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# EMBRACE

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



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*A BR Alumna takes on a role of chessed and kindness.*

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# 50

## A SONG OF HOPE

*I thought I had my life planned out. Since  
high school, I knew I would go on shlichus  
and I thought I would have a family of fifteen.  
Hashem was telling me that I'm not in charge.*



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**HE'S HOLDING MY HAND**  
*I consider the brochos within our  
challenge, notably that infertility  
has brought us closer as a couple  
and we have been forced to grow  
considerably.*

# From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

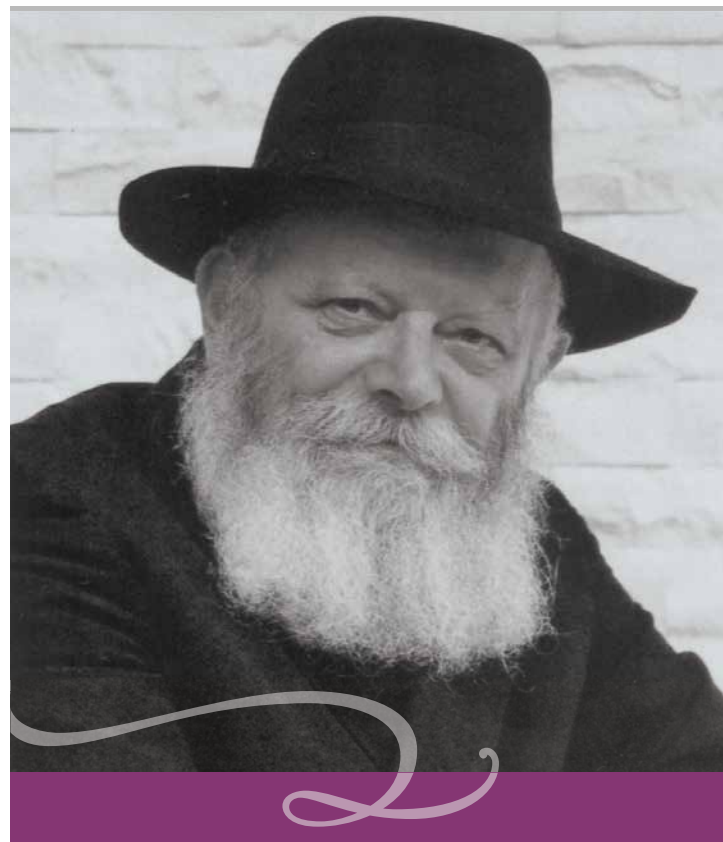
## Are Setbacks Cause for Frustration?

By the Grace of G-d  
20th of Teveth, 5717 [December 24, 1956]  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greetings and blessings,

**I** was pleased to receive your letter of the first day of Chanukah, and to read in it that your position has improved, both materially and spiritually. As for the setbacks you mention, and especially your feeling of deficiency in your studies, it should be remembered that the Torah teaches us that the conquest of setbacks and the general settling down in life usually can be accomplished in stages. You will recall that the Holy Land was also conquered by degrees, and as it was in the case of the physical conquest, so it is in the case of spiritual conquest.

For just as it is said of the Holy Land that “The Eyes of G-d are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year,” so are the Eyes of G-d upon every one of us individually, watching over us constantly and helping us in our determination to accomplish our conquests. Therefore, one should not be discouraged by the slowness of the progress, or even by an occasional setback. You will also remember what you must have learned in Chassidus, how destructive it is to be discouraged or sad etc. On the contrary, any setback should only call forth a greater measure of effort and determination to



*Any setback should only call forth a greater measure of effort and determination to overcome it.*

overcome it.

With regard to the financial difficulties, debts, etc., I trust that the position will improve. I am enclosing herewith a check from the Special Fund of my father-in-law, of saintly memory, which you should invest in your business, as this will be auspicious for success.

[Enclosed] also is an excerpt from a message which I think you will find interesting and useful.

Hoping to hear good news from you and with blessing,

With blessing,

*The Rebbe's Signature*

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# A LIGHT IN THE DARK

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



**Y**ou know how when you climb a mountain it gets cooler towards the top? The higher the altitude, the colder it gets. But shouldn't it get warmer as you go higher? Doesn't heat rise? And besides, aren't you getting closer to the sun?

In case I piqued your curiosity, in short, it's the lower pressure at high altitudes that cause the colder temperatures. But I'll leave the in-depth scientific answer for another time. What I really want to focus on is what the Alter Rebbe says in *Lekutei Torah*. The Alter Rebbe states that when you realize how far you are, specifically then is when you can actually come to a greater closeness, just like the earth that's further from the sun is warmer than the snow capped mountain tops.

This is a *mashal* for a Yid's relationship with Hashem. When you feel far from Hashem, this gap can propel you to feel closer and to be more connected. The dark, the lack, the void, can give birth to a thirst and desire for connection and creativity.

So if you're feeling down or in the depths, know that the potential for growth and closeness is greater than ever. The warmth our *neshoma* really craves can be felt in the lowest of times.

In this issue, you'll read about what it's like being in different stages than peers and friends and you'll hear from women struggling with sickness or infer-

tility. Get inspired as you read about how the circumstances they find themselves in brought out a new opportunity for growth and connection.

And while we don't ask for it, sometimes Hashem sends challenges our way that test our ability to stay

*When you feel far from Hashem,  
this gap can propel you to  
feel closer and to be more  
connected.*

connected and to find the warmth, but somewhere there are hidden pockets of space to feel closer to Hashem.

May there come a time when all challenges and darkness will be a thing of the past and we will experience the ultimate warmth and closeness with Moshiach now! ■

*Sara Blau*

Sara Blau

# Message from *the* Chairman

*Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov* שיח'

---



**E**steemed Alumnae, תחילה  
As we approach the special and holy days of 10 and 22 Shevat, I would like to share with you the following thoughts.

Each of us and all of us are made up of many different parts. One of the primary challenges we have is to organize them all into a cohesive, constructive system that will allow us to execute the shlichus that Hashem has charged us with. During the year of Hakhel, we have a special mandate and empowerment to accomplish this goal; to transform our personal “kaleidoscopes” into “mosaics.”

The Rebbe זצ”ל, the Moshe Rabbeinu of our gener-

ation, teaches us that the mitzvah of Hakhel, the obligation of the king to “assemble the whole nation; men, women, and children,”<sup>1</sup> can also be expressed on a personal level. With regards to students, this would mean aligning the three characteristics, “men” (strength and impact on our surroundings), “women” (emotions and personal expression and development), and “children” (openness to learning), and bringing them into our own inner personal “Bais Hamikdash” and using them to serve the King of Kings.<sup>2</sup>

At every stage of our life, the primary focus shifts. In childhood and adolescence, the main focus is on developing our ideas and emotions. Later on, as



adults, when we carry the burden of responsibility, the focus and major challenge is on their implementation, both with regard to our inner state of being as well as our impact on others.

*Every generation has its unique opportunities and challenges. Previous generations lived in societies that oppressed them; Boruch Hashem, we live in a world with unprecedented freedom and opportunity. Freedom gives us access to great opportunities; it also exposes us to great challenges.*

One of the primary goals in chinuch is to prepare the child or student for life as an adult.

Every generation has its unique opportunities and challenges. Previous generations lived in societies that oppressed them; Boruch Hashem, we live in a world with unprecedented freedom and opportunity. Freedom gives us access to great opportunities; it also exposes us to great challenges.

The Rebbe זצ"ל taught us to appreciate the opportunities and to recognize the challenges that today's freedoms present us with. The chinuch that we provide our children with must include the tools necessary for them to take advantage of the opportunities and to protect themselves against any possible threats.

In the world we live in today, where society considers our individual rights to be sacrosanct, one can easily gravitate toward a lifestyle based on an exaggerated feeling of entitlement with no accountability. "Everybody owes me everything; I owe nobody anything."

Hakhel teaches us that everything we have is meant to be channeled towards the Bais Hamikdash and used to serve the King of Kings. Our freedoms allow us to serve Hashem unhindered by external factors.

One particular challenge that children have today is dealing with adversity. Accustomed to unprecedented comfort and pleasure, they naturally avoid anything that threatens to take them out of their comfort

zone. How do we prepare our children to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and accomplishment, to be tackled with joy and confidence?

The most effective way is by inspiration. When a child is exposed to an inspiring, real-life example, he or she can be moved to aspire to replicate that behavior. Yud and Chof Beis Shvat are opportunities to focus not only on the Rebbe's and Rebbetzin's personal greatness, but to look for and find examples in their personal behavior for us and our children to emulate in our own personal challenges.

This is another lesson we can learn from Hakhel. The king was the most powerful authority of his generation. Only Hashem, *melech malchei hamlochim*, had more authority than him. What did he use his power and influence for? To assemble all the men, women, and children in order to strengthen their connection to Hashem, and inspire them —by personal example— to do likewise.

This is something that we all can and must strive to emulate. Each of us is a "sovereign" to some degree, exerting authority over others. Parents, teachers, and counselors are just some examples of the leadership roles we play. Hakhel reminds us that authority carries with it a responsibility, not just a privilege.

*Hakhel reminds us that authority carries with it a responsibility, not just a privilege.*


May the year of Hakhel inspire and challenge us to be the best we can be in our understanding, feeling, and execution of our personal and collective shlichus to help turn this world into the beautiful mosaic it will soon become.

With best wishes for success and may we merit to see the *אגולה האמיתית והשלימה בקרוב ממש*!

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

1. וילך לא, י"ד-יב.

2. ראה ברכת כ"ק אדמו"ר זי"ע להתי' ערב יוה"כ"פ תשמ"ח ס"ד.



I love getting the Embrace magazine, it's a delightful treat.

BR alumnae are so wise and talented, and bravely share from the heart. The feature articles by D. Zaklikowski also elevate the issues. In my opinion this past issue was in a class of its own.

It was a real experience to get a peek into some dazzling souls.

Mrs. Krinsky A”H smiling at her chosson after he missed their l’chaim. Mrs. Cunin shtichye, beaming proudly near her selfless husband A”H. The incredible kindness of that senior class for their teacher. Aidel’s warm home(s). Chaya Goldberg and her little ‘glass balls’. Chanie Kaminezki, Leah Jacobson, Gitty Rosenfeld, and their elementary girls and teachers. Mushky Feldman. Gitty Orimland. All of them!

I love how the CTeen director put it, “In the ever-growing, self-obsessed metaverse, Crown Heights is selfless.”

I would just add: selfless with pride and with joy.

Thank you for highlighting some of our many wonderful role models,

– Zohar Sasson,  
*Jewish Women Influencers*

Thank you so much for the hard work that you put into the magazine. I really love hearing the diverse voices of fellow alumnae.

There was one article in a previous issue that surprised me. It was an article about mikvah. The Embrace Magazine is very popular in our house, even with my teen girls. That's why I was uncomfortable with that article, especially the angle it took. I'm not sure if we should publish stories of mikvah that teens can see, but if we do, shouldn't it be about the beauty and brochos associated with the mitzvah? Why should we expose them to the hardships that can come with this special mitzvah, especially as most people do not struggle with excoriation disorder like the author? This applies also to alumnae who are not teens anymore but are not yet married. Why should they associate the mitzvah with a struggle?

Looking forward to hearing from you,

– Anonymous

*Embrace asked Chaya Raichik, Author of “Mikvah Stories”, to respond:*

Hi,

Thank you for your letter. Many people have asked me similar questions ever since my book "Mikvah Stories" was published. It sounds to me like you have two questions:





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A. Should unmarried women be reading mikvah stories?

B. Is it appropriate to publish stories of women who struggle with this mitzvah?

There's no right or wrong here — no black and white, yes or no answer. Every family has its own culture and dynamic and will decide what is right for its members.

However, I want to emphasize two important points:

A. In response to your first question, it is known that the negative influences that are available out there to today's teenagers are at an all-time high, and it is our responsibility to provide our teens with the proper resources and tools on sacred topics to combat that. Many teenagers are searching for answers, and if a girl is curious and wants to know more about Taharas Hamishpacha and we don't give or allow her to have that information, then she will go somewhere else to find it.

In addition, if you own any English books on Taharas Hamishpacha, you can assume that your teenagers have read them — and it's a good thing! They are getting information from a Torah source. Sharing with them the Torah approach to marriage is the strongest filter out there, and it will hopefully give them a fuller perspective and encourage them to want to go to mikvah.

The Rebbe speaks in a sicha<sup>1</sup> about a discussion he had with a Rav, asking the Rav why he didn't speak about Taharas Hamishpacha openly. The Rav replied that he didn't because it wasn't *tzniusdik*. The Rebbe continued: "In years gone by, people were not aware of the matter, but in recent times, the people that he must influence know even more on the topic than him! What they don't know, however, is the importance of Taharas Hamishpacha [and therefore, he must speak openly about it.]" Here, the Rebbe is acknowledging that in the past, the knowledge around these concepts was not as widespread, and therefore Taharas Hamishpacha was not openly discussed. However, this generation is aware of so much more and information is so readily accessible that it's important that they learn the beauty and value of the Torah perspective, as

1. *Sicha Yud Tes Kislev*, 5735



### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

*Letters, comments, questions and suggestions are welcome!*

*Write to us at [Embrace@bethrivotkah.edu](mailto:Embrace@bethrivotkah.edu)*



opposed to learning about it elsewhere.

B. When asking about publishing struggles that people experience in relation to Taharas Hamishpacha, let's keep in mind that there is a lot of material published discussing the challenges that come with raising children. There are so many different kinds of struggles, and there is a wide array of parenting articles on a variety of topics. Don't we want our kids to have a positive view on having children? However, realistically, we need to talk about the obstacles so we can talk about the solutions. Inspiration and solutions help us return to the mindframe that raising children is the ultimate joy and privilege.

So too, many women experience challenges when using the mikvah, ranging from everyday, mundane inconveniences to serious obstacles. Should we pretend these challenges simply don't exist? Or should we talk about it, own it, and overcome it? We don't keep the *halachos* of Taharas Hamishpacha because they are beautiful or because of the *brochos* (although those are great motivators). Yes, sometimes it's messy, and sometimes it's hard, but we do it anyway. Having *mesiras nefesh* for Yiddishkeit is where true joy and happiness comes from. A real mikvah story is not just one that ends in a baby, but one that ends in a deeper relationship with Hashem.

However, I do agree and think it's extremely important that such articles, whether on parenting or on mikvah, be written to inspire, motivate, and uplift the reader. We can talk about challenges while also discovering how to become better through them, seeing the good in everything, and most of all, receiving motivation to overcome them.

At the end of the day, it's important that a women's magazine be able to publish articles on women's topics, even if they are sensitive. Today's teenagers are tomorrow's wives and mothers. What tools are we giving them to overcome tomorrow's challenges?

What tools are we giving ourselves to over-

come today's challenges?

Sincerely yours,

Chaya Raichik

PS: Excoriation is a type of OCD disorder. OCD is quite common, affecting about 1 in 40 people. See more about mikvah and OCD in my book 'Mikvah Stories,' available on Amazon or mikvahstories.com.

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***Thank you*** to all those who have dedicated  
a day of Torah learning during the month of  
Cheshvan.

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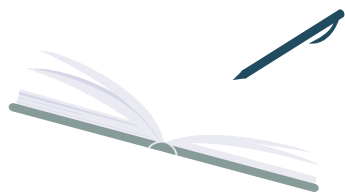


# A Fresh Perspective on Tznius:

*A Bais Rivkah Teacher's Journey*

---

Bracha (Goldschen) Leeds, Berkeley, CA  
*Shlucha on campus at UC Berkeley*  
*Former Bais Rivkah High School Teacher*



I had read about Chassidic Jews. I had seen movies about them. I had met a handful of them. I was inspired enough to go live with them and study their lifestyle for two years in Crown Heights. But I still felt like an outsider looking in. Until I took the job teaching eleventh grade chemistry in Bais Rivkah. It happened slowly. I'll never forget the way my heart raced the first time the principal walked into the class while I was teaching and all the girls stood at attention. I thought it was an earthquake (being



from California) and panicked for my life. The girls giggled from my shocked reaction when she left the room and I was desperately trying to make sense of what had just happened. In the public schools I had attended my entire life, not once did a student rise in the presence of a teacher. I was in awe.

When my students would be working on something during class hours, my mind would drift off to thoughts of my own high school experience, but especially the clothing. My school had no official dress code; we could wear whatever we wanted, and we did. Living in southern California, I often came to school dressed as if I was on the beach. Some days, I remember spending hours deciding what outfit to wear. By the time I left for school in the morning, my bedroom floor was covered in a sea of rejected jeans, tank tops, and flip flops. Looking around the classroom at my Bais Rivkah students, I remember silently envying their uniforms and thinking how lucky they were to never know what it feels like to stand for hours in the mirror agonizing over needing to attract a certain type of attention in order to fit in.

*But I still felt like an outsider looking in. Until I took the job teaching eleventh grade chemistry in Bais Rivkah.*

Once my secret past life of being an actress, singer, and dancer was discovered by the Bais Rivkah production heads, I found myself conducting tryouts after school as the newly appointed drama director. At some point, I made a trade with my students — math tutoring in exchange for teaching me Yiddish. Soon, I was spending each Shabbos with another student who welcomed me into her home. It was one big family. And I was finally a member. (I'm sure some of my students will remember the extra credit they received for wearing gowns to my wedding.)

