.⁶



Night 7 - כ"א תשרי

Ushpiz: Dovid HaMelech

Chassidische Ushpiz: Rebbe Rashab

The extra joy of Hoshana Rabbah is emphasized by Dovid Hamelech and the Rebbe Rashab. The Frieddiker Rebbe describes the Rebbe Rashab as “The Rambam of Chassidus”. This is because he took the Chassidus of the Alter Rebbe, the Mittlerer Rebbe, and the Tzemach Tzedek, with their differing opinions on various concepts, and offered the *final* decision and result - similar to the Rambam’s work of rendering the final decision in *halacha*. The clarification of a subject causes great joy, as seen in the saying, “There is no greater joy than the elimination of doubts.” This idea is also found by Dovid Hamelech. A king is the final arbiter, the one who lays down the actual law. While a king may take guidance from his advisors, as we find was the case with Dovid Hamelech when he would discuss Torah matters with the members of the Sanhedrin, the *main* function of a true Jewish king is to render decisions affecting actual behavior. The similarity between the two *ushpizin* of tonight is that both were engaged in rendering decisions in actual practice.⁷ ■

1. Sicha, 1st Night of Sukkos, 5743
2. Sicha, 2nd Night of Sukkos, 5745
3. Sicha, 3rd Night of Sukkos, 5742
4. Sicha, 4th Night of Sukkos, 5744
5. Sicha, 5th Night of Sukkos, 5743
6. Sicha, 6th Night of Sukkos, 5741
7. Sicha, 7th Night of Sukkos, 5742



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HACHI BABAYIT BA'OLAM

A CONVERSATION WITH AN EXPERIENCED HOSTESS
AND A FREQUENT GUEST, MODERATED BY SARA BLAU.

Aidel (Blau) Zaklos, Vacaville, CA
Graduating Class of 5741 (1981)



SARA BLAU: My sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Rabbi Chaim and Aidel Zaklos, are the Shluchim to Vacaville, Northern California. Besides facilitating and leading programs for the locals and constantly reaching out and working to grow their community, over the years, hosting

has become a large part of their shlichus. Whether it is welcoming families passing through the town, people looking for Shabbos meals, or having their own community members over, Rabbi Chaim and Aidel are always cooking, preparing, or cleaning up after guests. They also run a three-week boys camp which my son and nephew were excited to join this year. At the end of it, I flew to California to pick them up and spent Shabbos there. Getting to see an inside view of all the amazing things Aidel and Rabbi Chaim do was such a treat! Along with all the community responsibilities they had, they were hosting multiple groups that Shabbos. I literally cannot imagine waking up in the morning and having thirty boys from a camp sleeping in my space, eating breakfast in my space, and living in my space!

Over Shabbos, I got to meet some incredible people, including a couple, Assaf and Efrat Shimon. As I was sitting with her and getting to know her, Efrat started telling me about their amazing experience being hosted by the Zakloses, and how it has impacted her life. With Embrace at the top of my mind, I spontaneously began to interview both Efrat and Aidel on their experiences as guest and hostess.

SB: Efrat, your travel stories sound fascinating! Can you please tell us a little bit about your family and how you met the Zakloses?

EFRAT: We are originally from Israel. My husband and I, along with our five children, have been traveling the world for over five years and have been to fifty countries, including China, the Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, Mongolia, Russia, Canada, the US, and more. We get to visit all types of shuls and Chabad houses and have been guests in many, many different places. This past Shavuot, we were in Northern California and didn't have a place to stay for the Chag. We had an Israeli friend in this area and asked if we could join them for Yom Tov, to which he responded, "I'm going to Vacaville. Why don't you come along? I'm sure they'll let you join!"

Not knowing anything about who we were staying at, we agreed to join him at the Chabad house in Vacaville, and that's when we met Rabbi Chaim and Aidel for the first time. It was an absolutely beautiful Chag, like nothing I have ever experienced anywhere else! I've been to many places, and I have never seen such special Hachnosas Orchim.

Here, we felt surrounded by love and warmth; it felt like a mother's embrace.

Inspired by our stay, we returned to Vacaville for the summer. My son, Adi, has joined their summer camp and is having a great time!

SB: Can you give us some examples of the special Hachnosas Orchim you experienced here?

EFRAT: When we arrived for Shavuot, Rabbi Chaim and Aidel had just gotten back from Israel. Still, they were ready for us, almost as if they were waiting for us to be their guests! As we pulled into the driveway, Rabbi Chaim came out with a cold drink for each of us. We were warmly welcomed and shown around; Rabbi Chaim offered us to either stay in the Chabad house or the guest house. The guest rooms were ready with bed linens and all, as if they were simply waiting for guests to fill them. We decided to stay in the rooms in the Chabad house due to its proximity and having a baby with us, but I couldn't get over how in addition to rooms in the Chabad house, they had an entire additional house for guests. It was all so tastefully decorated with beautiful linen and gorgeous interior design.

Sometimes travel can be lonely, and we were yearning for a social experience. Here, we felt surrounded by love and warmth; it felt like a mother's embrace. It



*My son, Adi, said it perfectly:
Hachi babayit ba'olam! They
feel at home here.*

was surreal, and it simply felt like home.

SB: What a beautiful experience! Aidel, what do you do to give people this feeling of truly being at home?

AIDEL: This is a part of our shlichus! We are here to be a home for both the Jewish people that live here and for those passing through. We genuinely feel blessed to spend time with each one of our guests, and it often becomes a family-like relationship. When we think of our guests as family, they feel it and respond in turn.

When it comes to hosting, often, it's the little things! For example, we make challah on Thursdays for our Chabad House, and we also distribute it to our community members on Fridays, free of charge, via delivery at their door. In the past, in order to maintain the challah's freshness, we would freeze it overnight and give it out the next day. We always ask for feedback which led us to start vacuum packing the challahs on Thursday. The community members now receive "freshly baked" challah on Friday that they can enjoy for the seuda. This little tip was a game changer — it means so much to the recipients.

Here in Nor-Cal many people are very health-con-

scious, which includes some who keep a vegan or gluten-free diet. We make an extra effort to keep those guests in mind while planning menus. For example, there is always chicken soup and a vegetarian soup on the menu. Our daughter Mussia is our in-house baker, and she knows to include a gluten-free option as well. If you're making chocolate chip cookies, why not make a recipe with almond flour, too?

EFRAT: I have met so many people on our travels, and I have never met people with such open hearts. I had preconceived notions about "cold" Americans, but the Zakloses are anything but cold. They don't just host us, they sit with us, talk to us, and make a real effort to get to know us. We are part of their family! "*Sheli shelach, shelach shelach*" is the feeling I get here. Rabbi Chaim and Aidel don't keep anything for themselves — if they have, they give!

SB: How did being here inspire you and your family differently than in the past?

EFRAT: Throughout our travels, we started growing closer to Chabad, and my husband slowly started to grow his beard. When we were in Mexico and staying by the Brod family, I even learned some Tanya. I was so impressed with the incredible wisdom found there, and wanted to know more. I had wanted to learn the depth of Chassidus Chabad in the past and had never really gotten a chance until Rabbi Chaim offered to teach me — and I have been in awe ever since! I'm saying this not as a Chabadnik; I am truly blown away by its wisdom.

Aidel and Rabbi Chaim both sit and invest time into us, answering our questions and giving us an understanding of the essence of chassidus and what everything really means.

We're not the typical Chabad house customer as we were already frum, but nevertheless, the Zakloses see it as part of their shlichus to teach us chassidus.

SB: How do your children feel about staying at the Zakloses?

EFRAT: My son, Adi, said it perfectly: *Hachi babayit ba'olam!* They feel at home here. They feel that they can be themselves. Even though the house is tastefully decorated and fancy, he feels he can eat, play comfortably, etc. as if it's his own home.



SB: I remember when Aidel and Rabbi Chaim moved to Vacaville, a quiet town in the middle of nowhere with only vineyards and farms, people were skeptical about the potential for growth that this town possessed. Now, they have turned Vacaville into a thriving, vibrant community and an attraction for many visitors. Aidel, what inspires you to have such outstanding Hachnosas Orchim?

AIDEL: Growing up, my mother exemplified Hachnosas Orchim. We didn't have a fancy house, but we had much to share. Friends were always comfortable to come at any time. My mother was always happy to have them and enjoyed getting to know them.

As a teenager, I had the opportunity to visit Shluchim in Asia and Europe when I came as a counselor, and I was always inspired by their hospitality. Everything was always prepared for anyone to come at any time. They never knew how many tourists to expect or who would come, and it blew my mind. I knew that I wanted to have that kind of Chabad house.

EFRAT: I love that she respects her roots and speaks about her parents and grandparents as role models. It's so inspiring for me to hear about all these special people.

AIDEL: It is a delightful part of our shlichus. Often, we have guests who are starting to keep Shabbos and need a place to stay. We are honored to sometimes be their first shabbos experiences and see them come away not only appreciating the gift of shabbos but wanting to host one day, too.

I love that she respects her roots and speaks about her parents and grandparents as role models.

Sometimes, we have families, like Efrat's, that are frum and traveling, and we have the opportunity to learn together and teach them Chabad chassidus and minhagim. Over time, we have been blessed to watch them incorporate much of what they observe and learn by us into their own lives.