Fast forward. After getting married, I spent a third year teaching chemistry (and math and biology labs) in Bais Rivkah and directing the production. I was blessed to give birth to our oldest daughter on Shavuot, a few days before the Regent exam

*In the public schools I had attended my entire life, not once did a student rise in the presence of a teacher. I was in awe.*

(and still graded the tests of course). We had the great *zechus* to move on campus shlichus to UC Berkeley, the place where my husband and I had met as college students only five years earlier. We quickly outgrew our one-bedroom apartment, and then our second one-bedroom apartment, with students bursting at the seams. We miraculously bought a house and continued expanding our Chabad center. My husband is also a mohel and I run a mikvah (we joke that we never have more than a week's notice for anything we do!) and we now host over one hundred students for Shabbos, with hundreds of alumni that we keep in touch with frequently.

Fifteen years ago, when we packed up our Crown Heights apartment to move back to California, the one thing I had mixed feelings about was leaving behind teaching in Bais Rivkah. Even for years while on shlichus, I often dreamt that by some miracle I would be able to continue doing both, but could never figure out how to host massive Shabbos meals



*Looking around the classroom at my Bais Rivkah students, I remember silently envying their uniforms.*

across the country from my nostalgic Bais Rivkah classroom.

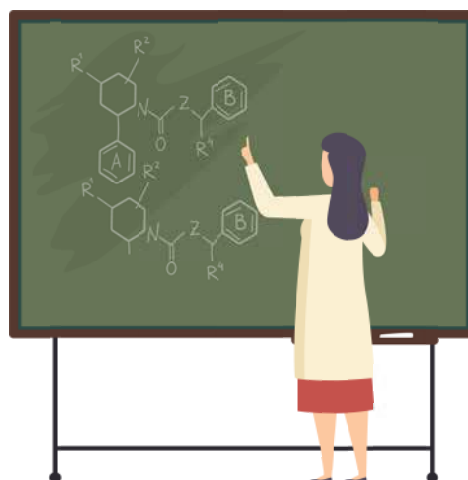
But Hashem can do anything. And He did. All it took was Covid, a chemistry teacher on maternity leave, and Zoom. There I was. Back in the classroom doing one of my favorite side passions — teaching eleventh grade Bais Rivkah girls! When my subbing days came to an end, I marveled at how Hashem had managed to create a situation that seemed completely impossible just months before. It got me thinking about how something that we can't even dream up can become a reality in an instant, the way the world will feel when Moshiach comes.

As much as I enjoy chemistry, to me, it was a way to become an influencer in an unlikely capacity. Truthfully, I've always felt that Hashem wanted me to go through what I went through in order to inspire others. When Covid shut down the in-person activities on our campus shlichus, I had a chance to focus on something I had been thinking about for years but didn't have the time to devote to properly: creating ways to transform and revolutionize the way people view the mitzvah of tznius. Tznius was actually one of the things that really drew me into Chabad, ironically. Perhaps because it was so radical to me compared to what I was used to, or maybe because it just honestly made so much more sense than a lifestyle where people meet, fall in love, do things they regret, and wake up and repeat the whole process again. I can't say for sure, but when I saw it on my first trip to Crown Heights while in college, I knew I wanted it. Yet I also saw that despite my jealousy of this lifestyle, many people who had grown up with it didn't appreciate or care for it too much. Bring on the challenge to find a way to change all that!

Five years ago, I listened to a life-changing class about tznius from Chanie Wolf as part of the Kallah teacher training course with Mikvah.org. It made me stop and think — somehow I actually had no idea about tznius even though I had been inspired by it and was keeping it. This got me thinking; how can we

get this knowledge out there to the world in a way that people will be able to make it their own?

So a close group of friends and I started working together with Chanie on adapting the tznius course to a curriculum called Modesty and Moshiach, aimed at delving into sources in small group settings to understand, inspire and motivate each other about tznius and how that relates to bringing Moshiach. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to bring this course to Bais Rivkah via Zoom, helping bring my initial Bais Rivkah experience full circle.



*Amongst its many objectives, the goal of the course is to dispel common misconceptions about tznius, such as:*

1. Tznius is all about protecting men
2. Tznius is to hide our beauty
3. I'm tznius as long as I'm covered, and
4. Tznius is a checkable item from a checklist.

*Some major takeaways are:*

1. Tznius at its core has nothing to do with anyone else and is primarily about being in Hashem's presence.
2. A Jew must always be a dignified and fitting representative of Hashem, allowing the true beauty of our neshomos to shine through.
3. Physical covering is only a small detail of tznius and in fact, a person can be fully covered and yet fall short of being tznius.
4. The profound insight that tznius is an ongoing avodah, applying at all times and in all situations.

*Tznius at its core has nothing to do with anyone else and is primarily about being in Hashem's presence.*

There is a reason why this is relevant right now more than ever — one word: Hakhel. The whole point of Hakhel is to gather people together to get inspired about Yiras Hashem and walk away as a changed person, ready to go out and inspire others. Well, essentially that's exactly what tznius is all about — deepening and strengthening our relationship with Hashem so that it is readily apparent in our thought, speech, and action, as a natural expression of that relationship, in a way that has a positive influence on our surroundings.

The fact that it is a Hakhel year right now fuels our

growth in this direction, unlike any other year, something I encourage everyone reading this article to take advantage of. So far, in my experience of inspiring women in the area of tznius, one thing seems universal: women are seeking the truth. The time has come for us to make this our own. It's not about the school rules or dress code, nor what my parents or principal say. It's about finding my own connection to Hashem, at any age or stage of life.

There is no better time than now to form your own small group of women (beginning with fellow Bais Rivkah alumnae) to motivate and inspire each other and start to live now with a new mindset that closely resembles the way it will be automatically when Moshiach comes. By doing this we actually bring Moshiach closer, when we will get to experience the ultimate Hakhel in the Bais Hamikdash, and all the Bais Rivkah alumnae will gather together once again and we will sing and dance just like we did at production finale! ■

## Once My Teacher, Forever My Teacher

Ms. Goldschen was one of those teachers with a real dedication to Torah and mitzvos all while being relatable to us students — she was on our plane, what you might call “with it.”

Ms. Goldschen knew how to manage our class and really taught us well. I remember her drama lessons. Because of her professional background in drama and dance, she brought a whole new level of skill to our practices; she taught us how to be bold and not afraid to perform.

Years later, I am fortunate to have reconnected with Ms. Goldschen, now Mrs. Leeds; I took a Kallah teacher training course, and Mrs. Leeds was one of the course mentors. It was really special and beautiful to experience. Once my drama teacher in Bais Rivkah, now a Shlucha on Campus, and giving me guidance on subjects related to Taharas Hamishpacha.

— Leah (Deutsch) Winner



# *The Path from* **Cleveland *to*** **Crown Heights**

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Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine



*Rebbetzins Shula Kazen brings a community member past the Rebbe.*

**W**hen Milton Sussman showed up at the local Jewish day school in Cleveland, Ohio with his twelve-year-old daughter, Paula, who had never attended a Jewish school, the administrator balked. Respectfully listening to the father, she feared that without basic knowledge of Yiddishkeit, his daughter would not be able to keep up with her grade.



The administrator raised red flags about her attending the school, and he felt that he was at wit's end. For Mr. Sussman, it felt like the last resort to help his daughter, who found no peace at any school — even a local Catholic academy. Suddenly, the face of the woman lit up, “Wait here, we are going to call someone to help you.”

After half an hour, Paula recalled, an energetic and loud woman walked in and announced, “Hello, my name is Mrs. Kazen. Get in the car with me. We are going to my house, and then we’ll figure out how to get you to school in New York.”

Rebbetzin Shula Kazen, born in the Soviet Union, never had the opportunity to attend a Jewish school. While her parents provided ad-hoc instruction at home, the most potent lesson had been their refusal to send the children to a secular Soviet school, a decision that put all their lives in danger.

Her parents’ self-sacrifice instilled in Rebbetzin Kazen a reverence for Jewish learning and a desire to ensure that every Jewish child had access to the education she had been denied. This is the story of generations of her protégés attending Bais Rivkah.

## “A Nice City”

After smuggling across the border from the Soviet Union, the Kazen family found themselves in France, dreaming of moving to be near their Rebbe and fellow Chassidim. In 5713 (1953), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) arranged for the Kazen family to fly to New York. From the airport, they were taken to a hotel in Manhattan where the organization arranged for them to stay while they tried to find a Jewish community that would accept the large family.

One day, their HIAS social worker came to update them that they had found a place in Cleveland, Ohio. “During the Great Depression,” she said, “an elderly woman had purchased several homes, which were standing vacant since the neighborhood began to decline.” The woman had agreed to rent one of them to the Kazens.

Soon afterward, they had a Yechidus, a private audience, with the Rebbe. “I was so impressed by New York’s large community of frum Yidden and Chassidim,” recalled Rebbetzin Kazen in her upcoming autobiography *The Queen of Cleveland*, “that I simply wanted the Rebbe’s brocha for us to remain in the

*Rebbetzin Kazen had not received the brocha she sought to settle in New York, “and my dream of living in a vibrant Lubavitch community seemed to evaporate before my eyes.”*

city.”

When the subject of where they will settle was raised, she told the Rebbe, “Rebbe, I want to stay in New York. HIAS wants us to settle in Cleveland. Please give us a brocha to settle here in New York.”

“Cleveland is a nice city,” the Rebbe replied.

“I don’t know anything about Cleveland,” she persisted. “In all my life, I’ve never seen so many frum people like here in New York. I want my children to grow up in this environment.”

“Cleveland is a nice city, with a good school for the children,” the Rebbe replied patiently. Thinking perhaps that the Rebbe did not understand her



*Rebbetzin Shula and Rabbi Zalman Kazen shortly after their arrival in Cleveland.*

*“It was physically impossible for us to conceive that month,” Phil commented, “yet it happened. Without a doubt, it was the Rebbe’s brocha.”*

wishes to live among frum Yidden, she said, “Aren’t there schools in New York? Why do we need to travel to a city twelve hours away to find a frum school?”

“HIAS will take care of your needs there,” the Rebbe pointed out. “If you stay here, you’ll struggle.”

“We’ve struggled before, and we’ll struggle more,” she pleaded, “but at least we’ll be among frum people.” Just then, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Hodakov, the Rebbe’s chief aide, opened the door to indicate that their time was up.

Rebbetzin Kazen had not received the brocha she sought to settle in New York, “and my dream of living in a vibrant Lubavitch community seemed to evaporate before my eyes.”

She felt that the Rebbe had not understood her. Not having grown up in proximity to a Rebbe, she

said that she did “not yet understand that a tzaddik, a righteous person, senses what is best for us, and, indeed, his word was final.”

She told her husband, Rabbi Zalman Kazen, “I’m not giving up, I’ll persist until the Rebbe lets us stay here.”

The next day, she went back to 770 and waited outside Rabbi Hodakov’s office. When he saw her standing there, he asked what she wanted.

“Is it possible to speak to the Rebbe again for a few moments?” she asked.

“No,” he said abruptly and closed the door.

She waited patiently for another hour. When Rabbi Hodakov emerged and saw her still there, he asked again what she wanted.

“Maybe it’s possible to speak to the Rebbe?” I repeated. “I feel he didn’t understand me last night.”

Again, he refused. An hour later, she knocked at his door.

“Do you believe in Hashem?” he asked. *Of course.*

“Do you believe in the Torah?” he asked further. *Of course.*



Rebbetzin Kazen (center) at the Kinus Hashluchos



“Well, just as Hashem and His Torah never change, neither do the Rebbe’s words. You came from Russia, so you’re unfamiliar with what a Rebbe is. If you stay here without the Rebbe’s brocha, don’t complain to anyone. HIAS won’t help you here and you’ll be on your own. But if you go to Cleveland, HIAS will continue assisting you, and, above all, you’ll have the Rebbe’s brocha.”

With that, she wrote, “I gave up the fight. I would have to make the best of it.”

## The Queen

Shortly after arriving in Cleveland, Rebbetzin Kazen was making waves. Over the course of five decades, she built an empire of Jewish life and kindness. On top of her agenda was Jewish education, and she became a staunch supporter of the local Hebrew Academy. Sometimes she would be at the Academy several times a week, recalled Rabbi Simmy Dessler, educational director of the school, with several children to enroll. “She wanted to give them a window of opportunity,” he said, and a “taste of Yiddishkeit.”

Rabbi Dessler said that the Kazens made a huge impact on the community’s infrastructure, “with their minds, with their hearts, with their hands, and with their feet. It was done with dignity, majesty, passion — and, of course, Rebbetzin’s Kazen’s energy.”

While she was always making new demands of the school, the administrators also turned to her for assistance, and that is what happened on that day in the 5720s (1960s) with Paula and her father.

While Rebbetzin Kazen was ready for the spontaneous trip to New York, father and daughter were taken aback. *New York?* Paula recalled thinking. *My parents will never let me go to New York.*

Indeed, her mother Gert was not fond of the idea of her daughter going to New York to study. She feared Paula would be brainwashed, but her husband insisted; for him, it was the only chance he had.

Paula went to visit New York and stayed at the home of Rebbetzin Kazen’s daughter, Mrs. Henya Laine. She quickly warmed to the extended Kazen family, and soon after moved into the Laine basement and began to study at Bais Rivkah.

Rabbi Chaim Dovid and Mrs. Henya Laine were newly married, but they welcomed her, and other



Rebbetzin Kazen (blue dress) assists at the badeken of Sossie Brown-Scheinfeld



Bais Rivkah out-of-towners, into their home. Looking back, Mrs. Laine said that it was a crazy idea, with the credit for the sacrifice going to the way her parents ran their home. “We were raised on shlichus,” she said, “and our life was always to give. We never thought about ourselves, we grew up thinking about the other person. It was never us. It was always them.”

## Natural to Go

Over the years, many more teenagers made their way from Cleveland to Bais Rivkah for high school. Some at Rebbetzin Kazen’s prodding, others the children of those who she and her husband brought closer to Yiddishkeit. One was Sossie Brown-Scheinfeld.

One year, when the Laine family was visiting Cleveland, a neighbor from across the street came and introduced himself as Phil Brown. “You probably don’t think I am Jewish and neither do your parents,” he said.

Henya brought him inside to meet her parents. Upon entering, he asked for a yarmulke. He explained, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do. When I come into a Rabbi’s home, I want to put on a yarmulke out of respect.”

He said they had moved to the block because he heard that Rabbi Kazen was nice. He also confided that while they loved children, his wife had experienced numerous miscarriages and they had given up hope for children of their own. They were planning to

adopt. He was hoping to get a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Kazen as a clergyman, which would carry great weight with the adoption agency.

“Why not write to the Rebbe to ask for a brocha for children?” Henya suggested.

Not having heard of the Rebbe previously, the Browns did not take her seriously. But Rebbetzin Kazen did not give up. Eventually, Elaine decided it could do no harm to try, and Phil, too, agreed “out of curiosity.”

They wrote a letter to the Rebbe and received a reply around Rosh Hashanah. In the letter, the Rebbe wrote that they should begin keeping the mitzvah of Taharas Hamishpacha, and in its merit, they would be blessed with a child. Elaine agreed immediately.

Three months later, Phil became ill quite suddenly. His physician told him that his illness made it impossible for his wife to become pregnant. They concluded that their only course was to proceed with an adoption. Just before finalizing all the documentation, however, Elaine discovered that she was expecting.

“It was physically impossible for us to conceive that month,” Phil commented, “yet it happened. Without a doubt, it was the Rebbe’s brocha.”

They decided to travel to Crown Heights to thank the Rebbe personally and to introduce “his baby” to him. “If she’s ‘my baby,’” the Rebbe told them, “she wants to keep Shabbos and kosher.”

“I can’t keep Shabbos,” Phil stammered. “I work on

*Their enthusiasm to study Torah showed that Yiddishkeit was no burden to them, “It made our children stronger in their own Yiddishkeit.”*

Saturday.”

“Then your wife will keep Shabbos together with the baby,” the Rebbe said.

The following Shabbos, Phil fell and hurt himself, missing a day of work. The next Shabbos, it was something else, and after several weeks of unforeseen mishaps, he decided to stop working on Shabbos altogether. At a later audience, the Rebbe said that if they would continue observing Taharas HaMishpacha, their daughter would have brothers and sisters. And that is exactly what happened.

The extraordinary events eventually drew the Browns closer to Yiddishkeit. They developed a close bond with the Kazens over the years. The Brown children called Rebbetzin Kazen “Bubby” — and even when the Browns moved to another neighborhood, Rebbetzin Kazen would visit them, always bringing along three bars of dark chocolate for her honorary grandchildren.

Their daughter Sossie grew up with the warmth she got from the Kazens and their daughter, Mrs. Devorah Alevsky, and her family. Befriending the Alevsky children, she knew from a young age that for high school she would go to a Lubavitch school. In eighth grade, she wrote to the Rebbe, asking if she should go to Bais Chana Girls High School in Massachusetts or Bais Rivkah. The Rebbe encouraged her to go to school in Crown Heights. In 5741 (1982), she and her adopted sister Rina did just that.

## *Giving Atmosphere*

In Bais Rivkah, she felt welcome. Her previous school was wonderful, she said, but they were not as warm as the Lubavitch girls. “I felt at home. It was the best place to be. It was a very warm environment.”

“She integrated without fanfare,” recalls Esther Nemanov (nee Feigenson). Having out-of-townners in the class, she says, enhanced their experience, “It was



Rabbi Zalman Kazen (right) says *lechaim* with Sossie's husband, Moshe Scheinfeld

excellent to meet different people from other backgrounds.”

Mrs. Laine agrees, “Bais Rivkah benefitted, my house benefitted,” from the out-of-towners. Many of the girls the Laine family hosted over the years were from backgrounds more diverse than the classic Lubavitch Crown Heights home. Despite this, their enthusiasm to study Torah showed that Yiddishkeit was no burden to them, “It made our children stronger in their own Yiddishkeit.”

For many of the students, it was the principals’ efforts to create extracurricular programs that worked wonders for the students. “There was always something that the students were encouraged to organize on their own,” says Chanie Scheiner (nee Chanowitz), who joined Bais Rivkah in ninth grade. While this harnessed the students in leadership positions, and everyone had a chance to shine, “to bring out the identity and qualities of each girl,” it had a much greater benefit. The sub-groups of those activities, she says, connected the new girls with the veteran students in the class. “It helped the students integrate smoothly over working together on various projects.”

Another benefit, she says, is that while she and most of the classmates from Crown Heights had obligations at home and wanted to spend the little free time they had resting, the out-of-towners had more time on their hands. The principals therefore encouraged them to volunteer during their additional free time. “It would encourage the locals to also get involved in volunteering,” Mrs. Scheiner says.

## Never Foreigners

It was the mid-5730s (1970s) when Rebbetzin Shterna Zirkind got married. She grew up in Melbourne on shlichus, speaking in her slight Aussie accent. “When you grow up somewhere, it doesn’t leave,” she says that it took a year of living in New York until she stopped waking up and asking herself, “Where am I? Ah, I am in New York.”

She is not sure why she was chosen by Bais Rivkah to head the out-of-towners division. However, the fact that she knew the feeling of leaving home and living in a foreign country assisted her in the task. “It is hard to be away from home at such a young age,” she says, “issues could vary from a specific teacher, a subject, or just missing home.” She was there to be a shoulder to cry on, to lean on, to hear them out, “and try to be



*Sossie's parents, Phil and Elaine Brown.*

there for them.”

But she says that ultimately she was just the shadchan, the advocate and liaison, between the students and their parents, and the host families, school, and teachers. The credit, she asserts, goes to the host families, who gave up their personal privacy and treated the out-of-towners as their own children. Many would go to their PTA meetings, give regular reports to their parents, and take them to doctor’s appointments.

“They opened their homes and hearts to these girls,” Rebbetzin Zirkind says, “This experience really molded [many of the young women, and] helped them hashkafically.”

True, she says, it wasn’t always smooth riding. Some of the hosts could not tolerate some of the students coming home too late, before the age of cell phones, endlessly worrying. Some of the students could not handle strict rules that they did not have in their homes. When this came up, she made sure to be hands-on and deal with the issues as soon as possible.

With that, for many of them, these families became a home away from home, “It was a very special thing to see.”

The out-of-towners, Rebbetzin Zirkind concludes, did good for the school by just being who they are and becoming friends with the locals, “They are coming





from a different place, a different perspective.”

Sossie Brown-Scheinfeld fondly recalls the events, get-togethers, and personal interest that Mrs. Zirkind took in their wellbeing. The newcomers at the school bonded, she says, while the locals welcomed them into their circle. The locals would invite them to their homes, especially for Shabbos meals.

At the time, there were no dorms, and the girls boarded at people’s homes. Rina and Sossie stayed with the Tiechtel family. Rebbetzin Shaindel Tiechtel, Mrs. Scheinfeld says, was so accepting of her ideas, views, and way of life which was in many ways very different than a local Lubavitch girl. “She was open-minded. You could have the most amazing conversations with her.”

She was amazed that Morah Tiechtel could run a high school, her home, and a beautiful Shabbos table with many guests. “Her home ran smoothly,” Mrs. Scheinfeld says, “She taught me how to manage time.”

The principal never took advantage of her and never asked her to help at home. “She refused to,” Mrs. Scheinfeld recalls. Sossie wanted to assist as she did back home, and when she insisted, Mrs. Tiechtel did let her help, “so I felt that I was contributing in my way.”

At the Tiechtel home, the phone never stopped ringing. “She had her finger on the pulse of every

single girl in high school, what they needed, what their personalities were. She knew how to help them, how to speak to them. She understood where you came from, what you were about.”

## *Generations of Bais Rivkah*

For Paula Sussman, it was a snowball effect. Her children, Sarah Leah Seewald and Shaina Rotter went with Rebbetzin’s Kazen’s granddaughters to Bais Rivkah. It was natural, Mrs. Seewald says, “It was a thing that we were all going. It was a given.”

She admits that at first, it was hard leaving home, but Bais Rivkah shaped her life and the friends she still has. Being at the school, she says, gave her the power to go out in the world, “while being firm with who you are. [Bais Rivkah] makes you stronger, it makes you prouder. It gives you a certain spark.”

“There I was, a girl from public school,” Paula said several years ago, “and the girls in class befriended me and took fabulous, fabulous care of me. And I loved it.”

Surrounded by her children and grandchildren, she said, “All these good things started with my meeting Mrs. Kazen.” ■



*Sossie and her mother Elaine.*

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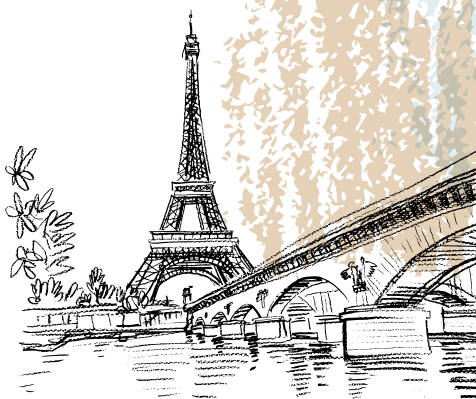
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# The French Branch of Central Bais Rivkah

Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine



*The Kazen children: Henya, Dvonya and Esther (bottom right), join a group photo with the students of the Beth Rivkah school in Paris, 1948.*

*From New York, the Rebbe — then the Ramash — built a network of Bais Rivkachs as the director of education of the schools. Presented is a brief history of the establishment of the French satellite school.*

After WWII, the possibility presented itself for Chassidim to smuggle across the border of the Soviet Union to Poland. It came in the form of the Soviets wanting the refugees from war to leave their borders. With forged passports, a prayer on their lips, and their mouths shut lest their accents give them away, they made their way to the unknown. After a long and tiring journey, dozens of Lubavitch families made their way to a suburb of Paris, where they remained until finding a country to emigrate to.



The Rebbe Rayatz appointed the Rebbe, then known as the Ramash, to be the director of the educational committee and took an active role in encouraging the establishment of Bais Rivkachs across the globe. He did the same while in Paris, and the Lubavitchers soon established a Bais Rivkah school. The students who had never experienced a formal Jewish education during their years in Russia finally received a late start.

In Adar 5707 (1947), the Ramash wrote to the school's committee that the school would be under the auspices of the central Bais Rivkah in New York. He was sending them the curriculum for the school and guided them to make amendments based on the students' needs.

In the summer of 5749 (1949), the Rebbe Rayatz notified the committee that he was pleased with the school's development and the progress of its students. "But you should not be satisfied with this," the Rebbe Rayatz wrote. "You need to strengthen yourself, and make efforts to bring in more students, and to make the school as best as it possibly can be, so the students will be educated to have *Yiras Shomayim* and good character traits."

The Rebbe continued that he was happy to hear that the school was functioning well and that the students are enthusiastic. "Just as these reports reassured me, you should be reassured," the Rebbe continued.

In her memoir, based on extensive interviews and accompanied by hundreds of photos, Rebbetzin Shula Kazen tells of unimaginable hardship in the Soviet Union and the triumph of her life in America. Presented here is an excerpt of the forthcoming *The Queen of Cleveland: A Life of Self-Sacrifice and Courage* about their time in a French Châteaux where the Bais Rivkah in the country was first established:

## Palace Life

After a few more months in Peking, Leibel Mochkin informed us that France was accepting a limited number of refugees. If we wished to go, travel documents to Paris could be arranged for us.

Many refugees, hoping for coveted American visas, were reluctant to go to Paris. On the other hand, staying in Germany, a country that had so recently murdered millions of yidden, was unsettling. With the hope that Paris would be one step closer to America, I asked my husband to obtain travel documents so that we could leave Germany as soon as possible. Again, we packed our few belongings and embarked with our three children,

*"I warned you not to play with that dye. Now look at the problems you've caused!" I screamed unabashedly until the conductor took pity on my poor child.*

Esther, five, Dvonya, two, and Henya, fifteen months.

Tickets in hand, we boarded the train to Paris. After sitting the girls down next to my husband, I walked into another train car briefly. Returning to our seats, I heard a commotion that sounded as if some hapless family was in trouble. I quickly realized the conductor was shouting at Zalman, who looked very nervous.

The conductor was holding my daughter Esther's passport as she was sleeping. He angrily yelled "This passport is fake! This girl has red hair, and the passport says brown eyes and brown hair."

Although I, too, was frightened, Hashem placed the right words in my mouth. Instead of addressing the conductor, I berated my daughter, waking her up: "I warned you not to play with that dye. Now look at the problems you've caused!" I screamed unabashedly until the conductor took pity on my poor child. After returning her passport,



*The Rebbe Rayatz's letter to the Bais Rivkah committee in France.*

*“You’re lying! How can you slander Russia this way? Everyone knows that life under Stalin’s leadership is wonderful. Get out of my store!”*

to my relief, he moved on to the next passenger.

Thirty-five Lubavitch refugee families arrived in Paris in the spring of 5707 (1947). The Joint settled us in a mansion built by Gustave Eiffel, engineer of the famed Eiffel Tower, in Montmorency, a beautiful Paris suburb. The chateau was surrounded by a scenic garden with blooming flowers and a fountain. The garden contained ornate stone statues, which zealous members of our group defaced, since they were considered forbidden graven images.

From the chateau’s roof, we saw the tall spire of the Eiffel Tower rising over the Parisian streets. It seemed so close to us, but it was a two-hour ride away.

The chateau had countless bedrooms, and we were assigned one on the third floor, which was home to ten families. Each floor had just one bathroom, a total of three in the vast structure, and one makeshift oven, consisting of one stove with three burners. With so many families sharing it, I often waited until 3:00 a.m. before cooking porridge or kasha.

I saw how some women would bring half-cooked food to their rooms because they did not have time to cook and decided there must be a better solution. I demanded that my husband organize more stoves so that no one would be rushed. Eventually, we obtained our own small kerosene stove to cook on.

At the chateau, the atmosphere was warm and friendly. We were all living through the same unknown, awaiting an opportunity to leave for a country that would allow us to rebuild our lives. When the Chazanow family arrived, all available rooms had been claimed, so we agreed to give them half of ours. For privacy, we divided the room with a curtain, which was later replaced by a solid wall. They had a daughter, Rochel Leah, who was Henya’s age, and our girls became friends.

For Sukkos, we built a collective sukkah where we ate



Group photo of Beth Rivkah students in Paris, 1948. Henya, Dvonya, and Esther Kazen are in the front on the right side



The Kazen Family in Paris: Rebbetzin Shula Kazen, Dvonya, Rabbi Zalman Kazen, Rivka, Blumah, Henya and Esther.

and celebrated together. Before Yom Tov, every family placed *s'chach* over their designated place in the sukkah. Following Chabad custom, Zalman placed an abundance of *s'chach* over our corner. When we later entered the sukkah, however, someone argued that Zalman had taken his spot. Never one to quarrel, Zalman immediately stood up and moved our tiny table to a spot near the door.

The Rebbe Rayatz asked that a girls' school be established at the chateau, to be named Bais Rivkah after his grandmother. It began in a single room, with each age group at another table. Mrs. Gissa Matlin, an excellent teacher, taught all forty girls, pivoting from table to table and subject to subject. In good weather, they would study outside in the fresh air. After so many years in which our children could study Torah only at risk to their lives, it was deeply moving to see them learning openly and with such enthusiasm. The older students slept on the first floor of the chateau because space in the family rooms upstairs was so limited.

As members of the school's committee, Zalman and his friend Reb Yankel Lipskier would visit Jewish-owned stores in Paris's garment district to raise funds. In Yiddish, they would request donations for a new school for Russian refugee girls. This piqued the storekeepers' curiosity. "You're from Russia?" they'd ask. "Tell us about it!" Many were Russian-born, inspired in their youth by communism, and staunch members of France's large and influential Commu-

nist Party. They believed everything they read in the local Jewish paper, a communist party organ, which described Soviet life in glowing terms.

Zalman and Yankel did not realize this at first. Instead, they told the truth: "It was hell on earth. We were arrested, beaten, tortured, and starved. They murdered our fathers. Everyone in Russia is afraid of their own shadow. Boruch Hashem, we managed to escape."

Many shopkeepers became infuriated with the pair. They would yell, "You're lying! How can you slander Russia this way? Everyone knows that life under Stalin's leadership is wonderful. Get out of my store!"

Little did these communist sympathizers know that,

*Our dream had been to meet the Rebbe, as we counted the days and months until we would receive visas to America.*

under Stalin's regime, they would have been jailed or shot just for owning a business. After Zalman and Yankel were repeatedly thrown out of stores, they learned to smile and change the topic when asked about Russia. This way, they managed to raise money for the school.

They were more successful fundraising from the Hungarian Jewish immigrants. Some even promised monthly donations of a few francs, enabling a steady salary for the teachers. Zalman and Yankel received ten percent of what they raised, but it barely covered their transportation costs. Eventually, Yankel could no longer accompany Zalman, so Zalman continued to raise funds alone.

In many of the homes Zalman visited, he saw Jewish children kneeling in a Christian manner while praying before bedtime. The families had assimilated and were sending their children to Catholic schools. Zalman gently explained to them that kneeling before a cross is forbidden. He tried to convince parents to send their children to Jewish schools, often returning to the home several times to teach the children basic tefillos like Shema.

The Joint's daily allowance for every family member was just one franc, barely enough to live on. So, in addition to fundraising, Zalman started a business selling Swiss watches and silver to supplement our income.





## Paris Paradise

The years we spent in Paris were marked by beautiful unity among the Chassidim. In the summer, Shabbos ended near midnight, so the long day allowed many hours for davening and learning. Zalman would daven until the afternoon and then remain at shul for the farbrengen. I would make kiddush for myself and my daughters, pleased that I could enable my husband's spiritual pursuits.

The long Shabbos gave the women, too, quality time with their children. Every Shabbos, I made sure to read to my girls from *Tzena Urena*, as my mother had done years ago in the Soviet Union.

Later, the women of the chateau would gather in a room or outdoors to share inspiring stories, talk, sing, and dance. Feigel Shimonovitch sang beautifully and would entertain us with traditional Yiddish songs. All our gatherings ended with fervent wishes that we should soon merit to meet the Rebbe.

In the evening, I would bring my daughters to *shalosh seudos*, the third Shabbos meal, to sing stirring Chabad niggunim and hear inspiring words of Torah and Chassidus.

The refugee population in Paris included many orphaned children awaiting immigration to Palestine. My husband would invite them to experience

Shabbos at our chateau, where they slept in the basement. He would spend hours singing traditional Jewish songs with them and talking to them about their Jewish roots. He wanted to give them as much "soul food" as he could since they would likely have little exposure to religion in the future.

## The Rebbe's Passing

On the 10th of Shevat 5710 (January 28, 1950), I was once again sick in bed, my daughter Rivka having been born just a few days before. Suddenly, I heard crying and wailing, but was too ill to leave my room. It was not until evening, when Zalman came home, that I heard the terrible news. The Rebbe Rayatz had passed away.

Our grief was indescribable. Rabbi Uziel Chazanow sat on the floor in tears, and when my husband came home, he joined him.

Although I had never been privileged to meet the Rebbe personally, my parents had raised us on stories about him and the Rebbe Rashab. It was the Rebbe who pulled us through our desperate struggle to observe Yiddishkeit under the worst of circumstances. Our dream had been to meet the Rebbe, as we counted the days and months until we would receive visas to America.

Throughout our travels, we would receive maamorim and sichos of the Rebbe that we would study avidly. Now, our source of hope and inspiration was gone.

All the Lubavitchers were distraught.

My husband had often recounted his visit to the Rebbe in Leningrad. Now, I gathered our daughters around him to hear his fond memories of the Rebbe. Often bursting into tears, he described the trip he took with his father and brother, and especially his brief but impactful audience.

Afterward, he added: "This is what kept us going through the long years of *mesiras nefesh* in the Soviet Union. At every farbrengen we sing, 'Mir vellen zich zeh'n mit unzer Rebbe,' one day we'll meet our Rebbe again." ■

*An excerpt from The Queen of Cleveland, available at [HasidicArchives.com](http://HasidicArchives.com).*



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# The Faces *of* Chinuch PART 1

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Mrs. Baila Rochel (Hecht) Kievman, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5747 (1987)*

Personal anecdote and interviews by  
Sara Matti Kievman, Crown Heights  
*Bais Rivkah Junior*



*Before I share with you the powerful interviews from two mechanchos, I want to share this personal anecdote that I wrote about my experiences in Bais Rivkah and the particular impact of its chinuch and environment it has had on me as a current student.*



## Dear Bais Rivkah

I walk your halls alone,  
 Helpless, grasping for something to keep me safe.  
 To bring me to the surface.  
 To keep me from sinking.  
 To build a safe place.  
 I reach out, grasping at straws, each attempt failing miserably.  
 “I’m drowning!”