SB: Good intentions are one thing, but Aidel, how do you actually do it all? How do you run your home, a Chabad house, and a guest house?

AIDEL: It's not always easy. One thing that has been really helpful is that we have a secretary. Besides for doing all the secretarial work, part of her job description is "mother of the Chabad house". That means that if there is ever maintenance that needs to be done, she'll delegate the task to whomever it applies to and help make sure it gets taken care of.

The way to approach hosting is realizing that in



We are not in the business of impressing, but rather opening our home to allow others to see what goes into maintaining a frum, chassidic home and raising Chassidishe children, with Hashem's help.

many ways we're doing pretty much the same thing we would be doing without having guests. We make challah anyway, so we're just increasing the amount. I am always dressed, even around the house, so if a guest shows up, it's not a stress or inconvenience. My house is a public house all the time. Our shlichus is our entire life! I would definitely find it harder if I had another "job" to balance alongside it.

I also want to emphasize that the term Hachnosas Orchim can take on many different meanings. Yes, the typical definition is hosting someone in your home, but if you're unable to do that, there are other ways to welcome someone in as a guest, such as putting together Shabbos food for someone in the area or for people in the community. People are always relieved to hear that.

SB: This is your job and so is having ka'h eight children and running all the other programs and classes you have for your community! How do you handle the wear



and tear and mess that is inevitable from having so many guests?

AIDEL: Naturally, I like when things are clean and neat, and at the same time, I try to not worry about what other people are going to think. (*Pointing to the top of the stairs) I even see two full laundry baskets that need to be taken care of, but instead I'm choosing to spend time with guests. It helps to tell myself that it's also okay for people to see things that are not perfect. It's part of the process. We are not in the business of impressing, but rather opening our home to allow others to see what goes into maintaining a frum, chassidic home and raising Chassidishe children, with Hashem's help. Since I naturally enjoy quiet and clean and putting my best foot forward, this is something I have to constantly work on.

As far as damage and how guests take care of the property, we have to fix things every so often, and it's a sign that it was well used and enjoyed, exactly what it was designed for.

I would like to start making things clearer for guests when they first come in to prevent unnecessary, uncomfortable situations.

SB: Yes! I once saw a Shlucha who created an entire etiquette form with all the information a guest might need to know and gave it in advance to everyone who came. This way the guests were enlightened right away as to what the expectations would be. How do you work towards being more okay with mess and wear and tear when it's not your natural state? What do you tell yourself?

AIDEL: I know that the most important thing when guests come is the interactions. The way the house looks and having delicious food are tools to host, but it can never replace the conversation and connection. The most important thing is to give our guests our full selves. Before each big week, I tell myself that as long as I have the basics of the meal, I'm fine. The extra fancy dishes are nice to have, but if it's too overwhelming, just go back to the basics. No matter if I cooked five star dishes or not that week, I can always give my guests my full attention, love, and warmth.

EFRAT: Aidel's patience with everyone is admirable. The way she talks to her kids and

community members, the way she feeds her guests and takes care of them — it's so amazing! Aidel is a great listener, and when you're talking to her, you feel like she doesn't have another care in the world. Her community really feels her genuine care and concern and are really open to learning from Rabbi Chaim and Aidel.

SB: Aidel, how would you say hosting affects your children?

AIDEL: As I mentioned, I myself grew up in an open home. Sometimes it was hard,



I believe that if you're open to having guests, Hashem will send you the help you need to handle it.

but I knew that I matured from it. It felt rewarding to be needed, helpful, and responsible. I noticed that for my children, oftentimes, the guests will benefit them as well, in an obvious way. For example, we speak mostly English at home. Having Efrat and her Hebrew-speaking family here with us definitely poses a language barrier at times, but my children are learning so much Hebrew from Efrat's family! In turn, it'll help my children with other guests in the future as well.

We are open to anybody in need of a place, and we also make sure to invite guests whom the kids will definitely enjoy having around — families with chil-

SAMPLE GUESTHOUSE ETIQUETTE INFORMATION

Welcome to The Guest House!

Please keep the key in the lock box all times to avoid getting locked out. Code is xxxx.

PARKING:

Please only park your vehicle in the designated space #833 or in an unmarked spot.

SHABBOS INFO:

- There is a Mehudar Kosher (not Adh"z) Eruv between the apartment and Chabad.
- Check all the lights (freezer light?).

KITCHEN INFO:

- As there is only one sink, no pots/pans/utensils may be placed directly inside. There is a black bin (fleishig) and white (milchig) for dish soaking.

HOUSE ETIQUETTE:

- Please minimize noise between 8PM and 8AM to respectfully ensure that our neighbors can enjoy a night of undisturbed sleep.

- Smoking is prohibited in any part of the apartment.
- Remember to close lights and check that porch sliding doors are locked when leaving.
- Washer/dryer are located in the hallway bathroom. Please use caution when opening and closing the folding door in front of the dryer.
- Try to leave the guest house in the same condition (or better:) for the next guests.

LOCAL KOSHER FOOD:

[Insert Kosher restaurant/supermarket info]

MIKVAH:

Mikvah has a men's and women's Mikvah. It is located in the back of the Chabad property. 48 hour notice for women appt required.

As our personal guests, please be sure to ask if you need anything!

We hope you enjoy your stay!



dren similar to their ages or who they've met before, so that hosting should be enjoyable for them as well as rewarding. This is similar to making their favorite Shabbos dishes and even more important.

We do our best to get our children involved in the process. After school on Fridays, we all work together on the finishing touches for Shabbos preparations, such as setting up the d'var torahs and practicing, filling up drinks, cutting flowers, and warming up food. My children know they are needed, and they learn and grow from it.

EFRAT: I see it a lot with big families — the children are naturally used to helping, and they are so capable. Aidel, this week you hosted fifty girls from California Program for a Shabbaton, a group of counselors from a nearby city, my family, Sara Blau, and this is after having just concluded running a sleepaway camp with thirty boys. Where is your limit?

AIDEL: I communicate my needs with them. I can share with them something they can do to help out.

Other guests help through words of encouragement. Efrat is so expressive! And again, for me this is my shlichus — even when I have other responsibilities alongside it — teaching, administrative work, etc., I know that boruch Hashem I can still put my energies towards hosting.

SB: How do you keep up with it financially?

AIDEL: For me and my husband, we each have our roles. I take care of all the

technical preparations and whatever is needed, and he deals with the financial aspect of it. During the hosting itself, I prefer to speak to individuals, while my husband runs the meals.

We do also charge for some of our programs, such as a public seder or other large scale events. Not everything is just handed out for free, but we try our best to fundraise so that we can give to and continue to grow our community.

Something we've noticed is that when you are generous with other people, people are generous in return — whether it be with their labor, their time, or their energy. When we give to others, it inspires others to want to take part and give back, and that has really helped our shlichus over the years.

We do not take for granted that it is our job to put in the effort, and it is Hashem that provides.

SB: Aidel, can you share with us some tried and true tips that have worked for you over the years?

AIDEL:

- 1 Like I said earlier, I have a secretary, so that helps a lot.
- 2 I also get the community involved in many different ways. When we have big crowds with lots of children, I engage the kids in cleaning up. It's good for everyone to help out with that. It's good chinuch!
- 3 As soon as guests leave, I set up the guest rooms for the following week already. My children's rooms are designed to be able to be moved around easily. I store things in baskets so that they can be transferred from room to room on a moment's notice.
- 4 Whatever is not food related, I prepare right away after Shabbos, including setting up candles! For food, I prepare my lists on Tuesday, and I do the bulk of my cooking on Wednesday and then Challah on Thursday. I have a three-week rotating menu for when I have guests that are here for longer stays. If it's different guests, then I'll repeat meals. I always try to make foods that my kids will enjoy, too.

- 5 I really try to stick to easy menus and food options. There is always plenty of food, and no one goes hungry, but often, it's easy and quick recipes.
- 6 There are other times that I rely on a fellow Shlucha to help. For example, for the girls camp that I run in the summer, a fellow Shlucha does the cooking.
- 7 Baruch Hashem, I have a lot of cleaning help! If you're able to delegate, it's really helpful. This makes me able to put my energy into where my strengths are.
- 8 We have a community member, Paul, who is retired and helps out with any driving we might need— airport pickups, etc.

SB: You and Rabbi Chaim are so giving, and I see how the community rallies around you and helps to host. They receive from you and want to give back!

AIDEL: My community definitely enjoys it as well. It's exotic for them, and they form new friendships! Years ago, when our new Chabad house was ready, we started having open Friday night meals for the first time. Prior to that, we only had an open kiddush on Shabbos day. We were in our third

week of doing Friday night meals, more and more people were joining, and it started to be a lot of work for me! When I was bentching licht that third week, I began to wonder if I had taken on more than I can do . And then, Hashem sent help in the form of an extraordinary couple. Mayan and Ash are van travelers, and they were in the area when their van died and wouldn't restart. They were looking to see where Hashem would lead them. They ended up staying here for six months (and eventually visited two more times, for six months each), and they completely took over the Shabbos cooking. They even helped us build a tiny home on the top of a hill on our property. They loved using Chabad's commercial kitchen, and it was like having a Kosher restaurant in town. They would cook for Yom Tov, Shabbos, Shabbatons, and anything else that was necessary while they were here, and I took care of setting the table and the aesthetics. We formed a really great friendship from it! I believe that if you're open to having guests, Hashem will send you the help you need to handle it.