My days keep repeating.  
 Regardless of my efforts, I’m helpless.  
 Instead of guiding me to float gracefully through a life of opportunity,  
 You weigh me down immensely.  
 “I’m drowning!”

Strategies, manipulations.  
 To meet your expectations.  
 There are no differentiations,  
 Between my reality and hallucinations.  
 “I’m drowning!”

Dear Bais Rivkah,  
 Something changed today.  
 Today I decided things need to be different.  
 Today I was happy because I chose to be.  
 Today I was motivated because I chose to be.  
 Today I was respectful because I chose to be.  
 Today I was confident because I chose to be.  
 Today I was proud because I chose to be.  
 Today I finally realized  
 I am here because I chose to be.

Dear Bais Rivkah  
 Now,  
 I walk your halls with pride.  
 You brought me to the surface.  
 You reached out and pulled me through.  
 Now  
 I look forward to the opportunities of each day.  
 With your guidance, I can achieve anything.  
 There is so much opportunity.  
 Finally, I’m thriving!  
 Now  
 You have given me the tools to create a new reality.  
 You have given me the inspiration to lead my life the right way.  
 You have given me the love I need to trust in myself.  
 Today I am no longer lost.  
 Because of you.

Dear Bais Rivkah.  
 Thank you for believing in me.

*The connection that I make with the students is so powerful; it’s incomparable to anything else.*

*Many years ago, my mother (Baila Rochel Kievman) began her teaching career at New Haven Hebrew Day School as a second grade teacher. From there, she moved to Bais Yaakov of Queens and has been teaching second grade there for over thirty years.*

*My mother's involvement in chinuch goes beyond the classroom. She has been the director of Camp Emunah Bnos Yaakov Yehuda Jr. Camp for over twenty years. My mother inspires me and so many others as a role model for chinuch. I've been privileged to sit down with her to talk about her involvement in chinuch over the years.*

## How did you know you wanted to be an educator?

I actually wasn’t always sure that I wanted to be a teacher. There are many challenges in the field of education, but the longer I continue, the more I grow to love children. I love to express my creativity within my teaching and my classroom.

The connection that I make with the students is so powerful; it’s incomparable to anything else.



*Bais Rivkah gave me a deep love for Chassidus and instilled within me a strong Hiskashrus to our Rebbe. Bais Rivkah not only inspired me, but encouraged me to inspire others.*

### *How can we all be educators?*

I often tell fellow educators that to become a successful teacher you must think of your students as if they were your own children.

Within our own relationships, we must remember to treat others as we want to be treated.

What is your role as an educator?

My role as an educator is to instill a love of Hashem, a love for Yiddishkeit, and a love of learning within each child. Every day, I aim to inspire each child to be the best she can be.

### *What is your classroom like?*

Teaching a large group of seven year olds can be challenging and takes a great deal of patience, but I constantly strive to create a warm, happy, and loving atmosphere where the children are inspired to learn and love to learn.

How do you effectively impart Torah values within your lessons?

I create games and songs and do many classroom projects to create excitement for Torah learning. I use many creative modalities to bring my lessons alive.

### *How do you make chassidishkeit practical for your students?*

While I do not teach in a Chabad school, over the past thirty years in Bais Yaakov, I have made it one of my top priorities to bring many of the Rebbe's teachings to the students in all of my lessons.

Every year, I am required to put on a play with my students based on a Yom Tov or mitzvah of

our choice. I have always written our stories based on lessons we've learned from the Rebbe, especially the idea that every mitzvah that we do brings light into the world and brings Moshiach closer.

### *What is your favorite part of being a teacher?*

My favorite part about being a teacher is connecting with the children and bringing the stories of the Torah to life for them. I also love creating exciting and captivating lessons for my students.

### *What is your favorite subject to teach and to learn?*

My favorite subject to teach is Parsha. I love how the children get lost in the stories of the Torah and I work to make sure each week's lesson is unique and exciting.

My favorite subject to learn is Chumash. Many of my lessons are based around strengthening Chumash skills to prepare my students to be able to learn Chumash on their own in the future.

### *What is the best advice you have received?*

The best advice I have received was to listen to every single child and to allow them to feel validated and loved.

### *Do you have any advice you'd like*



### *to give?*

In order to be a successful educator, every child must feel that you genuinely care about her. Each student needs to believe that the teacher has confidence in her success and encourages her to use individual methods to reach her goal.

Most importantly, a teacher must understand, at every moment, the effect of her actions and reactions in the classroom. A teacher must take a moment to think about how her reactions will affect the child and the class as a whole.

I often tell other mechanchos and parents that it is the split second before we react that truly makes all the difference between a good teacher and a master educator. That second is when the educator says to themselves “breathe and think.” That is the moment where we do not react impulsively but we ask ourselves, what is the child really asking for or needing with the behavior they are displaying and how can we make an everlasting positive impact with our reaction.

### *How has your experience in Bais Rivkah shaped you as an educator?*

Bais Rivkah gave me a deep love for Chassidus and instilled within me a strong Hiskashrus to our Rebbe. Bais Rivkah not only inspired me, but encouraged me to inspire others.

Rabbi Bell’s Tanya and Chassidus classes definitely inspired me. I loved the *chayus* and energy, and most of all I loved the warmth that radiated within the walls of Bais Rivkah. I will never forget my classmate, Elisheva (Posner), telling me in twelfth grade with no doubt that I’ll be a teacher one day. I looked at her and laughed, but little did I know.

### *Is there a Hanhala member that has inspired you?*

Throughout my years in high school, there were many wonderful mechanchos. I especially appreciate and connected with Morah Teichtel. She encouraged me to succeed and empowered me to utilize my talents. She picked me specifically to attend the Bais Yaakov convention two years in a row. She called me out of class one day and said, “We know what a great impact you’ll have on the Bais Yaakov girls.”

*I have gained a real sense of purpose over the years; I know that each day I am doing something meaningful and impactful.*

Sure enough, I went to the Bais Yaakov convention in both eleventh and twelfth grade and had the most wonderful, uplifting experience. Morah Teichtel’s love and confidence have remained within me until today.

### *What is the biggest lesson you have learned, being that you are so involved in chinuch?*

Working in chinuch goes beyond just the classroom and the prepared lessons. As a camp director, I have learned that it is the connection we make with the children, the passion for Yiddishkeit that we instill within them, and the love for the Rebbe that inspires them to go *m'chayil el chayil*. Children are much smarter than we think — a warm smile and kind words go farther than many of our thought-out, prepared lessons. Every child has something special to bring to the table.

### *How has being a teacher and a camp director shaped you as a person?*

I have gained a real sense of purpose over the years; I know that each day I am doing something meaningful and impactful. It has reminded me to be more sensitive and kind and I am constantly reminded of the power of young children.

### *How does the Rebbe inspire you in your teaching?*

The Rebbe strongly promoted the power of the children. With Tzivos Hashem and many campaigns for children, the Rebbe encouraged the children of today to become the great leaders of tomorrow. He taught that every mitzvah they do is special to Hashem. That is the message I take with me into my classroom.

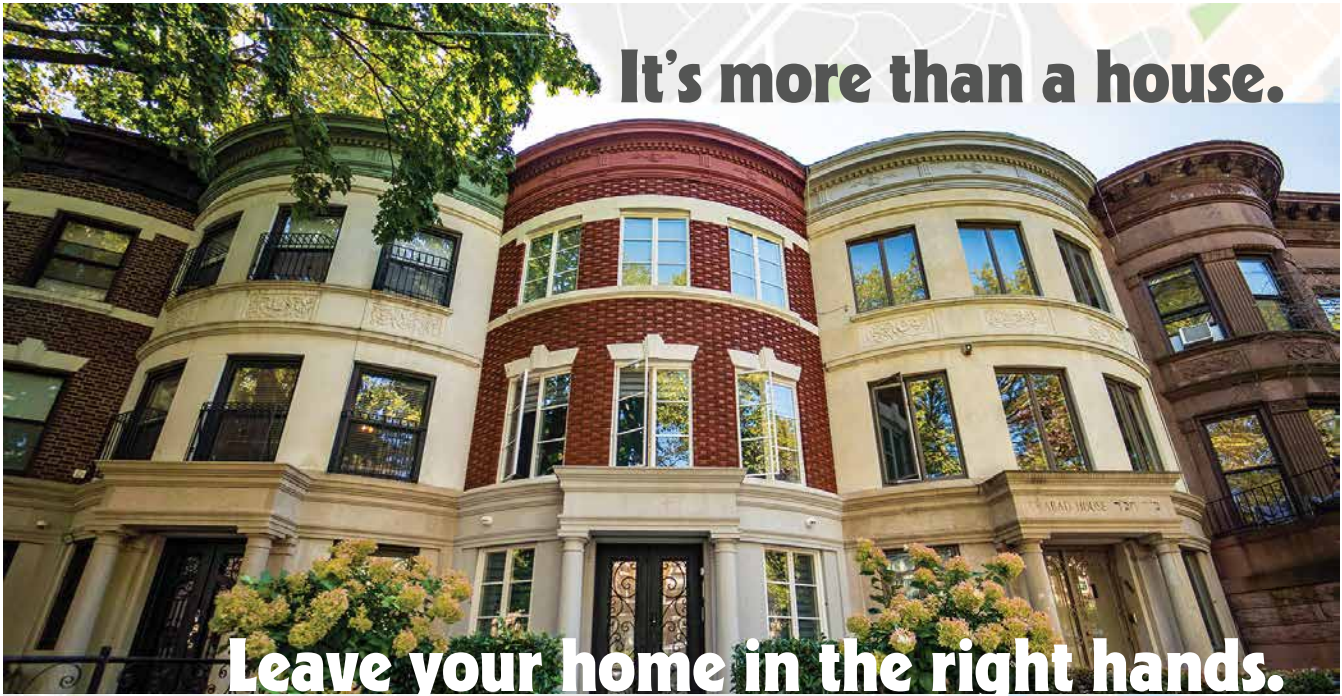
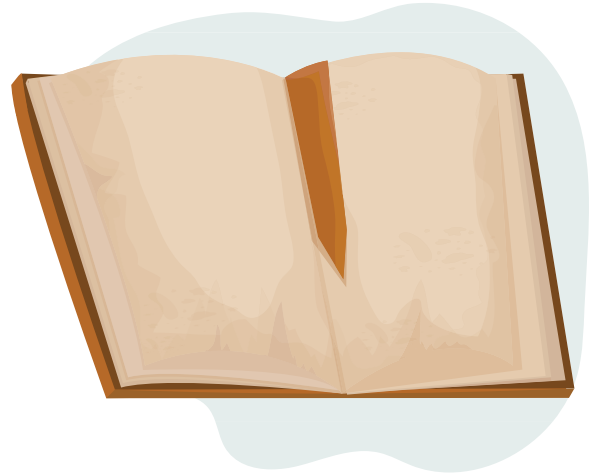


I would also like to share a short story about a student I work with privately in my afternoon remedial class. She expressed to me that she feels like a failure and never gets any of her spelling words correct.

I told her that I believe in her, and we would work extra hard every day to practice and practice those words. Every day, the child came into my class room and we worked together.

We used all types of creative methods to review those spelling words. I expressed my confidence in her and continuously told her that I believe she was going to do great. She asked if she could take the test with me and as she wrote each word correctly, I expressed excitedly how proud I was of her. Of course, little Elisheva got a score of 100. At the end of the test, she looked up at me and said, "Morah, did I get a 100?" "Yes Elisheva, you did," I said to her. She jumped up with tears in her eyes, put her arms around me, and said, "Thank

you Morah. Thank you so much!" The confidence that we have in a child's ability, and sharing with them our faith in them, can help them reach the stars! ■



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# The Best Type of Hectic

Goldie (Tenenbaum) Grossbaum, Folsom, California  
*Graduating class of 5759 (1999)*



*Goldie with her family, ka'h*

“Why do we never have any sleepovers? Can we have a sleepover party?”  
I looked at my bright eyed eight year old, and laughingly answered him, “We are so lucky; our whole life is one big sleepover party!”  
And that’s the truth. Being the mother of nine boys and two girls ka’h, our family life is one big sleepover party!



And in this party life, I have stretched my limits in ways that I never imagined. My children have taught me that my role as a mother is not to make them into who I want them to be but rather to embrace who they are, as they are, the way Hashem created them, and help them fulfill His unique mission that was designed for each of them in this world. And the way to do that is not by changing them, but by working on myself. They are not my report card; they each have their own talents and strengths, and my job is to help them use those to succeed in their *Avodas Hashem*.

*And in this party life, I have stretched my limits in ways that I never imagined.*

I never imagined I'd be the mother of a baseball team or nearly a minyan of boys. But what I've learned on the job has made me who I am today. Granted, boys don't whine. But there is plenty of other stuff they do that's not for the faint of heart. I love pink, bows, dolls, and dollhouses. After the fourth dollhouse was once again used as a stool and dolls were missing too many limbs too many times, I came to terms with the fact that I had to learn their game. And really that's how it all is; to be there for each of them is to learn their game. I try to understand life through their eyes and value their strengths so that I can help each of them succeed.



After I gave birth to my sixth child, one of the nurses in the delivery room asked me the routine, albeit rude and poorly-timed question, "So, are you having more?"

I said, "Well it's up to G-d, but I sure would like to!"

She looked at me incredulously. "But why?!"

"Because I want a large family!"

"But you already have one!"

We laughed and I left it at that. I didn't feel the moment was right to start farbrenging with her about the Rebbe's perspective on children; that we view each child as a brocha, that each child is a whole world, and that each child that is born brings us closer to Moshiach. Instead, I silently thanked the Rebbe for

*It's not a mathematical equation where all the details line up. It's a koach that comes straight from Hashem that enables parents to raise a family.*



empowering me with these perspectives. *Ashreinu Mah Tov Chelkeinu.*

The term "large family" is relative — there's no measurement for "large." Having any number of children is a tremendous brocha and makes you shift your focus from self- to others-oriented. Granted, a house full of children is hectic. Very hectic. But life is always hectic. How blessed to be busy with the best type of hectic; the type that helps you grow into a better person while you grow little people into a world of their own, empowering them to fulfill their unique mission in this world.

People often ask me, "How do you do it? How do you keep track of everyone and everything?!"

Sometimes I laugh and say that I wonder too! It's not a mathematical equation where all the details line up. It's a *koach* that comes straight from Hashem that enables parents to raise a family. Even raising one child requires a magical capability.

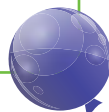
Before any tips and tricks, perspective is everything.





In a sicha on 24 Teves 5741 (1980), the Rebbe shares:

*“The Talmud teaches that Moshiach’s coming- which is the task of this generation- is waiting for all the souls in heaven to be born into this world. More importantly.... The very first commandment is, “Be fruitful and multiply”- and in a way which “fills the earth and conquer it.” ..... When, however, one conquers their ‘earthly’ outlook (concerns over material or even spiritual matters relating to pregnancy, birth, and child rearing), they also conquer the materialistic concerns themselves, seeing that they are literally unfounded, because it is “Hashem’s blessing that brings abundance.” Therefore, by expanding the vessel with which to receive Hashem’s blessing- by following His will- Hashem reciprocates in kind, measure for measure. When a Jewish woman and Jewish man together show Hashem that they have expanded their ‘vessel’ to receive His blessing by doing everything in their power to have sons and daughters who study Torah and fulfill Mitzvos..... Then “Hashem’s blessing is what brings riches”- they will lack nothing to raise another son and another daughter, and to do so in comfort.”*



This requires ongoing effort to keep yourself inspired and focused on the Torah value on having children. When the perspective is solid, then we can work on practical strategies that help us receive these brochos and stay sane too. For me, it comes down to planning, systems, and more planning — no different than running a corporation. A strong team is the foundation. I view my husband and I as the executive management of our family; we need to work together to keep our corporation thriving. Good communication

and planning are the secret to success.

Together with that, or perhaps even more importantly, is knowing where and when to let go.

It’s not uncommon to subconsciously create a standard that is a struggle to keep to. This requires taking time to reflect and think: is it helping me or making my life harder? If I’m the writer of the rules, then I have the luxury of making them work for me, not against me. Because children thrive when their parents are thriving.



Before I share some practical tips that work for me, I’d like to share one overall principle of parenting (and life in general):

Don’t follow someone else’s ideas or systems! Take people’s ideas and make them your own. Never try to follow it exactly like someone else; you have to own it and let it be natural. Trying to do what someone else did successfully will leave you frustrated, as it inevitably won’t work out exactly the same way. We are different people with different needs and different children, and the ideas need to be tailored to fit each family.



Having said that, I’ll share some ideas that work for me. Before you try any, modify them to suit your needs!

1. Plan. Pen and paper. Phone. Post-it notes. Whatever works. Lists are your friend. Your best friend. Before Yom Tov, I make a grid with all the kids’ names, and a checklist of pants, shirts, shoes, etc. Then I shop accordingly, checking off each item as it arrives as planned. When I place an order for multiple white shirts in seven sizes, all at the same time, I’m sure the store suspects I’m opening my own business.
2. On that note, know your children and their ability to keep clean. Only buy things that won’t get you upset when they get dirty. To me, white shirts are disposable — they have a magnetic attraction to grape juice, guacamole, and dirt. I make purchases with that in mind.
3. No one does it all. For real, absolutely no one. And if you’re thinking that actually you do know someone who does it all, I guarantee that you



*If I'm the writer of the rules,  
then I have the luxury of  
making them work for me, not  
against me.*

only think that because you don't know her well enough. Instagram might tell you otherwise, but it's not possible. And the good news is, it's also okay. No one can do it all and no one is supposed to do it all. But the other good news is, you get to choose. You get to choose what will be a priority and what won't, what could handle neglect and what can't. Some of the balls we juggle are glass and some are rubber. Knowing which ones are which helps with the decision of which to drop.