SB: This feels like Avraham Avinu, who had four doors to his tent. Aidel has four places to host: her home, Chabad house, a guest house, and the one-room mini home at the top of the hill. I hope you were even partially inspired as I was from my visit! ■



AIDEL'S CHALLAH RECIPE

2 cups water, 1 hot and 1 room temperature
 3½ tablespoons yeast
 2 tablespoons sugar

MIX

In a separate mixing bowl, combine:

3 eggs
 1 cup oil
 1½ cup sugar
 2½ tablespoons salt
 2½ cups water, 1¼ hot and 1¼ room temperature

Add yeast mixture

MIX

1. Add 5 lb bag of flour, gradually.
2. Mix until completely combined.
3. Transfer to a clean, greased bowl.
4. Cover with oil and plastic wrap.
5. Bake at 350° until lightly browned. Rotate pans for even baking.
6. For best results, bag and freeze fresh out of the oven.

A Mother's Prayer

Dassie (Butman) Heber, Yorktown, NY
Graduating Class of 5764 (2004)



This article is lovingly dedicated to my mother-in-law, Mrs. Rochel Leah Heber A”H, Yartzeit 26 Tishrei, who treated her children, in-laws, grandchildren, and great grandchildren with unconditional love and acceptance.

Through the kindness of Hashem and with the Rebbe’s brochos, we recently welcomed a baby girl into our family.

As I cradle this little bundle, all seven pounds of her, I marvel at the miracle and majesty that is the birth of a child. I could sit forever just watching her chest rise and fall in that soft

Please give me the wisdom to teach without criticizing, to mold without breaking, and to guide without degrading.

way, her fists clenched in newborn position, and her tiny red lips relaxed as she dozes without a care in the world. In my eyes, she can do no wrong. To be sure, she is too tiny to make choices, achieve accomplishments, or earn respect for her productivity. But it's no matter. Without a doubt, I can say that I love her unconditionally.

I silently pledge to give her the best upbringing I can, to provide for all her needs, and to give her opportunities to grow and accomplish, with Hashem's help.

I know that one of the most valuable gifts I can give her, far more valuable than any overnight camp or seminary tuition that we will, b'ezras Hashem, pay someday, is the gift of always seeing her the way I do now: pure, precious, and unconditionally lovable. For it is the way that I, as her mother, relate to her that will strongly affect her future self-image. The messages I send her today are to be an integral part of her inner voice tomorrow. By believing in her abilities and goodness, I can encourage a healthy sense of self-worth in my little girl.

And so I whisper a prayer to Hashem. Please give me the wisdom to teach without criticizing, to mold without breaking, and to guide without degrading. May my words be words of connection and understanding, bolstering security and confidence.

May I see her goodness when she colors on the walls and when she accidentally spills the negel vasser on the bedroom carpet.

May I remember that in addition to teaching her to brush her teeth every day and not to leave the milk out on the counter, it is my sacred duty and privilege to teach her to love and believe in herself and in the enduring and unchanging value Hashem has given her.

May I always remember to celebrate her qualities and strengths. May I succeed in communicating that my expectations and aspirations for her are not more important than her essence. As she grows and matures, and throughout her life, there will always be a part of her that will remain as pristine and unchanged as it

is now, in her newborn state: the timeless and eternal intrinsic value she possesses.

May this little bundle always know that over and above her accomplishments, she is inherently worthy. She is a child of Hashem who possesses a soul too magnificent to describe, an actual part of Hashem Himself.¹ So precious is each Yid to Hashem that He refers to Yidden as “the work of My hands in which I take pride.”² It is a status of supreme holiness, prestige, and empowerment.

The paradigm of unconditional love is Hashem Himself. In a sicha of Parshas Shemos,³ the Rebbe refers to the Midrash on the possuk,⁴ “כִּי נֶעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל” (For Israel is a young child and therefore I love him), and explains that the love of a father for his young child is unconditional and unequivocal, unlike the love for an older child, which may be due to the child's accomplishments. A father loves his very young child for the simple reason that there is an essential bond between them. This pure love is rooted in the unconditional and absolute love which Hashem has for Yidden, for the simple reason that they are His children.

This pure love is rooted in the unconditional and absolute love which Hashem has for Yidden, for the simple reason that they are His children.

So always remember, Little One, that nothing can detract from your value, for it is intrinsic. And may I, as your mother, always remember that it is through my unconditional love and acceptance that I can, with Hashem's help, teach you that.

I freeze this image of you, Baby, so serenely swaddled, and commit to always perceive your identity for what it truly is: unalterably sacred, treasured, and prized. ■

1. *Iyov 31:2, Tanya Chapter 2*

2. *Yeshayahu, 60:21*

3. *Lekutei Sichos, Volume 21, Page 20*

4. *Hoshea, 11:1*

THE MAGICAL BRAIN

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



When we lived on Maui, we had a beautiful orange tree in our backyard. As the first harvest of oranges arrived, we picked the roundest most beautiful oranges, cut them up into wedges, and sunk our teeth in... only to be met with scrunched up noses and ‘eww! These oranges are SO sour!’ We tried one after another, but each one was just as tart.

We waited a few weeks, then a few months, adding sugar, agave, trying all we could to make these sour oranges taste like regular oranges. We didn’t understand; it looked like an orange. It smelt like an orange, but we ultimately surrendered to the fact that this is just a tree that produces sour oranges.

Then one day, a friend who had lived in Maui for many years came over and looked out the window and exclaimed, “Wow! You are SO lucky; you have your very own Meyers Lemon tree! Meyers Lemons are sweeter lemons, double the value of regular lemons, and are used by many famous chefs throughout the world to enhance many fancy dishes. Do you have any idea how delicious and valuable these lemons are?!”

There are many children who can come across as neurotypical, but they in fact have neurodiverse brains, magical brains in my opinion.

And in a matter of seconds, our sour orange tree was transformed into an extremely rare and valuable sweet Meyers Lemon tree.

There are many children who can come across as neurotypical, but they in fact have neurodiverse brains, *magical* brains in my opinion, that can be considered to the neurotypical world as defective.

And because these kids are so high functioning, especially when it comes to teenage girls, they often slip below the radar and go undiagnosed, masking their neurodiverse behaviors while going through life wondering why they never fit in and if something is indeed wrong with them.

I mention teenage girls because only recently has science started recognizing that what seemingly comes across as common teenage girl behaviors, when combined with other behaviors, is in fact Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). And once given the right diagnosis, these girls can finally learn to understand themselves, get the support they need, and develop their strengths.

Many neurotypical teenage girls get depressed, suffer from anxiety or social anxiety at some point, get moody, and many can come across as quiet or shy and have difficulties forming friendships.

But sometimes, a child has the above behaviors as well as some of the following characteristics: the inability to pick up on social cues, lack a filter when speaking, an extremely high intelligence accompanied with very good vocabulary and a sophisticated command of language, under or over sensitivities to one or more of the five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell, or sounds, an unusual interest in certain objects with a need to have things around them meticulously organized, an incredible rote memory ability which often leads to playing music by ear, the ability to hyperfocus, and of course, an intense love and connection to animals. Many children have some of the above behaviors or challenges, but when a child has the *majority* of these, they very possibly have ASD.

There are many children that have been blessed with these neurodiverse brains, but we are so focused on the ‘disorder’ part of it that we fail to see and *show them* the magic that comes along with it.

These kids are the Meyers Lemons of the world, trying so hard to blend in as ‘regular’ kids, but have no idea what their true value and strengths really are.

Yes, children with neurodiverse brains need to learn and develop certain skills, but we tend to rely too heavily on all the therapists and teachers and outside help to help these kids thrive when Hashem has actually given us the power

These kids are the Meyers Lemons of the world, trying so hard to blend in as ‘regular’ kids, but have no idea what their true value and strengths really are.

within ourselves, as their parents, to help our own neurodiverse children blossom into the amazing human beings that they are.

Every behavior that can hinder a child with ASD can also catapult them into success. We just need to take the spotlight off of their challenges and help them focus on and utilize their inborn talents.

Understand and work with them instead of trying to change them. A child with ASD can’t handle the sound of silverware at the Shabbos table? Start using plastic. Restaurants too loud? Get take-out and celebrate at home. You have *no* idea how hard they are trying to be more comfortable in this world; let’s work with them and help make the world a little more comfortable around them.

Invest in these kids. If they are musical, buy them a piano, a guitar, a violin. Artistic? Get art supplies in bulk, make them their own art studio, or give them a wall in your house to paint. Many kids with ASD can write an entire novel in a week—let them write, let their imaginations soar. Computer genius? Get them the best tech equipment money can buy. Whatever you notice their interests are, invest in it heavily.

Explain to them how lucky they are, exclusively blessed by Hashem, to have the ability to see and experience the world in a way that not too many people get to experience it.

Yes, the social aspect is a difficult one, no doubt about it. But when they are able to connect with someone that ‘gets them’ and appreciates their way of communication, there is nothing sweeter.

With the right guidance, unconditional love and support, and with parents who are their biggest fans and cheerleaders, these are the kids who will grow up to be the adults who change the world.

Danit Schusterman teaches 4th grade in Bais Rivkah. To reach her, email damitschusterman@gmail.com. ■



Inherent Value

Anonymous



I knew I should be grateful for what I had. I already had a wonderful husband, more than one child ka”h, a job, and a home, boruch Hashem. And yet, every month, when it came time to immerse in the Mikvah, I felt a stab of pain as I faced another month of not being pregnant.

I guess you can call it secondary infertility, though I prefer not to think in those terms. But as the gap between my current baby and my future one continued to widen, it got harder and harder to accept.

My friends that had gotten married at the same time as me outgrew minivans, while my humble, little family still fit into a car. When my friends would send me messages, all I could see were the gorgeous profile pictures of big families ka”h, and I found myself staring at the little screen,

counting beautiful little faces without realizing it. I would see these big families, and I felt so inadequate, like I was missing something.

Intellectually, I knew it was not my fault. Obviously this was from Hashem, and Hashem would decide when my family would expand. And yet, there was an insidious voice inside of me that made my baby-less existence start to define me. I started to think, “Maybe I don’t have any babies because Hashem doesn’t think I’m capable of it? Maybe if I had a bunch of babies right now I would fall apart?” I started to question my entire sense of self-worth. I began to feel self-conscious of the fact that I was one of the only one of my friends not currently nursing or pregnant. I felt as if I was basically not worthy if I didn’t have a baby to cradle or a carriage to push.

Rather than just channeling the raw desire for another child into davening to Hashem, I found myself allowing these feelings to rapidly spiral into sentiments of self-doubt. I felt like it reflected on my incompetency. Because if I was able to have a child, I would, right? Round and round those mistaken thoughts went, leading me into a double layer of misery. Not only was I in pain from infertility, but I also had a second layer of despair to contend with, spurred on by my unhealthy beliefs and disappointments.

So why am I writing in the past tense? Have I had my baby yet? Unfortunately, not yet. But I’m writing in past tense because my perspective has changed. And as I wait for Hashem to bless me with more children, I want to share how a short conversation changed my entire life.

I was speaking to a friend of mine, who listened intently to my struggles and pain. At one point in the conversation, she was quiet for a moment and then said, “Do you know that so-and-so (a mutual friend of ours) feels the exact opposite way?” She proceeded to describe how just the day before, our friend, who boruch Hashem has had a baby just about every year since she got married, was sharing that she felt like she couldn’t get anything else done during her day other than caring for her kids. And since she was so busy feeding, burping, bathing, and changing diapers, she felt like she had no value at all! She felt like she was not worthy if she couldn’t work or accomplish anything else.

Woah. Suddenly, I saw it so clearly. Of course she has value! Whether or not a person can accomplish something at work doesn’t define who they are! And as that sentence flashed through my mind, it hit me. The same

My friends that had gotten married at the same time as me outgrew minivans, while my humble little family still fit into a car.

way not working doesn’t define my friend’s value, not having a baby at the moment most certainly doesn’t define mine! We both were allowing our thoughts to mislead us in the totally wrong direction, just on two opposite sides of the coin.

I think we tend to identify with something tangible so that we can point and say: “Look! I can justify my existence today because of x, y, and z; when, in reality, we do not need to justify our existence at all. Shternie Ginsberg brings this concept out beautifully in her book “My Awesome Self”, where, based on Chassidus, she writes about the inherent value of our neshoma. She explains how we are not defined by what we do, but rather by who we *are*. We have essential value. Period. No need for justifications or proofs. We have a precious and holy neshoma, and as a piece of Hashem, it automatically has infinite value. A Yid is not defined by how much money he or she has in the bank or by how much of a *balabuste* she is. A Yid is precious, holy, and inherently worthy!

Once I really worked on internalizing this idea of essential worthiness, I was able to focus on how Hashem designs each person’s life according to the mission of their neshoma. This means that the mission my neshoma has is to raise the children I currently have and to do the work I’m able to do at this time. Chassidus explains that a person’s deepest need is to have meaning, to fulfill the purpose for which they were created for. For a Yid, that means to reveal Hashem’s light and make a *dira b’tachtonim*. When you look at life like this, having children or not having children can both accomplish the same thing: making a *dira* for Hashem. It’s not only that my value is essential and inherent, but that regardless of my external circumstances, my mission remains the same—to reveal more G-dly light on earth in whichever way that I can.

This journey has taught me that sometimes, it is my own thoughts causing me to experience pain, and it is within my power to *completely* change that. I realized that knowledge of spiritual truths can actually change my emotional experience. And whenever those thoughts of incompetence crop up, I stop them in their tracks and

It's not only that my value is essential and inherent, but that regardless of my external circumstances, my mission remains the same—to reveal more G-dly light on earth in whichever way that I can.

say, “Not today! I'm not going to let my mind think in that way!”

This has brought me a completely new level of freedom! Of course, it still hurts me not to have another baby yet. But, I don't let it mean something that is simply not true. My secondary layer of pain was based on a mistaken belief—and totally unnecessary!

I now try to focus on the mission Hashem currently has for me, as well as on raising the family I already have. I may feel the ache of wanting another child, but none of the other unwanted feelings are present.

I don't know who needs to hear this today, but if you're reading this, I want to save you from a negative thought loop. I want to remind you that your value is not dependent on what you do today, but on who you *are*: a precious child of Hashem. I want to remind you that you have the power to think thoughts that are helpful and uplifting, rather than unhelpful and discouraging. I want to remind you to question your own thoughts and determine if they are even true. And I want to encourage you to focus on all the brochos you currently have in your life, and the mission is hidden within that.

May we all be *zoche* to receive Hashem's brochos in a revealed way, and may all our tefillos be answered immediately! ■



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Full Circle

From Bais Rivkah
to Ukraine & Back Again

Mrs. Chanie (Lipsker) Kaminezki, Dnipro, Ukraine
Graduating Class of 5746 (1986)



I was born on shlichus in Italy. When I was four years old, my parents moved to New York and a year later to Morristown, New Jersey, where my father, Rabbi Lipsker, founded the Ba'al Teshuva Yeshiva, Tiferes Bochurim.

In Morristown, there were no school options for me, so my parents improvised and

created a homeschool with teachers from the Yeshiva team. My aunt Chevy Lipsker, my uncle Fitzzy Lipsker A”H, Mrs. Rasi Yurkowitz, Mrs. Sara Greenberg, Mrs. Rivka Nachlas, Mrs. Shulamis Rothman, and my parents all took turns in teaching me.

When I turned nine, my parents and I decided it was time to go to school. My parents wrote a letter to the Rebbe explaining that the only option locally was co-ed. My grandparents were understandably opposed to my attending that school. What were my parents to do?

The Rebbe gave me a brocha to attend Bais Rivkah.

The Rebbe gave me a brocha to attend Bais Rivkah.

So, at the tender age of nine, I left my parents and my home to be in the Rebbe's school, where the Rebbe wanted a *chassidische* girl to be. (As I relate this, I just returned from the airport where I sent my fourteen-year-old son away from home for the first time, as he will be attending the Ukrainian yeshiva that relocated to Germany. The mesiras nefesh that children and parents have for chinuch!)

Settling into my new school was incredibly difficult. My great aunt and uncle, Rabbi Sholom Ber and Tante Yachet Eichorn, welcomed me warmly, even though they had their hands full with a growing family, as well as a continuously open home for guests. Yiddish was my first language, and I could neither read nor speak English properly. Thus, suddenly being surrounded by countless English speaking peers was overwhelming.

After a year, I moved in with my grandparents, Reb Yankel and Taibel Lipsker, where I lived for the next ten years. Over time, I made friends, learned English, and settled in my new environment.

After graduating from Bais Rivkah, I met my husband, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki from Eretz Yisroel. Together, with the Rebbe's brochos, we moved to Dnipro (Yekaterinoslav), Ukraine on shlichus.

This Adar, our world was turned upside down. With war raging in Ukraine, we were hastily evacuated, and

I set out for New York with some of my children and grandchildren. Leaving my husband and eighteen-year-old son behind, I did not know what the future held.

After a week-long journey, we arrived in Crown Heights. I asked my ten-year-old daughter, Luba, where she wanted to go to school. I offered her multiple options. Considering that she was from a Hebrew-speaking class, I gave her the choice of a Hebrew-speaking school. Since she was learning in our growing but smaller school in Dnipro, I gave her the option of attending a smaller school in Crown Heights. I also told her about schools where she had close relatives who could help her adjust.

My daughter's decision was clear: “I want to go to Bais Rivkah.”

“Are you sure?”, I asked. “A big school with an overwhelming number of girls, a new language, and no close relatives to take care of you?”

My daughter's mind was made up.

So, at the age of ten, similar to her mother, she set out for Bais Rivkah.

On her first day, we entered the school building as



The Kaminezki's Chabad House in Dnipro, Ukraine.