4. Know when to accept help and when to let go. This is the hardest but will change your life. We are everything to our children; we don't have to do everything. Prioritize where to put your energy, and outsource what you can. Look for shortcuts. Instacart, Amazon, and Target pickup are my other best friends. While I love to go to stores and browse, there's a time and place for everything.
5. Make a meal plan and stick to it. Don't ask for new recipes before a Yom Tov if it'll bring more stress. It's okay if everyone is serving foods you don't know how to pronounce. Your kids love

potato knishes so that's what it'll be.

6. Pause and reflect. Systems work until they don't. And when they don't, reassess and keep moving. Things change and stop working when you're holding a newborn all day or running after a toddler or doing both; allow yourself to change with them. I once came across a great system of putting dots on the clothing so my housekeeper could fold the laundry seamlessly. It was fantastic; my oldest son had one dot. Second boy had two. And even better, if their clothes survived to be passed down from one to the next, I could just add a dot. My third son got three dots and my fourth son got four. But then I had a problem I hadn't anticipated: there simply wasn't enough room on the tags

*It's okay if everyone is serving  
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it'll be.*

for dots number five, six, seven, eight, and nine! And that's when I realized it was no longer a system for me anymore. And so I revamped and created a new one. And it works (for now).

7. Stock up if you can. This can save you the stress



*When you have a team, you put them to work!*



of running out and extra trips to the supermarket. If space is limited, think about which items you go through the quickest and buy just those in bulk.

8. Certain terms stress me out, like “Bedtime Routine.” Am I failing if our routine is just pajamas, brushing teeth, negel vasser, and Shema? Like, is that good enough? Will the Bedtime Routine police come after me if I don’t read enough books to them? Forget fancy words and terms that don’t work for you; all they do is add stress and make us feel like we’re falling short. You can have a bedtime and requirements for bedtime. And keep to it most of the time.

9. Take care of yourself - spiritually, physically and emotionally. The Torah is way ahead of its time; from the beginning of time we are required to care for ourselves, always. A healthy body and mind is necessary to being a happy and healthy mother. The greatest gift you can give your family is a mother who takes care of herself spiritually, physically and emotionally. You know what you need. Be kind to your body, make time for the things that you enjoy, and go to your doctor’s appointments. Give yourself time to daven, to learn the way you enjoy, and to speak to your mashpia. Make time to go to farbrengens or events that empower you to be the best mother you can be.

10. Make time for your marriage. Don’t just wait for moments to happen — make it a priority! Time together doesn’t have to mean going away for a week to an exotic island. It’s dedicated time together that’s important. Date night can be as fancy as sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee. But it won’t happen by itself — plan it each week or the week will be over before you blink.

11. Make time for your children, individually. The thought can definitely sound overwhelming; there’s barely enough time in the day to juggle the regular things, how can you possibly find time for each child separately? Time alone with each child doesn’t need to be every day or for many hours; it’s not about taking each kid out to lunch once a month or going to paint pottery. There may be times over the years that that works, and that’s great, but regardless of how it’s done, the concept is the same: find time to spend with each kid by themselves. Whether it’s you or your husband taking one child on a shopping run, going on a walk together, or just sitting together on the couch for five minutes chatting; come up with an idea that fits your schedule and works for you, spending time together, no expectations, no pressure. Give

*And in this party life, I have stretched my limits in ways that I never imagined.*

the child the experience of having your full attention, for whatever amount of time it is. I used to be able to sit with every child before bedtime; as our family grew, we got more bunk beds and it became less practical to sit on their bed and to get to everyone if I wanted them asleep before midnight. At another point when all my children were younger, one child would get to stay up late Thursday night to make dessert for Shabbos. That worked until it didn’t. For me, bringing one child to school an hour late twice a year works right now, but last year it didn’t. And don’t start asking others what they do, it will just make you feel pressured, overwhelmed, and like you’re falling short. You and your husband are the best parents for your children, chosen by Hashem. Do the best you can with what you have.

Even with all the planning and lists in the world, remember we are not in this alone. Ask Hashem for help. We are in this together; we need to do our part, and as our Partner, Hashem will certainly do His. ■



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# Our Children Will Be Okay

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



*‘Humility is the willingness to show up for every moment of reality, including the painful ones.’ –Rabbi Shais Taub*

**Listen.** Encourage. Step up. Be present. Get involved.

These are all great parenting tips — nice, proactive, and pretty important in raising healthy kids. But with the world full of experts telling us what to do and how to parent our kids, I’m patiently awaiting the quiet expert in the back to take a small step forward and whisper: Back. Off.

When our kids are younger, yes, we need to help them to develop the skills of taking responsibility for their own actions. But as they grow up, there comes a time that we, their parents, need to take a huge step back.

By the age of twelve, if a child is neurotypical, functioning at an age-appropriate level, and they come home and say that they forgot their homework at school, it shouldn’t be the parents’ job to



frantically try to find a way to get a hold of it.

Hear me out on this one. Our children need to learn the responsibility that comes with figuring things out. Call a friend. Email a friend. Figure out a way to communicate what they need and from whom they need it. And rather than doing the work for them, our job should be to guide them through problem-solving or accepting a difficult circumstance.

If they are unsure of when a test is scheduled, same thing. It's not our job to ask other moms.

Call me crazy, but I don't ever remember either of my parents doing that for me as a child. I remember being in hard situations that helped me, over time, gain skills and confidence in resolving obstacles that came my way.

Same with class drama and friendships. If our child comes home upset (and sometimes in tears) that

*We need to recognize that our job is to validate their feelings and their experience. Not to try to fix it.*

another child was not nice to them, they got into a fight, or were left out at recess, our immediate reaction (and understandably so!) is to want to call the teacher or the parent of the instigator.

But before jumping up and rushing to their rescue (no parent wants to see their child upset on account of another child), we need to recognize that our job is to validate their feelings and their experience. Not to try to fix it.

If we jump to our kids' rescue every time they are upset or forget something, we aren't helping them develop the tools they need to figure these things out by themselves. We are perpetuating their reliance on us (or others) to sort through their challenges. We need to know the difference between enabling, advocating for, and empowering our kids.

Yes, there is always a time and a place for a parent to get involved, such as serious bullying or a child who is constantly forgetting things. But we have to give our kids the message that they can do hard things and that they can do them by themselves. They can figure these things out. They've got this.

Of course, we love our children and want them to succeed in life, but not by way of us being their per-

*We need to allow our kids to fail in order for them to learn and grow.*

sonal assistants. We must be parents who empower their children and give them the message and the opportunity to take responsibility for their own actions. If they get into a fight with a friend, give them the chance to try and figure it out. Nine out of ten times, they will and they do.

If they forgot to write down their homework, ask them how they plan to get it. If they don't study for a test or don't do their homework, don't hound them, especially at the expense of your relationship with them. Let them deal with the consequences of their own actions.

Shocking to hear, I know. If they don't study, they'll fail! If they don't do their homework they'll get in trouble! If their project is late, they'll lose points!

Let them get in trouble. Let them fail. Let them lose points. Let. Them. Learn! We need to allow our kids to fail in order for them to learn and grow.

This doesn't mean we don't love them or care about them. This means we are helping them learn to be independent, empowered, and sure of themselves.

And they will learn. We need to have more faith that our kids will do the right thing. Make the right choices. When we give our kids this opportunity to mess up and fix it themselves, we are helping them build up their self confidence. We're saying 'I believe in you, you can do this on your own, you've got this!' And in turn, they will start to believe in themselves. ■





# ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

## FINDING THE BALANCE



### DEAR CHAYA,

My daughter has been begging me for Blundstones, a term I just learned to mean a particular style and company of boots that are sold in the \$200 range. I don't see anything particularly wrong with them, but I do wonder: How do I know whether I should just give in so she shouldn't feel deprived, versus when she doesn't need to have every new item that comes out?

I mean, this is a question for myself as well. At what point does a new style become normal and okay to get, and it's not a problem of hopping on the new trend?

The Blundstones are just an example, but it could be about a gadget, a vacation, or anything else. How do I know when I should give in or use it as a learning opportunity?

Thank you,

*Torn about Trends*

### DEAR TORN,

This is a very insightful question, which shows that you are a person who thinks deeply about your

child's chinuch and the role that you play in it. It is telling that you acknowledge that your own avodah is also a part of education, and in fact it is probably the most important part. For simplicity's sake, I am going to address the question mostly in connection to your daughter, but it can be applied equally to anyone in any stage of life, and of course, as parents, we must model what we teach first and foremost.

### Be Realistic

The first thing that needs to be considered is the reality on the ground. Can you actually afford it? If you cannot, and it is not a necessity for your daughter (and I imagine there are cheaper brands of boots around), it is indeed a great learning opportunity about living within your means. When you can't afford something, you don't get it. If she wants to work extra and make her own money to be able to buy it herself, that can be a great compromise that still brings the lesson home.

In this case, it doesn't seem that the cost is a major issue. Which brings to the next question: even when you can afford something, when is a particular item appropriate or inappropriate to buy if you don't really need it?

### Don't Be a Spendthrift

No matter how great a person's financial position, buying everything they want on a whim is a terrible habit. It may begin with a five-dollar extra, then a twenty-dollar one, and soon a hundred-dollar one, and it quickly builds up from there, leading to the not uncommon reality of people who have a very good income but somehow find themselves spending it all and living paycheck to paycheck. If you or your daughter find yourselves frequently buying things that aren't necessary, or are a lot more expensive than they need be, this may be something to reflect on.

However great or small your income is, it is important to ensure that your spending reflects your true values. When there is some extra, consider a donation to a meaning-

*No matter how great a person's financial position, buying everything they want on a whim is a terrible habit.*

ful cause, reflecting your trust that Tzedakah brings the greatest brocha to your financial situation. Beyond that, ensure that other money is spent proportionally on the things that truly matter to you. It is always wiser to save and invest than to spend more than what you need.

### Is it Bad to Be Trendy?

Assuming that we are talking about trends within our community (and not necessarily in popular culture which would be a halachic question of chukas hagoy, and not for this column), there are a few potential issues that come to mind.

I'll begin with the more practical considerations. Let's assume you are due for a new pair of boots anyway, and your options are to buy a random style or the one that is trendy. Before buying the trendy option, consider if it is a practical item that will actually serve you, that fits you, and suits your style. Buying something trendy that doesn't actually work for you will end up being wasteful, since you aren't likely to use it for long. Consider the quality: if the trendy option is a cheaply made item that doesn't justify its price (which is only because it's in fashion), that would be another reason to pass on it.

However, there is also a deeper issue at play - and a fantastic opportunity for true chinuch - that would serve you well to consider.

### There Are Trends and There Are Trends

The Shulchan Aruch begins in the very first paragraph with an instruction to be strong in the face of the mockers, reminding us that doing Hashem's will can be a lonely effort. And yet, that is what is expected as



*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@bethrivotkah.edu](mailto:embrace@bethrivotkah.edu) to have an answer featured in an upcoming issue!*



## *What happens when your daughter finds herself in a social circle that is less than ideal, or worse, leading her in a negative direction?*

servants of Hashem: to do what is asked of us despite the opinions of those around us. Fortunately, if we live in a frum community and attend a *chassidische* school, much of the time we are not tested in this way. Generally, the trends are positive, encouraging, and pushing us towards bigger and better holy things.

But what happens when they are not? What happens when your daughter finds herself in a social circle that is less than ideal, or worse, leading her in a negative direction? From where will she get the strength to resist and do what she knows is the right thing?

Perhaps this is the learning opportunity you are asking about. You can build your child's sense of self, independence, and integrity by teaching her NOT to follow the trends. Teach her that we DON'T base our decisions on what the crowd around us is doing, but by what our inner compass - based on the teachings of the Torah and halacha - tells us is the right thing for us to do. Teach her to be proud of her individuality, to own her personality and style, and to show strength and confidence in making independent choices that she truly believes in.

Blundstones - and whatever the next clothing trend will be - may technically be neutral, and perhaps even a quality and comfortable choice of footwear for your daughter. But if your primary motivation in purchasing them is to be one of the crowd, it may be an excellent opportunity to exercise independence and integrity, and get used to being a little different. Choose another pair of boots that you like and suit you better. Then, when the real test comes up with a question of compromise to Yiddishkeit - and this may play out in situations as varied as bullying another child, playing a prank on a teacher, or skipping davening together with friends - your child will have a stronger chance of making the right choice, despite the peer pressure to the contrary.

### **Will My Child Feel Deprived if I Say No?**

You mention your concern about your daughter feeling deprived if you say no. I believe the way she will feel is very connected to the way that you feel and how you respond to her request. If you feel sorry for her because

you do think she is deprived without Blundstones, chances are strong that she will too. On the flip side, if you show no interest or concern in her desires, and make it a flat-out no, she may feel completely uncared for.

It is important to approach it in a balanced way, to hear out what she wants and why she wants it, and discuss with her why you think it is or isn't appropriate to buy at this point in time. Explain the concept of making decisions out of values and integrity and the pitfalls of going along with the crowd. Sometimes, and especially if this is a new exercise for her, it is worth allowing her to make the decision herself after the discussion has been had. Even if she will still choose to go ahead with it, it may be better than to forbid something that is technically neutral when she isn't ready for that step. [To be clear, this is only if you truly can afford it; if not, refer back to the first point.]




If she is younger or you feel that it is the right time, perhaps you will make the call. Even if she will not agree with your decision, by giving her the time and explanation she is more likely to accept your choice and possibly even appreciate it as being the right thing.

### **Final Thoughts**

Much of our connection with Yiddishkeit depends on our strength of character and ability to navigate the gray areas of life. It is scenarios like this one that enable us, as our children's primary educators, to impart these values to our children. Additionally, if we work to ensure that the way we allocate our money in general reflects our true priorities, it can serve as a great tool to show our children what we find important in life. Hopefully, this will show our children our sincerity in all that we teach them, and encourage them, too, to choose to follow the beautiful path of Yiddishkeit as they mature.

Wishing you much hatzlocha in your parenting journey, and in your personal journey, discovering the nuance and significance in all that you do.

<3 Chaya ■ 

*Light from within the darkness*

# יתרון האור מן החושך

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# A Song of HOPE

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Devorah Leah (Gottlieb) Reiter, Roslyn, NY  
*Graduating Class of 5757 (1997)*

Interviewed by Sara Blau



I've grappled with the science of how we can feel presence in times of absence, how darkness can shed light, and how pain can bring closeness. How does a person recognize Hashem's hand in times when it seems out of reach?

Though this conversation will speak magnitudes in between the lines, I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to spend time with Devorah Leah Reiter, a hero, a mother, a Shlucha, and a friend.

Devorah Leah and I met on a park bench to catch up and hear some inspiration from her life as she battles an illness over the past four years. As she is very humble, she started off



by saying that she doesn't have much to share, but I can assure you that you will gain so many beautiful nuggets of wisdom, as did I.

**SB: Devorah Leah, it's so good to see you and talk. Can you take us back to where this chapter of your story begins?**

**DEVORAH LEAH:** In the fall of 5779 (2018), right before I was diagnosed, four of my friends and I went on a 40th birthday trip. We're all Shluchos with large families and to find a day and time to get away was a challenge. We stayed in an Airbnb in Deal, New Jersey for two days and two nights. We spent most of the two day's sleepover talking and catching up late into the night. It felt like we were back in high school. While this mini getaway was blissful, there was one thing that seemed slightly amiss. While eating with my friends, there were some foods that I thought were too spicy. It was strange, but I did have a similar experience in the past.

Six years earlier, I had felt something on my tongue that I had thought was a canker sore. When I'd eat something salty, I'd feel a burning sensation. The doctors had taken a biopsy and said it wasn't a canker sore, but a precancerous growth. Surgery removed it, and they promised it wouldn't come back and that they had gotten clean margins. Since then, I went to four routine checkups yearly, once every three months, and my upcoming checkup was soon after the outing with my friends. Thankfully, my close friend from Westchester would usually come with me to my appointments. Little did I know how crucial and significant it would be to have a friend at my side for this seemingly simple, routine check up. I truly felt Hashem giving me major support and friendship as I had no idea how my life was about to drastically change.

I had a biopsy done at Sloan Kettering Hospital to check out the burning I described, and they told me I had stage three cancer. I was very optimistic, and while I scheduled the necessary surgery, I was certain I would be back to preschool teaching in two weeks. I remember telling the fellow Shlucha who arranged suppers for my children over Chanukah, "Don't worry, I'll be back to myself in two weeks." The night before my surgery, I had a latke frying event for Friendship Circle. I never dreamed that would be the last Friendship Circle event that I would run until today. The surgery was twelve hours and they not

*I'm a believer that every neshoma connects to Hashem in its own way. Some find it through davening or learning. I find it through song.*

only removed the tumor that was on the right side of my tongue, they had also removed cancerous lymph nodes from both sides of my neck, as well as reconstructed my tongue from my leg muscle.