So, at the age of ten, similar to her mother, she set out for Bais Rivkah.

she proudly wore her Bais Rivkah uniform. We went to the principals' office (my classmate, Mrs. Gitty (Minkowitz) Rosenfeld and my cousin, Mrs. Leah Jacobson) where we were greeted with enthusiasm. "Do you know that all your classmates are waiting with bated breath to meet you, a Shlucha from Ukraine?" Sure, I thought, she's just being nice and making my daughter feel like a celebrity.

We made our way to the classroom, where I realized it was not an exaggeration at all. Twenty five girls were jumping out of their seats with joy, delighted to welcome the 'Ukrainian refugee' into their class.

I stayed to help her settle in. What I saw in that classroom moved me to tears. As my daughter joined Morah Stolik and Mrs. Schusterman's classes, I got to see such exceptional teaching and beautiful interactions, and I am eternally grateful to them for welcoming my daughter so warmly. I

had the pleasure of sitting in Morah Stolik's classroom for two and a half hours and witnessed how she brought the Torah to life. The incredibly calm way she spoke with so much respect for each girl, bringing out the best in each student inspired me. I wish I could go back and soak in more of what she has to give.

Luba also immensely enjoyed two weeks of Bais Rivkah Day Camp.

Unlike her mother, my daughter has settled in well. She has a bevy of friends, incredible teachers, and a loving mother nearby.

We hope for the day when we can return to Dnipro and resume school there. Until then, I am watching Bais Rivkah and my family come full circle. ■

I had the pleasure of sitting in Morah Stolik's classroom for two and a half hours and witnessed how she brought the Torah to life.



Chanie's daughter, Luba Kaminezki



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Derher FOR KIDS

A Mother's Vision

Chanie (Teldon) Kamman, Stamford, CT

As told to Miriam Polter

Graduating Class of 5769 (2009)



“Welcome to Derher for Kids! Sit back and relax as we experience life with the Rebbe in 770, stories of Chassidim, and see how the Rebbe continues to find a way to connect to us and help every Yid.” Whether it’s while getting tucked into bed or while being buckled into a carseat, this is what many Lubavitch children hear and internalize throughout their day. But where did it all begin?

The Bais Rivkah Impact

Growing up on shlichus in Long Island, Chanie (Teldon) Kamman was part of a small school put together by the local Shluchim until she joined Bais Rivkah in seventh grade. Nervous to join a class triple the size of her entire school, Chanie was welcomed with open arms. “I still remember our theme song from Room 407- ‘407! La creme de la creme! Enjoying each other, while serving Hashem!’ There was such joy and a feeling of belonging,” she fondly recalls.

Six years within the walls of Bais Rivkah, internalizing the messages daily that we can change the world and that we can do anything, left a lasting impact on Chanie and the path she chose for herself beyond her schooling years. During the Rosh Chodesh programs and the many other extracurricular events, she would take in the excitement, the joy, and the passion, sensing that this is unique to Bais Rivkah and Lubavitch.

“The chinuch we have as Chassidim of the Rebbe—and of course as Bais Rivkah students—runs through our blood without us even realizing it. We take it for granted,” she shares. “Going to camps as a young, passionate counselor or having the pride and courage to go on Mivtzoim with Mrs. Korf; there was nothing like it. It gave me a feeling of, I can do anything.”

Filling a Gap

Passionate about children and their development and growth, both b’gashmiyus and b’ruchniyus, Chanie was searching for quality bedtime stories and content for her kids. Having listened to all of the common Jewish stories multiple times, her kids were ready for something new. Chanie’s husband, Yossi, heads A Chassidisher Derher Magazine, and so after supporting her husband in this for years, an idea popped into her head. “What if we created a platform for children to hear stories from the Derher in an educational and entertaining way?” she thought. And in Tishrei 5782, Derher for Kids was born.

She began collaborating with the Derher team to see how she might be able to adapt the stories for children and then reached out to master storyteller Rabbi Shalom Perl to see if he would be involved in this new project. He eagerly agreed, and together with Chanie, they started picking the stories, writing the scripts, and producing the series. A large team of researchers, writers, and mashpiim work together to create the larger quality episodes. Every word is vetted and carefully chosen to properly give over their message in a clear, direct way

The main challenge Chanie has come up against is the time crunch.

for the children to internalize.

Outpouring of Support

The feedback from children and adults alike has been overwhelming. On a weekly basis, Chanie receives messages and pictures from friends whose children have been enjoying the bi-weekly episodes. One particular parent shared a picture of her child, saying that immediately after listening to an episode about writing to the Rebbe, her daughter went searching the house for a pen and paper to begin writing her own letter. Parents have also shared that as their children are listening to it, they themselves have learned so much at the same time. Listeners feel very grateful that there is a resource that provides content in an educational and entertaining way, which shares messages that parents often want to teach yet don’t always have the right words to properly formulate on their own. As a parent, this has been something Chanie has wanted for her own children and is humbled to be able to fulfill a need and provide it for others as well.

The Rebbe Finds a Way

Starting something new has its ups and downs and launching this platform has been no different. The main challenge Chanie has come up against is the time crunch. “As much as we think we have four months to prepare an episode, there’s never enough time,” says Chanie. “With the help of Rabbi Perl and his wife though, and our entire team, boruch Hashem, we have been able to produce over thirty episodes! These episodes include stories of Chassidim who’ve seen the Rebbe’s brochos and guidance after visiting the Ohel, stories of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka for Chof Beis Shvat, an episode on Rebbetzin Chana in honor of Vav Tishrei, the full story of Hey Teves, a thorough perspective on Harov Levi Yitzchok—the Rebbe’s father, and a large segment on Hiskashrus—writing to the Rebbe, and what the Rebbe is to us.” Through all the challenges and hiccups along the way, it has been clear that the Rebbe is there every step of the way.

It takes a village to raise a child, and Chanie is passionate about taking part in contributing to that purpose. “Children are so precious, and we all need to work together to raise the next generation of beau-



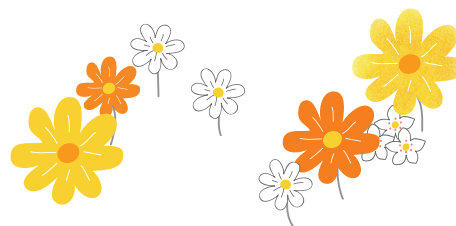
A Derher for Kids listener inspired by the episode about writing to the Rebbe.

It takes a village to raise a child, and Chanie is passionate about taking part in contributing to that purpose.

tiful Chassidim,” Chanie explains. “I want children everywhere to know that the Rebbe is part of our lives in a very tangible way. We can all talk to the Rebbe in the way we know how and continue to see his hand in our lives.”

With over sixty thousand listens and close to fifteen thousand unique listeners, the Derher for Kids is addressing a need for Lubavitch parents everywhere, thanks to one mother with a mission. ■

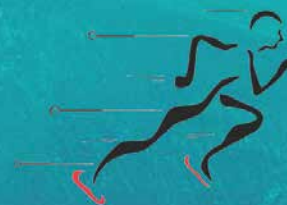
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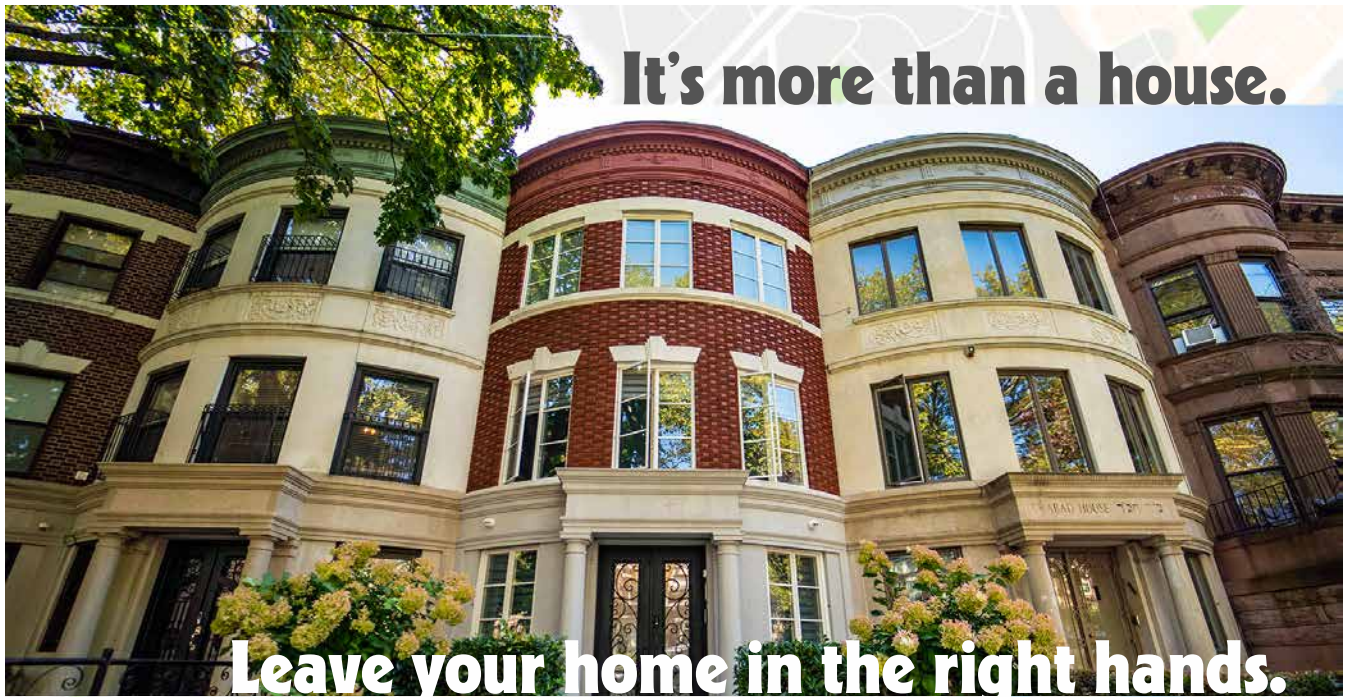
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ALUMNAE

Who, What, Where
Chabad of the Midnight Sun



Mushky (Namdar) Feldman
Reykjavik, Iceland
Graduating class of 5769 (2009)

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHAT YOU DO?

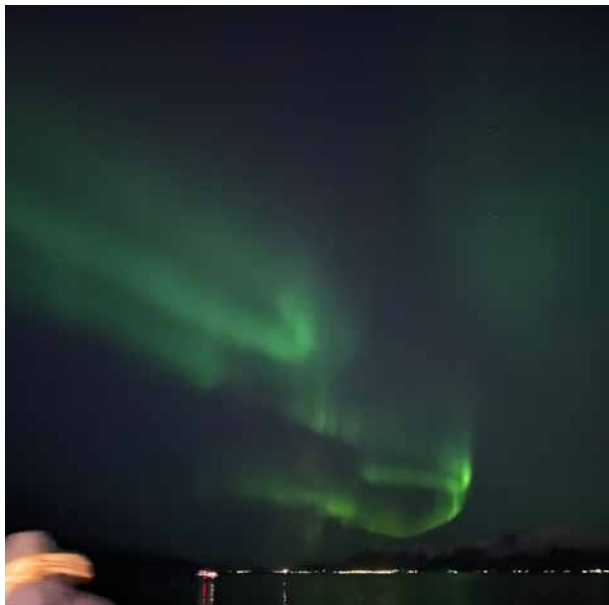
My husband and I and our kids live on shlichus in Iceland which, despite it being a really amazing place, was only put “on the map” when one of its volcanoes erupted in 5770 (2010). After that, a lot of people began visiting our amazing sights and nature. Some of Iceland's best-kept secrets are the ice caves, glaciers, and glacier lagoons that form floating icebergs that wash up to the beach. The gulf stream runs through Iceland making the climate warmer than it should be for its altitude of approximately 1,640 feet above sea level. Iceland is also a volcanic land, which means there is a lot of geothermal activity, hot water running everywhere and geysers nearly every five minutes. Once volcanoes erupt, cooled lava grows moss, creating beautiful landscapes. Until Iceland decided to adver-



Mushky and her husband and daughters heading out to Reykjavik, Iceland with some bags, a Sefer Torah, and a one-way ticket.

tise its attractions and open airlines and hotels to make traveling easier, these sights were often unknown to non-Icelanders.

Iceland has only one hundred thousand people in the whole country, making it the “biggest small town” in the world. We live in the northernmost capital in the world, which means we hold the title of the northernmost Chabad house in the world. There have been Jewish people living here for over a hundred years and a small friend group of sorts who get together to celebrate Jewish holidays. Yet, they never organized or formed a community, shul, or Rabbi. My husband is the first Rabbi in Icelandic history. I am originally from Sweden, and the culture is pretty similar to that of Icelanders, so I think the people here value that we



The northern lights, one of Iceland's winter attractions.

can appreciate and understand their culture. We are here because we heard that there were Jews looking for a community, and we felt that this was a real calling and that we were needed here. We have a community of approximately four hundred Jews, and over the summer, we could have thousands of Jewish travelers passing through. We offer kosher catering and host large Shabbos meals of over two hundred people.

During the summer in Iceland, we experience some-

thing called the midnight sun. Our Chabad House overlooks the ocean, and we can enjoy our meal as the sun hovers over the ocean for hours. We light Shabbos candles at the earliest possible time which is at about 10:00 PM on Friday night, and we end Shabbos at dawn on Sunday, at about 1:30 AM. We wait to do Havdola on Sunday morning.

WHAT WAS A DETERRENT IN YOUR PATH, AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?

Sometimes, things can get overwhelming, trying to balance between my family and the Chabad house, and I'm often split between the way that each group needs me. What has really helped me is finding time to connect to and understanding why I'm here and who I am, and that has really helped me be present in the moment and be there for whoever needs me then. For example, my child may really need me while I'm running an event, and I need to remind myself, "Yes, I worked hard on my event—arranging the flowers and themes, but now my child needs me, and this is what's important now." The outcome is that whoever I'm with feels like I'm fully there with them and knows I'm trying my best.

WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR ALUMNAE AND CURRENT BAIS RIVKAH STUDENTS?

My years in Bais Rivkah were the best years of my life. I think it's up to each student to squeeze every-



Mushky taking the Chabad kiddie group on a trip.



Various Chabad of Iceland events and functions.

thing out of their teachers and the farbrengens and not take it for granted. In high school, we are still developing into the kind of person we will be, so don't let the opportunities slip away by not being focused and failing to take it all in. I had the opportunity to be both a teacher and student in Bais Rivkah, and as an adult, I could see things from the other side, and I know that there is so much that goes into the programs and lessons.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THE YOUNGER VERSION OF YOURSELF?

I'd watch those Twizzlers in the dorm (haha). I would remind myself that this is not going to last forever and make sure that my time matters. I was there before smartphones and many other distractions but would remind myself to make every moment matter. Lastly,

show appreciation for my teachers for the things they did in and out of the classroom. As an out-of-towner, teachers really stepped into a "mother" role and were people that I really looked up to.

Bais Rivkah gives their students the confidence and excitement in following the Rebbe's instructions and provides a *chayus* that you can't get anywhere else. They show real respect and admiration for *shluchim*, which makes you feel proud that you go out of your way to be on shlichus. We were treated like we were doing the best thing, teachers were accommodating, we were hosted a lot, and taking an extension or an exemption to travel was never seen as a problem because it was clear that our shlichus came first and was the most important.

Thank you to Bais Rivkah, and especially Mrs. Teich-
tel, for creating such an incredible atmosphere — I can say, without a doubt, that my daughters will be Bais Rivkah girls. ♣

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SO YOU WANT TO BE A WRITER?

Shterna (Karp) Lazaroff, Yerushalayim
Graduating class of 5774 (2014)



What do you do?

I work as a copywriter, which is basically all the writing parts of marketing. Copywriting is a very wide industry — you can work on anything from the super creative projects like naming companies and writing advertisements to super intensive projects like writing websites. Personally, I focus on writing websites, emails, and brochures for non-profit organizations.

On the side, I also work as a staff writer for Ami and Mishpacha magazines.

What does a typical day look like?

It's very varied because a lot of working as a writer is not actually writing. Some days, I'm meeting with clients or interviewing people for articles. Other days, I'm deep into the writing portion of the project. I also have to spend quite a bit of time on the business side of things (like project management) and on research — either for my clients' specific projects or just learning more and more about the most effective methods in marketing and writing.

“Okay, but if I don't go to college, what are my other options?!” I wish I knew then that, even without any formal degree or training, there is so much opportunity.

How did you become a writer?

I always loved writing but never thought it was possible to make a job of it. In my mind, writing was a side hustle — something you did for fun with the extra time you had AFTER you came home from your REAL job. Boruch Hashem, I quickly learned that that wasn't the case.

When I was in high school, I was super involved



There's something uniquely gratifying about seeing just how big of a difference your work makes.

in the Grapevine. When I came home from seminary, one of the editors I'd worked with reached out to offer me a job working on Hachayol at Tzivos Hashem. I got to really sharpen my writing skills there, so when I left after a few years, I pitched Ami Magazine about a piece on the Shluchim in Mumbai. From there, I started writing for Mishpacha as well.

I found the copywriting field mostly by accident. I was working as the in-house writer for the Aleph Institute and eventually realized that fundraising letters are part of a broader field called copywriting, so I did more research and took a copywriting course.

Do you have any training or degree?

I have taken copy trainings, but I don't have a college degree. I remember in high school when the principals shared the Rebbe's perspective on college — they really discouraged us from going. At the time, I thought, “Okay, but if I don't go to college, what are my other options?!” I wish I knew then that, even without any formal degree or training, there is so much opportunity.

We live in a world where, boruch Hashem, you can turn almost any skill into a source of parnossa. Home organizing, event planning, graphic design, financial consulting, working in a non-profit organization — there are literally countless options where the barrier to entry is so low. You can try it out, see if you like it, and take it from there. If you have a talent and the drive to really hone your skills, you can build a profitable, fulfilling parnossa.

What do you enjoy about this job?

So, so much! Where to start?

• **Choosing my workload** — This one is huge, especially as a woman. When you're working for yourself, you have a lot of flexibility. You can choose what kind of projects you want to work on and how much you want to work. If it's a busy season in your life, you have the option to take on fewer projects for that month. If you have a lot going on and want to focus on quicker, easier projects instead of longer, intensive ones, that's your prerogative, too. You actually have the ability to adjust your job as your life evolves.