**Wow... that's a lot! What gave you strength?**

How did I connect to Hashem during that time? I'm a believer that every neshoma connects to Hashem in its own way. Some find it through davening or learning. I find it through song. Whenever I start to question what Hashem wants from me at a certain moment, I close my eyes, and whichever niggun or song comes to my head is the message I take from Hashem. When I was being rolled into surgery, I had no idea what Hashem had in store for me. The song that was playing in my mind in those pivotal moments was, "Al nisecha v'al niflosecha, v'al ye-shuosecha." That niggun, and my husband's genuine



The eight year old girl lighting Shabbos candles

*I didn't look at chemo as a poison destroying me, but as a team of friends; my own soldiers fighting for me.*

smile, gave me the knowledge and confidence that I would be fine.

### *What was recovery like?*

I remember waking up from surgery and feeling like I had a sore throat. For the next eight days, I couldn't eat, and I had a feeding tube through my nose. After six weeks of recuperation, the doctors told me it was time for radiation and chemotherapy. They told me this course of treatment was going to be an extremely difficult one and that most only get through half. I was determined to do it! I just kept thinking about my children and knew I needed to do everything in my power to see to it that they had their mommy! For six weeks, I had radiation every single day and chemo once a week. I had absolutely no time for anything else; I had to plow through. I didn't look at chemo as a poison destroying me, but as a team of friends; my own soldiers fighting for me. I would speak to the chemo and say, "You know where to go, you know what to touch and what not to touch. Thank you for fighting for me." It wasn't a

sad time. I never went to treatment alone and would always have three or four friends with me to chat and spend the time. It was a serious social scene!

It took a big toll on my body, and I lost an abnormal amount of weight. After five rounds of chemo, my body couldn't get through the sixth and final one. My body simply felt too weak and frail. I had three months to recover, but I was so sick and weak that I was in bed most of the time. At that point, I didn't know what would be.

One day, seven months after my surgery, I felt a pain in my lung that would not go away. We took a biopsy but were told it was not cancerous. The pain was still lingering, so we had another biopsy done, to which the results came back as not only cancerous, but it was stage four, not localized. The cancer was all over. It had spread to my back, jaw, skull, spine, and lungs. I had radiation to my skull and spine, and systemic chemo for my lungs and other areas.

After unsuccessful treatment at a large famous cancer center, we switched over to a private oncologist, who happens to be a frum Yid. By that time, I was in pretty bad shape. But his positivity and *Emunas Hashem* gave me encouragement. After a month of treatment, it was a miracle. My scans showed significant improvement and that it was almost all resolved. The frum radiologist who read my scans said, "This is nothing less than *Yad Hashem* and a miracle." So here I am, a testament of Hashem's individual care for my family and myself and every Yid.

I still have significant side effects from these treatments, but there's not a day that I don't think of how grateful I am that my children have a mommy. The radiation left me with chronic lung issues which cause strong coughing fits. My mouth is in a lot of pain, so I'm on painkillers every three hours, I still get my food through a feeding tube, and I go to chemo every other week to keep the disease in check. This is where I am now. I am stable, *boruch Hashem*, and I do not take it for granted; however, I do live with a lot.

### *How have your community, family, and friends supported you in this difficult time?*

Like I said, I've really been blessed with a great team of friends and family. Throughout this whole whirlwind, I was being held up by pillars of support, love, and chessed. The Shluchos of Long Island have gone to the Ohel many times together and davened for me. To



Torah learning class



*Putting on tefillin with doctors and medical practitioners*

date, the tehillim has been said over eight hundred and forty one times for me. That's tens of people taking time out of their day to think of me! The thought alone, aside from the power of the tehillim said collectively, strengthens me. There's also a weekly 'Listen and Learn' in my zechus where every week high school girls all over the world gather for an evening class for my refuah. It's not just about the doctors and diagnoses. It's the support in ruchniyus and gashmiyus that propels me daily and gives me the boost and chizuk to be where I am today. I'm one hundred percent a walking miracle according to the doctors.

On the home front, Bikur Cholim of Crown Heights and other amazing organizations have reached out many times to bring joy and excitement to my children. They have sent singers to perform concerts, created different activities for my family, and they even still send cards and gifts for every one of my children's birthdays. It's awe-inspiring and incredible that there are complete strangers who are looking out for me and my family and thinking of us through this bumpy journey.

In general, people have just reached out and supported in the most amazing ways! Whether it was with help in our shlichus, supporting our children, rides to school, meals, or assisting with medical related needs, I am blown away. We boruch Hashem have married off two daughters during this time and the support in helping us get ready for these big milestones both emotionally and physically, like setting up our daughters' apartments, have meant so much.

I don't want to name each person that has reached out and helped my family and I because I will probably miss some out, as there are too many, but the support

is truly what pulls us through.

***If someone isn't well, sometimes it can be awkward. I don't always know how to reach out, what to say or do or offer. How can I support people in this situation?***

It's all the little and thoughtful things that people help with. When this leg of my journey started, it felt like the whole world jumped in to save us from the utter shock. Then, as time went on, I needed less and people were less involved, which is totally normal because comparatively, things weren't as bad. But really it's all the little things that add up, especially in the outwardly quiet times. The people who reach out to make suppers, offer me rides to my appointments, keep me company, play with my children, daven for me, do mitzvos in my zechus, all these small acts are of great help and meaning to me. They really make a



*“This is nothing less than Yad Hashem and a miracle.” So here I am, a testament of Hashem’s individual care for my family and myself and every Yid.*

huge difference!

My children's schools have also been very supportive and sensitive to our children's needs. One of my daughter's classes was having a class performance where they would be singing a tribute to their mothers. At the finale of the performance, each girl was to walk over to her mother and give her a rose. At that point, I had been in the hospital for an infection and was unable to attend. Somehow, the school had found out that I wouldn't be there and had called my mother to make sure she could come instead of me. Though it is definitely true that no one takes the place of a mommy, it was so touching and comforting to know that the school was sensitive to my daughter's feelings. My daughter was definitely happy to have someone there to cheer her on.

### *Wow! How has this affected your children?*

Before I started radiation and chemo, my daughter Mushka was in seminary. We had had a trip planned for after the surgery to go visit her but the doctor told

me I had to start treatment and if we went to Eretz Yisroel, it would delay the radiation. The doctor discouraged us from going, saying that it was irresponsible of us to push it off. However, a second opinion told us that one week wouldn't make much of a difference. We decided to ask a Rav, committed to listen to whatever he said. We spoke with Rabbi Lesches and he said we could go. We had the absolute best trip! I finally felt like a person and not a patient and I was so happy we were able to visit our daughter and be there with her for some time. I also ate a slice of pizza in the old city and had no idea it would be the last real food I would be able to eat.

During my treatment and being in and out of the hospital, my children were well taken care of. My mother moved in to help out which was much needed as I could barely do basic tasks. My children got used to getting lots of outside help and I always had people visiting—either to keep me company or to play with my children. My house became a Grand Central station with people coming and going at all times. Cancer is different for everyone and some people are very private about it. I personally like visitors. It helps to keep my mind off the sickness.

But my children are still not growing up in a normal situation. I spend a lot of time in bed. Before I got sick, I always taught my kids to be responsible and independent. They learned how to make food and help out and it has been a great benefit now. Last night, my son went to get his new hat for his Bar Mitzvah. I was in so much pain that I couldn't even ask him to show me how it looks. His Hanochas Tefillin is next week and it's a miracle. I remember davening, *please let me be at Tzvi's Bar Mitzvah*. And boruch Hashem, it's a miracle that I'm here to celebrate, as well as marry off two daughters and become a grandmother.

*[Editor's note: at the time of publishing this article, Devorah Leah has boruch Hashem celebrated the Bar Mitzvah of her son on 11 Teves]*

### *What has been the impact on your community and shlichus?*

It's very different than it used to be, obviously. My new shlichus is speaking to people who drive me to and from chemo. So many people have become connected to the community during this stage in my life.

Often, when a spouse is sick, the other spouse has to drop a lot of working responsibilities to take care of



*Prayer Circle*

the family and the home. But we have been so blessed with so much help and support that my husband has been able to continue our shlichus. He was able to run camp and Hebrew school, holiday programs and give classes. One Shliach even offered to help teach one of his JLI classes.

I remember someone telling me that a family member of theirs was sick and the Rebbe told them that there must be a reason they are needed in the medical facilities they were in and when that reason is complete then they would get better. So my husband has brought his tefillin to every appointment and always asks every doctor or specialist if they're Jewish. Many tefillin have been laid, many neshek and brochures have been handed out, and I hope that our shlichus in the medical world has been accomplished. For me, I've been the recipient of so much good, I just want to give back and I'm slowly starting to be able to do that. I recently started an organization called Circle Of Kindness. It's an idea similar to that of the Friendship Circle where I pair up adult volunteers with individuals battling cancer. We all have a talent and something to give, whether it's to give a ride, help pick up medicine, read a book to someone, do shopping, cook a dinner, baking challah, delivering flowers, etc. Everyone has something to offer and people truly want to give!

We had a huge impact on one family in particular, where unfortunately the mother passed away from cancer and now the eight year old daughter is fighting. Her father is so grateful to the team of support he has. He just reaches out and we try to provide whatever it is for him to continue doing what he's doing—being a single parent, while taking care of both his sick child and his other healthy child.

While I hope this organization does not grow, we are now servicing four families and I see what a huge difference we can have on others. Unfortunately with going through it myself, I know what's needed and while I myself still need rides to and from treatments, I am so grateful to Hashem that I am now able to at least start to give back somewhat. As part of this program, I run a prayer circle where we daven for anyone who is sick. I teach a short sicha, give tzedaka, etc. I used to think I would make a great big *seudas hoda'a* and only then start giving back but I see we are in Hashem's time so I need to start now.

So yes, our shlichus has been impacted and we've needed to adapt during this time, but boruch Hashem,

*I still have significant side effects from these treatments, but there's not a day that I don't think of how grateful I am that my children have a mommy.*

we have been able to continue our work in different ways.

*I'm sitting here filled with awe and gratitude to you for sharing your story with me and our readers and I'll admit tears are coming to my eyes as well. You have been through so much and it has been so dark at times. What is your relationship with Hashem like at these times?*

I feel that Hashem is so close to me, and It's a constant feeling for me. Hashem is with me at every second. It is known that Hashem's shechina is at the head of the bed of a sick person and it's true. I feel Hashem right there one hundred percent of the time. It wasn't easy to come to this perspective but it's the only way. My whole life has changed. I used to be a very active person. I was always busy doing everything. And I have come to realize that this is exactly what Hashem wanted and I had to learn that it's not about doing, I just have to be.

*What would you say to your younger self ten years ago?*

I thought I had my life planned out. Since high school, I knew I would go on shlichus and I thought I would have a family of fifteen. Hashem was telling me that I'm not in charge. The hardest part of all of this is not having a set schedule anymore. I wake up and I don't know what I'm doing that day. I can't plan anymore. If I had to plan my life again, I wouldn't take this chapter out though. I want this to end and I don't like the pain, but I wouldn't take it out. I have gained tremendously.

In what way have you gained from this experience?

I see the world very differently. That doesn't mean I don't struggle. I still work on davening and growing

*My new shlichus is speaking to people who drive me to and from chemo.*

my relationship with Hashem and the Rebbe but I have a deeper understanding of life. I wish everyone could have this perspective without being sick.

I used to be very calculated and extremely organized. I would think things through and plan accordingly. But this journey has taught me that we are in Hashem's time, not ours! He decides when a lesson has been learned and when it's time to move on. Nothing in the world will let anything stand in the way for one moment longer. Hashem is in control and the only thing we can do is make sure we are living every single moment according to what Hashem wants. And when we really give everything over to Hashem, we can rejoice in just being. I used to think I had to do. And doing is important! But Hashem decides what that

means. I may translate doing as running Friendship Circle, teaching preschool, organizing senior programs, running camp, or teaching Hebrew school. But maybe the rides to and from chemo each week with a woman from my community and the conversations had is what Hashem sees as doing.

Another thing I learned is that we can be in two stages at once. I can be in the position of needing help and having someone drive me to appointments and at the same time, I can help organize assistance for another person. We don't see the whole picture and only Hashem knows why and for how long one needs to be in a situation. From the second of conception until this very second, our lives are perfect and are exactly how they are meant to be. Hashem is directing every moment.

Sometimes I ask myself what did Hashem gain by taking my speech? I can still talk but it takes a lot out of me and it isn't clear. I went from teaching every day to giving a class once every two weeks. But I remind myself that only Hashem measures what



*Devorah Leah and family celebrating the wedding of their daughter, Chana.*



success really is and why things are the way they are. Today, my children have a mommy, my husband has a wife, my community has a Shlucha, my friends have a friend, my family has a sister, daughter, etc. and for all that, I say, "Thank you, Hashem!"

I recently read a letter in an Igros in which the Rebbe was writing to someone who wasn't well and the Rebbe was saying that when you follow the will of the doctor, you are fulfilling the will of Hashem. So when I go to chemo, I remind myself that today I am fulfilling Hashem's will! We wake up every day to fulfill His will, and for me that translates into taking the meds. At the same time I beg Hashem to bring Moshiach so that He can get His daily dose of blood from karbo-nos! Enough taking it from humans!

It's a lot all at the same time. Thanking Hashem for what we have, asking for this to end, Being there for others going through the same, and supporting each other.

*Thank you so much for sharing your story with us. How beautiful and painful to hear what you and your family has gone through*

*If I had to plan my life again, I wouldn't take this chapter out though. I want this to end and I don't like the pain, but I wouldn't take it out. I have gained tremendously.*

*and "grown through" and we ask Hashem to bring an end to your pain and remove all sickness from the world soon! What would be a final message for readers?*

I want everyone to know the importance of living life with joy. It isn't easy but it's the only way. Yes, daven and say tehillim that all pain and suffering should end and that we should feel and see the good! But it must be with joy! And when we contemplate that Hashem created us and knows what's truly best for us then it's easy to be joyful. Because it means life is perfect. ■



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# ALUMNAE Speak



*A*t an EmBRace meeting, it became apparent that a relevant theme binding our alumnae is that we all have different nuances in our lives that we have to maneuver. Some differences are glaring, like a looming sickness or being held back stages behind our friends, peers, and classmates. Other discrepancies might be more subtle.

Keeping this platform real, relevant, and relatable, we reached out to our Bais Rivkah community with a prompt:

*Dear Bais Rivkah Alumnae,*

*Do you ever feel like you're in a different stage than those in your inner circle? Did you get married while all your friends were single? Or vice versa?*

*What wisdom can you share?*

*What do you wish people knew?*

This innocent message was met with hard truths. Stories of introspection, reflection, and learning. But above the strength and wisdom in these stories, we were struck by the common thread. Each individual on her own path with her own set of wins and losses is growing. These differences, these stages, these joys, and yes, even these failures, pushed the storytellers to come to great epiphanies that brought about connection, sensitivity, and most of all, individual growth.

And although we don't usually have more than a select few anonymous submissions, due to the nature and sensitivity of the subject coupled with the powerful messages derived, we felt that the content outweighs the anonymity.

## THE POWER OF A MESSAGE

### *Anonymous*

I was voted in by my class as the one who would get married first and have a huge family.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. I didn't get married first — I was one of the last.

Before I found my husband, I remember saying to one of my married friends, "Maybe marriage is not for me; it's just not happening." I was a little sad about my situation. But on the outside, no one would have known. I looked like I had it all — friends, a job, security, and popularity. I created a special group of friends that did a lot of things together — weekends, get-together, etc. Life wasn't too shabby. Having my friends around me helped me cope with my reality.

At one point, one of my married friends told me, "Enjoy your time. Marriage is great but it'll come with different challenges. Please enjoy every minute." I wish I had listened more and didn't waste one minute of it worrying.

Then I boruch Hashem met my husband. My l'chaim and wedding were packed. "I'm the luckiest girl — I have so many friends!" However, keeping up with my friendships after marriage proved harder than I expected. Making time to meet up with friends became extremely difficult. To me, it felt that my single friends were afraid to reach out and invite me to anything

*I would see them post about their outings and travels and sometimes, it stung. I felt disconnected from them and slowly lost touch with many of them.*

they might be doing. It started being clear that the only time I would see them was if I reached out to them and invited them for a Shabbos meal or hosted a party at my apartment. Because I found it hard to be only on the giving end, some of my relationships dwindled. I would see them post about their outings and travels and sometimes, it stung. I felt disconnected from them and slowly lost touch with many of them.

To anyone going through the stage of a friend getting married or vice versa, I want to say that the best thing you can do is just reach out and say hello, send a 'thinking of you' message, ask when might be a good time to meet up. These messages go a long way and can really keep a relationship going.

My journey taught me that everyone has different stages in life and sometimes it can be difficult to find yourself in a different place than those around you. It can feel isolating and lonely, even while I find myself in an exciting stage. But my journey also forced me to do some soul searching. Who am I? What makes me happy? How can I fill my cup without relying on others? Because at the end of the day, while we





*It's been ten years of waiting, searching, crying, wanting, and davening! Ten years of talking to Hashem and writing to the Rebbe.*

all need friends, we also have to know that we are responsible for our own happiness. Learning to be content with myself and trusting in the greater plan has been a work in progress but I wouldn't have had to practice it had I not had the events of my life until this point.

If you haven't heard from someone in a long time, reach out, make a connection. Send a text; it can change someone's day. I know it changes mine.

## TEN YEARS

*Fruma Hershkovic*

When I started shidduchim, I knew right from the start what I was looking for. I was sure I would get married right away and start the family I always dreamed of. Hashem had other plans for me...