• **Meeting interesting people** — Between inter-

viewing people for articles, working with interesting clients, and meeting others in the industry, I've had so many conversations with people I wouldn't have met in my normal day-to-day. It's always fun to hear unique life stories, learn a new perspective, and connect with someone you wouldn't otherwise cross paths with.

• **Getting to see the impact** — There's a very selfish reason that I niched in nonprofits. You can write a letter or launch a website and then get a message from a client days later with just how many donations they

ARE YOU YOUR OWN BOSS?

When you're only answering to yourself, it can be hard to find the motivation and drive to get down to business. Here are 5 productivity tricks for anyone who's self-employed:

1) Put on focus music: Copywriter Chana Greenstein introduced me to this one. Find focus soundtracks to listen to that can help you get work done. On my heavy work days, when I know I need to spend a few hours getting deep into the kishkes of a project, I put on focus music. I literally see the difference based on how much more work I get done — focus music works wonders.

2) Use a sand timer: On the days that I'm not motivated to sit down and start, this is my magic trick. I start a twenty-five minute sand timer and push myself to work for as long as it's going. Usually, once I get started, I can continue working long after the sand runs out.

3) Don't check your emails first thing: It feels intuitive to check your emails in the morning, but I find that once I do, I'm down the rabbit hole of myriad little tasks and lose

an hour of what is otherwise prime focus time. Instead, I start the day with work that needs my full energy and attention and save emails for the afternoons.

4) Create theme days: This is a brilliant trick from copywriter Nechy Sampson. When you run your own business, there are always a million things to take care of, and if you're not on top of it, time quickly slips away. Nechy suggested creating a schedule with things like "Finances on Fridays." With this method, I batch together tasks. If I get any finance-related emails during the week, I snooze them until Friday and address them all at once, which takes less time than addressing each task on its own.

5) Batch your meetings: I started doing this based on Nechy's theme days idea. I don't especially love meetings because they can be tiring. So, instead of spreading them throughout the week, I only schedule them on specific days. Yes, it's still tiring — maybe even more so — but when the day ends, I love knowing that I have no more meetings for a few days. I enjoy all the remaining days so much more.

*If Hashem gave you talents or opportunities, then it's not really your choice — you have an *achrayus* to use them, specifically if you can use them to help spread Torah and mitzvos.*

raised. There's something uniquely gratifying about seeing just how big of a difference your work makes.

• **Featuring Lubavitch in a positive light** — One of my favorite projects is a series of stories about Shluchim that I write for Ami's Rosh Hashanah issue every year. The magazine always gets incredible feedback on it with non-Lubavitchers saying things like "I never realized just how hard Shluchim work," one reader wrote. "I'm in awe of how dedicated Shluchim are," wrote another. It's nice to know that people get to see Lubavitch from a new, positive perspective.

• **Mixing both strategic and creative thinking** — Copywriting is in the marketing field, so it includes a lot of strategy and critical thinking. It's not only about good writing, but about knowing what to say and how. You get to use both your right-brain and left-brain skills, and as someone who always enjoyed both English AND math, I really enjoy that.

Any tips and tricks for someone looking to become a writer?

Almost every business and non-profit out there needs some form of writing, so there's a LOT of demand for great writing talent. You can work as a copywriter, a technical writer, a magazine writer, a ghostwriter, etc. If you're a strong writer, there's probably a job out there for you. The hardest part is probably the beginning — when you're just getting started. Two big things you can do are write a lot and really focus on building your portfolio.

Writing is like a muscle; the more you write, the stronger a writer you will become. Volunteer to help friends with any writing they need for their

Chabad House and then really listen to their comments — what did they ask you to change? What did they like? Feedback is invaluable, and if you listen closely, it's a golden opportunity to improve.

When you're starting out, it's worth taking lower-paid jobs just to build your portfolio. I know some writers who wrote sample websites just so that they would have something to show potential clients. If you want to write for magazines, it's helpful to read them regularly, so you get a feel for their style and understand what kind of submissions they look for.

When I was first starting out, I came across a *sicha* (from 11 Nissan 5744) that's been my motivation ever since. It really applies to anyone who has any sort of talent, skill, or creativity. The Rebbe explains that Hashem didn't create anything in vain. If Hashem gave you talents or opportunities, then it's not really your choice — you have an *achrayus* to use them, specifically if you can use them to help spread Torah and mitzvos.

Especially in today's world, where there's so, so much need for good talent, it's such a shame if your G-d-given abilities go to waste. Just get started, put in your *hishtadlus*, and see where Hashem takes you — it will probably be some really wonderful places. ■



A Taste of Bais Rivkah



Date: _____

Chanie (Minsky) Gurkov
Wayne, NJ

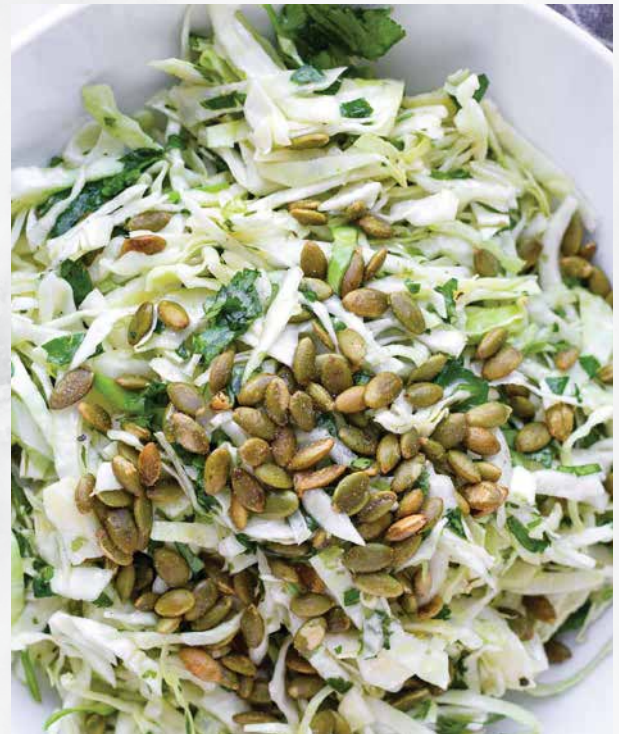
Graduating class
of 5772 (2012)



Chani Gurkov and family

YOU LEARNED SOME OF CHANI (MINKSY) GURKOV'S tips and tricks on acing the hostess experience in her article, "Tricks of the Trade", on page 52.

Here Chani shares some of her favorite recipes from her kitchen full of guests.



CRUNCHY ASIAN SALAD

Inspired by recipe from Renee Muller - Our Table

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 head shredded green cabbage* (I prefer to use fresh cabbage, not the pre-cut, bagged version)
- 1 bag of baby spinach*
- Sliced scallions*
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds

CRUNCHY TOPPING:

- 1 package Israeli couscous
- 3 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 cup toasted sunflower seeds (bake at 350° F for 10-15 min until lightly browned)

*Note: This makes the salad! Do NOT omit

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a pot or large pan, heat oil on a medium flame.
2. Add couscous and toast until light brown, for around 10 minutes.
3. Remove couscous and allow to cool. Mix with sunflower seeds.

DRESSING:

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup lemon juice (freshly squeezed)
- ¼ cup oil
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 3 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder

**Disclaimer: Some of these vegetables have specific Halachic requirements for checking for insects.*

**SABICH PLATE**

This is a simple dish that is easy to prepare, looks beautiful, and is always a winner.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 eggplants
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 hard boiled eggs
- 1 can of Israeli pickles
- ¼ cup of techina- homemade or store-bought Za'atar, for garnish
- Pomegranate seeds, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

1. Dice eggplants. Coat in olive oil and roast in the oven at 425° F until golden, about 10–15 minutes.

PLATE IT:

1. Slice the hard boiled eggs and plate them on a round platter or dish. Then, lay the eggplant on top, followed by the pickles.
2. Drizzle the techina over the top, garnish with pomegranate seeds and Za'atar spice blend.

OPTIONAL:

Serve with a side of pita chips. ■



- BAIS RIVKAH - Tafent



STRESS AND MESS

Chani (Zalmanov) Vaisfiche

Crown Heights

Graduating class of 5765 (2005)

The mess is getting to me
as you can see
I have no time to deal
It just piles up more and more
I've never had this before
I just can't bear
No patience to hear
Of more kvetching
Of more fighting
I feel like I'm collapsing
The exhaustion is just beyond
So overwhelmed
With all the responsibilities
It feels beyond my capabilities
Is there no end in sight?!

Isolate
Reflect
Breathe
Welcome Hashem
He is very capable
He will keep things stable
He will take care
Of what I feel I cannot bear
Just stop and remember
That He is right there
And it's truly His world
And so nothing is collapsing
I can start relaxing
I am in Good Hands!

EFFERV“ESSENCE”

Aura Chaya (Bitton) Gispan

Crown Heights, Brooklyn NY

Graduating class of 5754 (1994)

What is the sound
that infinity makes
when it spirals into
the corridors
of consciousness?

{Pulse. Breath.}

{Pulse. Breath.}

The curtain is raised
(on us) locked
in ever tighter
embrace.

Pulse. Breath.