I have always been open-minded. Baal Teshuva? Sure! Ger? How special! Gezh, not gezh? A Jew is a Jew so wherever he comes from I am good with it! I'm not looking for anything complicated. Just a good *chassidishe* bochur that has strong values and lives life b'emes with *yiras shomayim*! That is my list and the rest — personality, the family he comes from — to me, all those are but commentary. Of course, there is research to do, but I don't allow those details to be deal breakers. For me, it's all about his personal qualities.

It's been ten years of waiting, searching, crying, wanting, and davening! Ten years of talking to Hashem and writing to the Rebbe. But I'm not just waiting, I'm also doing! I'm becoming a better person, refining my middos, and becoming stronger in my Yiddishkeit by learning Chassidus; I'm really working on getting closer to Hashem.

Sometimes people ask me how I'm always so happy, especially at my younger siblings' weddings. And I

say that their journey is different than mine and I'm happy for them that they don't have to wait like me; they get to start living life the way it's meant to be. And for me... I'm meant to be here, exactly where I am now, at this age, at this stage! It was hard when the first sibling got engaged and I did have some hard emotions that came with it, but by the time the second younger sibling got engaged, it was just pure joy for her, boruch Hashem!

Do I ever feel down, lonely, sad, disappointed, or broken? Yes — all of the above and more, but it's not where I live from. Emotions are a part of the human condition and they are okay and healthy to feel and work through. It's about how long they linger and if they get in the way of daily living. I stay positive because I'm a naturally positive person. At the same time, I'm a deep feeler and I allow my emotions to be; I don't shut them out. I talk if I need to, write if I need to, self-care, take a walk, sleep early, be with people, be alone, or daven.

When it comes to processing emotions, it's different for every person and every time. One of the keys to being positive is to listen to the feelings that come up and let them slide through instead of fighting them or wondering why you're experiencing them.

Support is also a big help for me; I have friends who are also single and we resonate with each other on our experiences with single life and dating, and it makes



me feel less alone in it. But ultimately I know I'm not alone because Hashem is always with me, at all times, and this is where He wants me now.

Of course, I daven that Hashem should match me up with my *bashert* soon, yet I also accept where I am now. It's like being content with oneself and striving to be better at the same time.

My birthday was approaching and it was painful to think that I was turning another year older without being married. I was speaking with a friend about it and I told her that for this year's birthday, I feel like going down a number instead of up. She told me, "Every year that's added means that there is more Torah and mitzvos that you have done." I liked what she said. It took about a week for the idea to settle, and I ended up looking forward to my birthday that year. Those wise words stick with me to this day, and now I look forward to my birthday because it's a Torah and mitzvos milestone!

I've met a lot of nice prospects, just not the one — the one who will be mine and I will be his, the one that I have been davening for for years. Why am I waiting this long? Only Hashem knows, and I trust Hashem! It says, "Know Him in all your ways," and even in this, I know Hashem.

## TIPS FROM THE NON-ELITE

*Anonymous*

Before I got married, (and before any of my friends did) I had heard reports of girls going "MIA" or "cutting off their friends" as soon as they put their sheitels on their heads. I wondered why people would do that — what was it about getting married that made them suddenly lose their taste for friends?

Once I got married, I got a glimpse into the other side of the story. I realized that very often, girls assume that their married friends don't need them anymore. For some reason, the common belief is that when a girl gets married, she has joined some sort of special, higher rank; her sheitel and ring are status markers, and she feels that she is better than her single friends.



This, of course, is simply not true. Getting married is not a status thing; it's a life thing. It's a huge milestone, one that is truly worth celebrating. It is the total commitment of one human being to another, the like of which is not experienced in any friendship. It's a joy, it's a journey, and it's a brocha that comes with its own set of challenges. It is, most certainly not, the

*But ultimately I know I'm not alone because Hashem is always with me, at all times, and this is where He wants me now.*

entrance into an exclusive, elite society. As a matter of fact, I believe that a person needs "her people" in her life more than ever to support her in this major change.

I think it's so important for single friends to understand this truth, and be wary of assuming that their newly married friends hold themselves in higher regard. Buying into this assumption can actually lead the single friends to cut off their married friends — not the other way around.

I never felt it my place to tell my friends how to react to my new position, but if I could've, I would've loved to tell them the following:

**1. Reach out.** While a person's relationship with their spouse is the closest of them all, it does not take away their need for other relationships in their life. So don't pull yourself away from your married friend, thinking that she's got enough "relationship" going on to fill her plate. Sure, her husband may be her priority now, and the closest

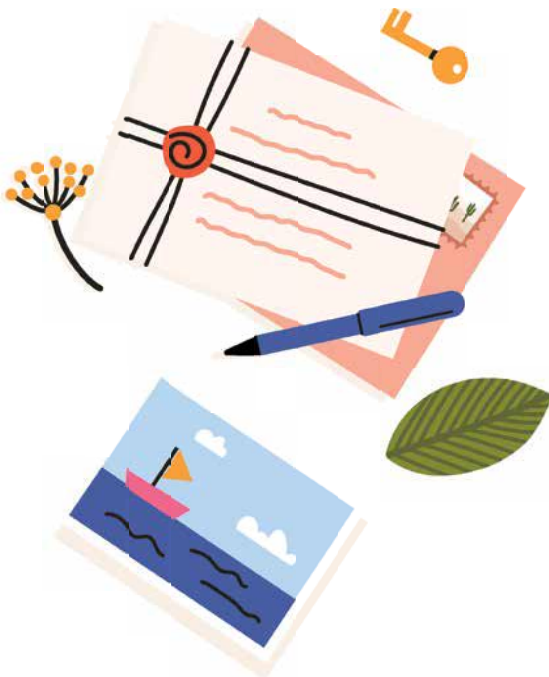
*It is, most certainly not, the entrance into an exclusive, elite society.*

relationship in her life, but she is in no less need of friend relationships than you are. Moreover, riding on the belief that your married friend is elite now, you might be inclined to believe that she is responsible to do all the reaching out — if she wants to step down from her pedestal and look my way, she will. Wrong. Your married friend has feelings and appreciates being reached out to, just as you do. So don't write her off from your plans to get together, and don't leave all the reaching out to her!

**2. Take interest.** Here I am, post-wedding, and I *still* like to talk about stuff other than sheitels and suppers. So hey, conversations can carry on as normal. At the same time, sheitels and suppers and other new things *will* slip into my lexicon because they are now a part of my life — and that's normal. It feels good when friends take interest in these new areas of my life. Remember that the same way you want your married friend

to hear you out about what's important in your life, she would like to feel that there's space for her to get the same listening ear. Showing interest in her life bridges the gap that often grows between two people who find themselves in different stages. In my experience, the friends who came over to help me figure out supper in the beginning or asked me about how I was settling into my new home, are the ones I felt comfortable sharing my life with. Keep in mind that your friend needs acceptance as much as you do, and show interest in her life. And hey, you'll get to learn a thing or two and be a little more in the know about this future stage when your time comes!

*In my experience, the friends who came over to help me figure out supper in the beginning or asked me about how I was settling into my new home, are the ones I felt comfortable sharing my life with.*



**3. Have someone to talk to.** If you're struggling with feelings of jealousy toward your married friend, it's so important to find someone to speak with to work through these feelings. Taking these feelings out on your married friend will only make her feel bad, and won't make you feel any better.

**4. It's an adjustment.** If it seems that your friend is a little MIA, remember that she has just gone through a major life change and is adjusting, and there can be so many reasons why she's not as present. Chances are, she's not looking to cut you off. Remember that it's not about you, and maybe look for ways that you can be supportive of her during this time. ■





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# He's Holding My Hand

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Anonymous



## Erev Yom Kippur.

This Yom Kippur, I'm not feeling it.

"It" being the awe, inspiration, and holiness of the day.

I felt like something was wrong with me as I scrolled through Instagram; of everything I had seen the last few days about Yom Kippur — forgiveness, davening, inspirational thoughts — nothing

resonated.

After lots of thought, I realized what it was.

I am angry at Hashem.

I am angry that all our efforts in trying to have a child have not been successful.

I am angry that I had hope in all the “top professionals,” only to face disappointment.

I am angry at Hashem that I have to pretend to the outside world that everything is rosy while inside I’m crushed.

I am angry that those who got married after me are pregnant/have a baby.

How could I daven to Hashem when I’m angry at Him?

Why should I exert so much energy into davening when whatever Hashem has in store for me will unfold anyway? Why does He need my input?

I sent the above message to a friend of mine who knew what we were going through and would understand the low mood I was feeling.

What she replied made me really think.

She said “It is *because* you have such a deep connection with Hashem that you are so angry. If you didn’t feel connected with Hashem, you wouldn’t get so angry when it feels like He disappointed you.”

I think back over the past two years and marvel at how much my connection to Hashem has grown. My connection to Hashem is a work in progress; it takes conscious effort to work on making our relationship personal. Yes, we each have an intrinsic connection with Hashem just by virtue of having a neshoma, but I am talking about the connection that comes about through avodah. It is true that the challenges Hashem gives you build you up and make you stronger. You can try to convince yourself that you pull the strings and can make things happen. But reality hits and it becomes obvious that Hashem runs the world.

Embracing this idea has been a journey in itself.

Accepting that Hashem is the Mastermind behind it all takes a lot of work. It means admitting that I cannot control it all. I am a human and while I do hold tremendous power and can accomplish great things spiritually and physically, ultimately it is not up to me, but up to Hashem’s plan. We all battle this daily — feeling that burning desire to be able to make

*You can try to convince yourself that you pull the strings and can make things happen.*

things happen while knowing we are limited.

It was a given that once we got married, a baby would directly follow within a year. At least that’s what my husband and I believed.

My husband and I both grew up in the same community with similar backgrounds. Coming from the Lubavitch community and the Jewish mentality at large, a lot of emphasis is placed on the beauty of having big families and we are surrounded by families with lots of children as well. I myself come from a large family and my husband and I always envisioned having a large family as well.

Within a few months of marriage, we realized things would not be so easy. My biggest dream was (is) to have a baby, but at the time, was not possible.

It was a very rough patch for us.

Being that I am an achiever, I was going to figure this out and get to the bottom of it. We went down all routes while being in touch with professionals, mashpiim, and Rabbonim. The joke was on me because this is not something that we can control no matter how much we try. We were at a loss and felt really alone.

Words cannot begin to describe the pain that we felt.





There were nights of crying. Some days the pain is absolutely excruciating that it manifests itself in physical pain. Some days are more challenging, and some days are easier.

To ensure that our relationship stays solid despite this very big challenge takes tremendous effort on both our ends. It requires lots of patience, love, and compassion. It means being accepting of each other and caring for each other. It means lots of conversations and communication. Being vulnerable and sharing when we are having a rough day. Knowing that if one of us has a rough day, the other needs to be strong because we can't both be falling apart.

It's tedious.

I feel that boruch Hashem, Hashem has made this process a little smoother for us, with the help of our incredible support system, our openness with each other, and our doing the best we can under the circumstances.

Going through this challenge together has brought out the best in both of us and has forced us to dig deep and grow, far more than we ever imagined. We have grown in our mindset — we are human, and though we would love to run the world and sometimes think we can do a better job than Hashem, Hashem is in charge.

Sometimes, trying to think logically, I consider the brochos within our challenge, notably that infertility has brought us closer as a couple and we have been forced to grow considerably.

A very powerful thought that I fall back on is something a wise mentor told me. The healthiest approach when dealing with a challenge that is bigger than us, after having completed our *hishtadlus*, is realizing that we really have no control over our life. All we can do is show up and be the best player for the precisely orchestrated plan Hashem has designed for us. It's all for the ultimate good as part of the grand purpose of creation.

The words *bittul* and bitachon have always been familiar to us and part of our vocabulary. It was only through our challenge of infertility that these terms took on a whole new meaning. *Bittul* means realizing I am not in charge; Hashem is. The sooner we realize this, the happier we'll be. Bitachon, on the other hand, is believing that Hashem listens to our tefillos and He will answer them! Bitachon allows you to feel lighter, freer, and less worried.

*I consider the brochos within our challenge, notably that infertility has brought us closer as a couple and we have been forced to grow considerably.*

A practical way I have found to help me incorporate the concept of bitachon is through music. Music is a very big part of me — whatever I'm doing, I always have music playing in the background. Someone suggested that I make a playlist that would make me feel better and give me a boost when I can really use it. My playlist includes songs that speak about simcha, believing in Hashem, emunah, etc. A particularly special one for me is "Hold on Tight" by Benny Friedman and Baruch Levine. This song specifically has significant meaning for me, almost like a hug from Hashem.

Everyone has an innate connection with Hashem, but it requires effort just like any other relationship. I need to put in the work and constantly nourish it in order for it to grow. The connection grows through feeling, and feeling is a result of understanding. Understanding and acknowledging the intricacies in which Hashem runs the world and how He has my best interest at heart, helps me develop more feelings for a connection with Him, thereby softening my sometimes frustrated or angry feelings when things don't go as planned. I know Hashem loves me unconditionally and is doing what is best for me long term. He is with me and He's holding me tight. ■



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# MRS. STRAUSS *and* MRS. SPERLIN

## *Best Friends & Beloved Mentors*

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Interview conducted by Libby (Zuntz) Hertz, Crown Heights  
*Graduating Class of 5759 (1999)*



*Mrs. Strauss (L) and Mrs. Sperlin (R)*

*Any Bais Rivkah alumna can remember the wise and witty comments from two of Bais Rivkah Elementary School's most beloved teachers — Mrs. Strauss and Mrs. Sperlin. Their friendship has grown over the years, and eighth grade Bais Rivkah girls love watching the two interact and jibe with one another. Embrace sat down to interview the cherished educators who have taught so much about math and English, but even more about Emunah, respect, and friendship.*



## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BE A TEACHER?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** I taught right after seminary. First in Chasam Sofer in Williamsburg, and then Bais Yaakov — Bais Miriam of the Bronx.

**MRS. STRAUSS:** As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher. When I finished school, I got a job in a pre-school.

## HOW DID YOU WIND UP TEACHING IN BAIS RIVKAH?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** When my kids were all in school, I went to work in Bais Rivkah. How did I get to Bais Rivkah? Who remembers?

**MRS. STRAUSS:** One summer, I was in the bungalow colony and a friend called me in desperation. She was a Bais Rivkah teacher and was having a baby before

*To this day, girls see me on Kingston Avenue and they say, “chartreuse.” And then they spell it for me. You have to love what you do.*

Pesach. I had two daughters in high school by then, so I agreed to sub in seventh grade for her.

The principal, Mrs. Goldberg, saw I was able to handle subbing so she begged me to take a full-time job, but I said no.

The next year, the eighth grade teacher, Esther Wilhelm, was expecting her first child so I subbed for her, too. Eventually, I taught seventh grade until the end of the year and I really loved it. I dropped my night job teaching at Bais Yaakov Seminary. Then I moved up to the eighth grade and have been there for forty years.

## WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT TEACHING?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** It's like a family. It's unbelievable. You can see the brocha of the Rebbe working every minute.

I just love teaching. I was blessed with knowing how

*I didn't know what was going on — I had no idea what it was! They kept walking to strangers all over the place and taking out those little tea lights.*

to spell, so I took that blessing and multiplied it. I used to give an extra credit word for spelling. One word was chartreuse. To this day, girls see me on Kingston Avenue and they say, “chartreuse.” And then they spell it for me. You have to love what you do.

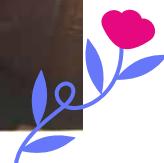
**MRS. STRAUSS:** I always loved the girls. There was something so special about them. They were more outgoing than I was used to. In the past, if I saw my students, they might have crossed to the other side of the street. But I noticed right away that in Crown Heights my students would run across to me and give me a friendly “Hello!”

I also noticed that the girls are not afraid to ask anything. It's a more outgoing culture. I think it's from the mitvzoim they do.

On our seventh grade trip, the girls were doing mitvzoim. I didn't know what was going on — I had no idea what it was! They kept walking to strangers all over the place and taking out those little tea lights. I didn't know if they were supposed to be doing it or



Mrs. Sperlin receiving a dollar from the Rebbe



*She said, “Put that lipstick on while we’re on the phone, right now.” She coaxed me out of my shell.*

not. Then I realized: this is what they do. They were brought up with this!

They have no problem texting me or calling me; I’m very close to my students and that’s one of the things I like about teaching them. I love that I have a relationship with them and that we are tied together.

Now, if I meet my students at weddings or the mechanchos convention, they come running! One of my girls told me that the highlight of the mechanchos conference was that I was there. We took a picture with all the girls who were my students. There’s a relationship and it never died down. It never went away. All my kids were teachers, but none of them had this relationship with their students. There’s more of a distance.

## HOW DID THE TWO OF YOU DEVELOP SUCH A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** I knew Mrs. Strauss before we worked together in Bais Rivkah, but I didn’t really have contact with her. I met her in Bais Rivkah and we developed a close relationship. Then, in 5755 (1995) my husband passed away. Bais Rivkah was extremely kind about it. I remember speaking to Mrs. Strauss on the phone. I told her that I would never put on lipstick again. She said, “Put that lipstick on while we’re on the phone, right now.” She coaxed me out of my shell.

**MRS. STRAUSS:** We both were in Bais Yaakov of Williamsburg as girls. That was the school you went to, whether you lived in Crown Heights, the Bronx, or Washington Heights. Mrs. Sperlin was in my grade. She is in my yearbook.

But when her husband passed away, she really needed somebody and I was there for her. She said, “I’m not going back to school. I’m not walking in.” So I had her travel to my house, pick me up, and we walked into school together. We developed a beautiful relationship. And we’re both *lebedig*. We have a good time together in school.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE TEACHING ON CHURCH AVENUE?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** I was teaching in class and a mouse started crawling around. The girls jumped but I told the girls to calm down. They accepted it. Then, the mouse ran to the lunchroom.