Pulse.
Breath.

Build me a hut
in the swell
of the temporary,
a sound booth
to amplify and shelter
our comm/union.

I

will cup my arms
around you
to protect your soulsong

from being snuffed
by the elements.

{Pulse. Breath.}
{Pulse. Breath.}

I
will swathe you
in my many clouds
of glory and you
will come into
my enchanting gaze.
You

will screen off the outside
and I
will show you
how vast
is the within:

a swirling sea
of potentiality and mystery,
two beating hearts
engaged in primal spin—
tying a knot of affirmation—
a placeholder
for sacredness and sentience .

Let's connect these two
points of kingdom.

Crown. Heart.
Crown. Heart.

I
will trickle along
the palm frond
of your fluid spine,
you

will traction yourself
one millimeter closer.
You
will raise
your myrtle eyes and

I
will seek them
ever so intently
so you may come
to see and be seen
You
will mark meaning
with your willow lips
so that living water

may pass through them
and irrigate the parched.
You
will gift me
your fragrant heart and

I
will circle you with starlight
and intergalactic dust to
illuminate your soulscape
while holding you
in my shade,
the insides of your cells
kissing the edges
of the universe.

{Pulse. Breath.}
{Pulse. Breath.}

I
will send my current
electrical, divine
and you
will warrior your limbs
through the cardinal
directions of distraction.
Let it be said —out loud— that
you
are infinitely loved:
the fragrant and the flat,
the palatable and the bland.

Pulse.
Breath.
Pulse.
Breath.

You
will respirate my presence
into the crevices and continents
of visceral voyages
whispering my name
in silent serenades.
You
are {always}
accompanied by ancestors
conscripting archetypal-gifts.

Sculpt me into new forms
articulating origins
in cobwebbed corners
of un/consciousness.

Reap divine bounty—
harvest,
in earnest.

Intoxicate in
water jubilation
as prophetic libation:
une fete d'esprit,
un eclat d'etre.

Pulse. Breath.
Pulse

Breath.
A quiet roar,
a hissing loudness.
Pulse.
Breath.

Savor
these days of illumination
like a burst of lightning
irradiating the sky
so you may continue to
find your way in the night
no matter what storms may come.

Sit with me,
feasting and faithing.

Just when you think
you are filled with enoughness,
you
will return my clasp
wrapping your heart

around the scroll
of my word,
raising up song
from dust.

And
I,

savoring this
every-moment
will whisper in your ear:
stay...

a while longer.
Pulse. Breath.
Pulse.
Breath.

Let's begin—
again.

EMBRACE MOMENTS



I want to start off with the quote from Pirkei Avos that “Everyone who says something in the name of the person who said it, brings deliverance into the world, as it is said: “And Esther told the king in Mordechai’s name” (Pirkei Avos 6:6).

My Chumash teacher in ninth grade, Mrs. Minkowitz, really made a big difference in my life and impacted my future years of learning. As a student, I loved to learn but I had a hard time in Chumash specifically. I would participate in class and understand all the concepts and enjoy every moment of it, but when I came home that day and would sit down at the long dining room table with my mother to chazer the Chumash of the day, the *teitschen* to the pesukim just escaped my

head. I really tried to review, but I had a hard time remembering pesukim and their translations, and thus, my grades were very low in Chumash. When it came to homework days, I would sit at the table and cry because I didn't know what was the problem. I knew I had a good head and got good grades in other classes, and I understood everything when it was taught in class; it wasn't like it was a complicated math problem or scientific explanation. I just had a hard time with pesukim. However, because the teachers saw I really tried my best in class, they gave me a good grade on my report card—a beis or beis plus. Some teachers would even give me the test to take home, and I would memorize the answers beforehand and get a good mark, which made my self-esteem in Chumash class a little better. But I always knew I liked to learn, and I had the ability to learn Chumash. I just needed something to click in my brain and that day would soon come.

When I entered Bais Rivkah High School and started Chumash class, an amazing teacher with a strong presence and a great energy walked into the class and in her clear powerful voice said, “Ladies sit up straight, feet forward, and review!” These were the three messages Mrs. Minkowitz would start off every class with. At first, I didn't take the review part seriously, but then, I realized maybe Mrs. Minkowitz has a point. Instead of reviewing before every test and sitting down for three to four hours and coming

out with a low pass, I decided to take her advice, and after each Chumash period, I would sit at my desk for five minutes before the next class and review the little notes that I had written in my Chumash and the *te-itschen*. I even acquired a special chavrusa from this, and we truly thrived from this and became friends! My grades were going up from 60's to 70's to 80's to even 90's in Chumash. These numbers were unheard of for me. While I do regret that I only woke up and took to heart Mrs. Minkowitz's words only three quarters into the year, I was so thankful and excited that Mrs. Minkowitz had truly solved the dilemma I had had for the past few years of my life. From then on, I had this new special tool in my school toolbox—to review right after a class. Throughout the rest of my high school, I succeeded in all the Chumash classes because of Mrs. Minkowitz's advice, and I owe a lot of my school grades to her. I looked forward to every class of hers, and when she said, “sit up straight”, you bet I sat up straight with pride!

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

Anonymous



Keepsakes

Bais Rivkah School Picture

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





A Bais Rivkah school photo of students at the Church Avenue branch, 1970's.
Photo: R. Pinchus Cunin Collection.

Do you recognize anyone in the photo or know the precise year? Let us know at keepsakes@bethrivkah.edu.



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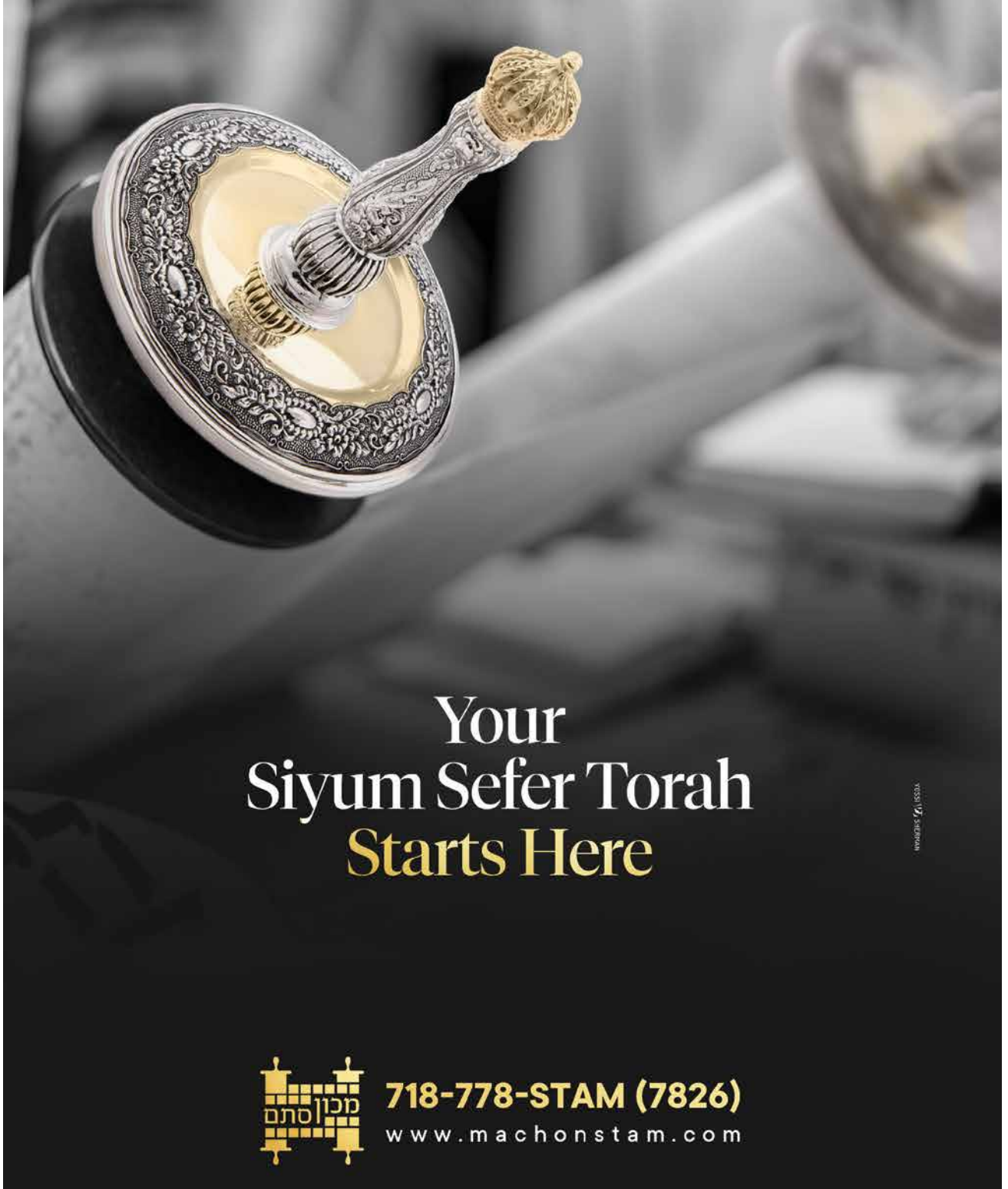
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