**MRS. STRAUSS:** Church Avenue was much smaller and homier. We were next door to Erasmus High School and sometimes we heard gunshots. We didn’t mind it.

Once, they threw eggs into the classroom. It sailed through the window and landed on the teacher’s sheitel. What do you think, they don’t know how to throw? They know how to throw! All I know is the girls were shrieking. The kids didn’t stop telling me about it. After that, they put nets on the windows.

## DO YOU RECALL A TOUCHING MOMENT IN SCHOOL?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** I remember it was the morning of



Mrs. Strauss and Mrs. Sperlin with some of their students years ago.

September 11th, 2001, and we had school that day. The girls were scared. I told them not to be afraid and that terrorists want us to be scared but there's nothing to be afraid of. (I was there! Who can remember Mushkie (Morozow) Itkin's late note explaining that she was late because a plane crashed into the Twin Towers?! —Sara Blau)

Now, I tell my girls the story of a Russian boy who went to camp in Gan Yisroel Parksville and broke his arm. His father was very upset and came screaming to pack up his son and take him home. But on September 11th, this father called the head counselor to say he was sorry. "You saved my life," he said. "I work on the twenty-sixth floor and I would have been killed, but that day I went to the doctor with my son to take his cast off."

Two years after 9/11, I met a woman who moved from New York to Monticello. Her husband was a fireman who was killed in the Twin Towers. After talking for a while, this woman gave me a poem that her daughter wrote about not having her father. Now, I read that

*Each and every one of them. One has dimples, one has blonde hair, and another has red hair, but they are all here to learn, and I'm here to teach. I tell them stories, I laugh with them.*

poem with the girls every year. My girls are mesmerized!

**MRS. STRAUSS:** Last year on Chanukah, my children and grandchildren were getting ready to light the menorah, and the phone rang for me. It was a Bais Rivkah girl in eleventh grade. She said, "I don't know if you remember me." Then, she started to cry.

She said, "I want to say thank you." I wondered why she would want to thank me three years after I was her teacher.

Well, her grandfather had passed away a few days before. She said that she couldn't stop crying and couldn't sleep. So she decided to take out her family report. She had interviewed this grandfather and spent a lot of time with him. She spent the whole night with the family report and it was the only thing that calmed her down. She could hear his voice in her head and reminisce.

## HOW HAVE THE GIRLS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** In my time, there was no such thing as the word 'stress'. You went to school, work, and slept. There was no such thing as having anxiety. But now it's a different era and some kids have anxiety. The homes are not the same, the system is not the same, so we have to go with the flow.

**MRS. STRAUSS:** The girls are more anxious now, especially since Covid. They have more anxiety about different things. They weren't so anxious before. Maybe too many things have been happening since then. Maybe there are more things affecting families.

## WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU WANT TO





## GIVE BAIS RIVKAH STUDENTS AND ALUMNI?

**MRS. SPERLIN:** When I'm in school, I'm in another world. These girls are super! Each and every one of them. One has dimples, one has blonde hair, and another has red hair, but they are all here to learn, and I'm here to teach. I tell them stories, I laugh with them.

If I have respect for them, they have respect for me. A teacher must have respect for her students. They get excited when I notice things about them. It's a world of its own.

I want to say, girls, keep going. Keep doing what's right, keep learning, and keep helping other people, and you're sure to succeed. And love each other.

**MRS. STRAUSS:** I want to say thank you to them because I was able to have such a beautiful relationship with all of them. I want to tell them how much I love Bais Rivkah. It changed my life. I'm so connected to all the people in Crown Heights and all the students and I learned so much from them. I'm so grateful for the beautiful relationships I've been able to have.

I could not be in a better place. I've learned from the Rebbe's *moisad* with the wonderful people I work with. We are like one big family. Everybody is happy. We have principals like Mrs. Jacobson and Mrs. Rosenfeld who are amazing and wonderful. The atmosphere

*I want to tell them how much I love Bais Rivkah. It changed my life. I'm so connected to all the people in Crown Heights and all the students and I learned so much from them. I'm so grateful for the beautiful relationships I've been able to have.*

is beautiful. I come home on a high. Everything is so positive and I have personally gained so much.

As long as Hashem gives me the *koach* to do this, I want to. The Rebbe said never to retire — that's one of the things I learned. I don't ever want to retire. It's wonderful being in Bais Rivkah. Especially working for Mrs. Jacobson. What a special person she is. What beautiful relationships the teachers have with each other. The whole school is such a holy place. ■



Mrs. Sperlin (white patterned blouse) stands behind the Rebbe





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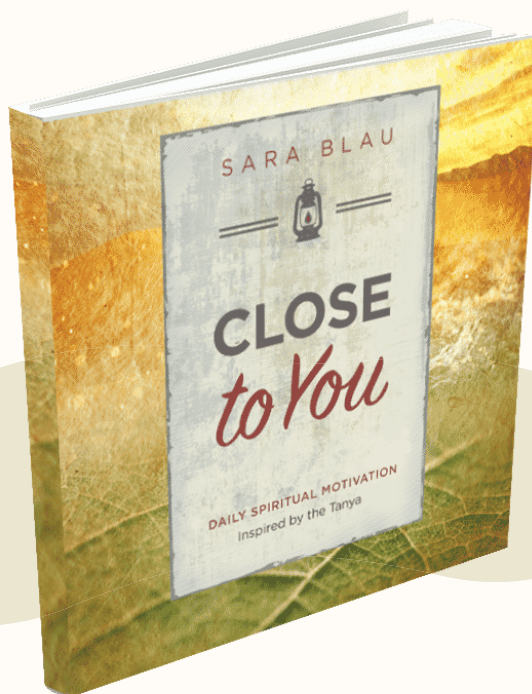
# Close to You

## DAILY SPIRITUAL MOTIVATION INSPIRED BY THE TANYA

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

Rashi (Jacobson) Marcus, Redondo Beach, CA  
*Graduating class of 5763 (2003)*



*In conversation with Sara Blau, author, and Rashi Marcus, project manager of Close to You.*

**SARA:** This is exciting; I am usually the one doing the interviewing, and this time we flip the tables!

**RASHI:** It's so nice to take a few minutes to chat with you about your incredibly inspiring book, Close To You. This book is close to my heart and soul and I'm delighted to have had the honor to work on it with you.

**SARA:** This is like the good old days in high school! I remember passing you in the hallway as a



young ninth grader when you were the mature and older twelfth grader. Amazing how we cross paths again. It feels so special to reconnect with alumnae in our older years to work together on something so beautiful and meaningful.

**RASHI:** Yes! I would love to say we're more mature and sophisticated but... Lol. Let's never lose that young energy and spark of rebellion to challenge the status quo. Speaking of energy, you are a mother to ka"ha beautiful family; you are a teacher, educator, author, speaker... the list goes on. Where do you find the time and energy to do it all?

**SARA:** Here's the thing: no one has more than twenty four hours in the day. I'm lucky to work with multiple teams of incredible people to pull things off, like you as my project manager for this book! This very magazine that you are reading, EmBRace, also has a very talented team. Boruch Hashem, working together with others really helps.

And the truth is, I also am constantly reevaluating. As something new comes up, I discuss with my mashpi-ah whether to take it on and if yes, whether to drop another thing or delegate it to someone else.

The last thing is that I try to compartmentalize as much as I can and try to be present in whatever hat I'm wearing at the moment. I'm far from perfect, but I try to tune into what I'm needed for at the moment.



**RASHI:** Excellent point! In this day and age especially when everything is at our fingertips — with our phone never more than an inch away from us — it is often so difficult to really focus on the task at hand and be present.

This brings me to *Close to You*, a brilliant, practical, and must-have book for every woman. Inspired by the Tanya, the short meditations are so powerful yet so down to earth. When do you personally take the time to reflect on all these concepts?

**SARA:** I purposely wrote these short Tanya-inspired bits for the busy woman who doesn't have hours every day to sit and study. So with just a few moments dedicated to personal, self, and soul care, these meditations can really change your attitude and entire outlook on life. Consider it some spiritual "me"

*True inspiration means going back to what you are already doing but doing it differently.*

time — a neshoma recharge that will fill and fulfill you in a deep and meaningful way.

Tanya can feel overwhelming to many of us; this book *Close to You* makes it achievable and accessible. It was written in short points that are easily digestible and understandable. Like any exercise, if you start small and steady you will begin to see results.

The whole concept of Tanya is that your mind can dictate your emotions! Our feelings aren't based on things that happen, but rather on how we think about what happened. We may not be able to change reality but we can change our thoughts. That is so powerful!

Personally, when I'm walking to work, I use that time to think of the things I'm grateful for. I focus on Hashem's greatness and meditate on positivity.

**RASHI:** Let's talk about the background and inspiration for the book for a moment. How did your years in Bais Rivkah and your education influence this book and process?

**SARA:** Great question! I most definitely give credit to my ninth grade teacher, Mrs. Leah Schapiro (née Gurary). When she spoke about the neshoma it was a real thing. Often, spirituality is hard to grasp and see — it seems out of our reach. But the foundation of Tanya, that our neshoma is a *chelek Eloka*, was taught to us in a way that it became so real, so full of potential and relevance. It opened my eyes to the concept that this was real *to me*, not just a lofty concept for others.

**RASHI:** With your overpacked schedule, when did you have the time to research and study Tanya in depth?

**SARA:** You know, I'm a creative person and I was finding Shabbos to be difficult in that you can't always be creative — or rather act on your creativity. So I began to use the day as an opportunity to learn, research, and daven. It transformed my Shabbos experience as well!

**RASHI:** Amazing. I always love hearing the back story of everyone's successful project!

*Continued on page 79*



# IN G-D WE TEST

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Esti (Reizes) Lowenbein, Pomona, NY  
*Graduating class of 5772 (2012)*

As told to Gitty Krinsky



**W**hat greater way is there to show true emunah than by pledging money that you don't have?

Many people worry that they won't be able to pay their bills and wonder anxiously where their next dollar will come from. When put in that position, it's difficult to imagine how one can give away even more than they have in the past. Yet at times, doing just that relieves some of the pressure, and takes away the bulk of the worry that comes along with financial difficulties.

When Esti Lowenbein made her Tzedakah pledge on Erev Yom Kippur last year, she experienced exactly that. She pledged an amount much greater than she had ever given in the past, purely out of the belief that she would somehow be able to honor it in full.

Inspired by a video by Berel Solomon explaining the concept of Tzedakah pledges, Esti discussed the idea with her husband and they immediately agreed on an amount that made sense for them. They took this step after hearing David and Eda Schottenstein sharing their success story on camera, supposing it couldn't hurt to try it too. In the end, the Lowenbeins didn't stick with their original pledge. They decided to change it instead to an astronomical sum, which was well beyond their means at the time.

"We didn't follow the rules," says Esti. "We went to the extreme. Naturally, there was no way in the world we would be able to reach our goal."

"It takes a lot not to be anxious; you really learn how to let go and let G-d."

The Lowenbeins' decision defied logic. It came from a place of complete belief that Hashem would pay them back more than they had given. After seeing how Berel Solomon had such clear results, they took the plunge. All Esti has to say on this move is that it just made sense — "I give and Hashem will find a way to pay me back."

By the end of the year, the Lowenbeins had given ninety percent of their pledge to Tzedakah. The following year they upped their commitment, adding the ten percent that was still not given into the sum.

The results were so obvious, it would have been impossible not to recognize where their extra income was really coming from. So, when Esti met Berel Solomon at a work conference, she went to thank him for inspiring her to make that initial pledge. At the time, Berel was in the process of producing the video "In G-d We Test," a short film explaining his secret to success: Tzedakah. He asked Esti if she could perhaps share her experience on camera. At first, she was hesitant. She wasn't sure it was the right thing to do. But the minute she realized that she had the opportunity to help even one person by sharing her story, she decided it was worth it.

Esti was in Eretz Yisroel at the time that the video was being filmed. Berel waited for her to get back to the states before releasing the film.

The dramatic results that came about due to the

*The Lowenbeins' decision defied logic. It came from a place of complete belief that Hashem would pay them back more than they had given.*

pledges Esti made had such a strong effect on her; the least she was able to do was share this treasure with the world in the hope that she would inspire others to do the same.

"It isn't an easy thing, promising to give more than you've made in the past. You need to constantly trust that Hashem will make it work and then b'ezras Hashem it will."

## TESTING HASHEM

There is only one place in Tanach where we are told we can test Hashem. In Malachi 3:1 it says **וּבְחִנּוּנִי נֶאֱבָרָה** — "Test Me with this," referring to Tzedakah. Hashem not only allows us to test Him but challenges us to!

When a person commits to giving Tzedakah without calculations of what seems financially possible, Hashem opens new channels, helping the person





*With this in mind, we can put our full trust in Hashem and leave all our worries in His court. Let go, give generously of yourself, and trust Hashem to fill the gaps with miracles.*

fulfill his pledge. Not only will he be able to give as promised, but he is also guaranteed that he'll receive several times the amount pledged, allowing him to give b'simcha.

The Rebbe spoke countless times on this topic, urging people to go beyond their means when resolving to give Tzedakah. We are given a promise that Hashem will help us help another Yid.

*"When G-d sees that a Jew is generous with charity, He is generous with him. Instead of four times, he receives five times the amount and many times more. Along with the abundance of food which he receives from above, he is also blessed with the success of using it for only good things, amidst health and joy, for purposes of Torah and Judaism, with joy*

*and gladness."*

[Excerpt from sicha of Purim 5729 (1969)]

*"When it comes to giving charity, there should be no calculations. Don't rely on what you think is possible and even on your own good heartedness. The Torah calls it "the generosity of your hand," given immediately, without limitation..... G-d says with regard to charity, "Test me with this." Even though in general we are not permitted to test G-d, the exception, as cited in the code of Jewish law, in the section of yoreh de'ah, in the beginning of laws of charity, is with regards to charity. Not only are we permitted to test Him, but G-d actually challenges us, "Test me!"*

[Excerpt from sicha of 5 Sivan 5733 (1973)]

Usually, giving connotes taking from something; creating a lack. In regard to Tzedakah, giving connotes receiving. It means gaining the best gift imaginable — the ability to help another while helping oneself. With this in mind, we can put our full trust in Hashem and leave all our worries in His court. Let go, give generously of yourself, and trust Hashem to fill the gaps with miracles. ■

## METHOD:

- 1. Make a pledge.** Out of your league but not too far from reach.
- 2. Write a document.** Tell the organizations and/or people you plan on supporting how much you will be donating throughout the year.
- 3. Send out checks monthly.** Or send predated checks for the entire year.





*Sara Blau*

Now let's be honest for a minute. We read, learn, daven, hear a powerful lecture, etc., but when we wake up the next morning — with good intentions to keep up the inspiration — reality hits. The alarm clock is ringing, we're bleary eyed from the child who needed us at three a.m., lunches need to be packed, and school busses are honking impatiently. Real life. With all of life's messiness and busyness, how can this book help us internalize the inspiration and make it practical?

**SARA:** Very valid point that I think a lot of us can relate to. I think each person will find a concept that they personally relate to and I highly recommend focusing on that specific topic to incorporate into daily life.

For example, for many women, the simcha section is extremely important — learning about true happiness and joy, discovering where negative thoughts stem from, and focusing on how to counter that with positivity.

For others, it's the Alter Rebbe's approach to guilt. Which Jewish mother doesn't feel guilt! It's a trick of the *yetzer hara*, and we have the power to let it go!

Another practical lesson is *Ahavas* and *yiras Hashem*. We often hear and even say these words but how are they relevant? Tanya teaches us that these spiritual concepts are close to you.

When we visualize Hashem, we may sometimes imagine Him as powerful yet far from us. But we can make our relationship with Hashem real! We can be grateful and we can have awe of Hashem on a very real level. How? On the way to work, or while driving in the car, think about something that you love about Hashem. Concentrate and meditate on all He does for you.

One last relevant example for now is the concept of *rotzo* and *shuv*.

We are so busy with physical things; getting through our day requires eating, working, sleeping, etc. But



*Rashi Marcus*

then we feel a void; we also need spirituality, and the feeling of *rotzo* and yearning for a connection to Hashem comes up. But what do we do with that inspiration? *Shuv!* We go right back into the very actions we were doing but with wings that make them fly. It's like a continuous cycle. True inspiration means going back to what you are already doing but doing it differently.

**RASHI:** Wow Sara! So much to reflect on here. Thank you for the practical suggestions and I look forward to implementing them into my days!

Any suggestions on how we can give over these vital and necessary lessons to our children so they can begin to live with them at a young age?

**SARA:** Live it ourselves! We must work on it and model it and live it — that's the best way. And of course, take any opportunity that presents itself to discuss these concepts — make them close to your children, too!

**RASHI:** Sara, thank you so much for your time and for sharing with us a little more about this truly amazing book, *Close to You*. I highly recommend it to each and every Bais Rivkah alumna! It is also a beautiful and touching gift for the women in your lives from every walk of life. This book is transformative.

**SARA:** Rashi, this was fun! We used to do school together — production, Lag Ba'omer, Shabbatons — and now we get to work together as adults. It's been a truly incredible journey and I look forward to continuing it! ■

*Are you a Bais Rivkah alumna doing a joint project or working with another alumna? Reach out to us and let us know! We'd love to feature it.*

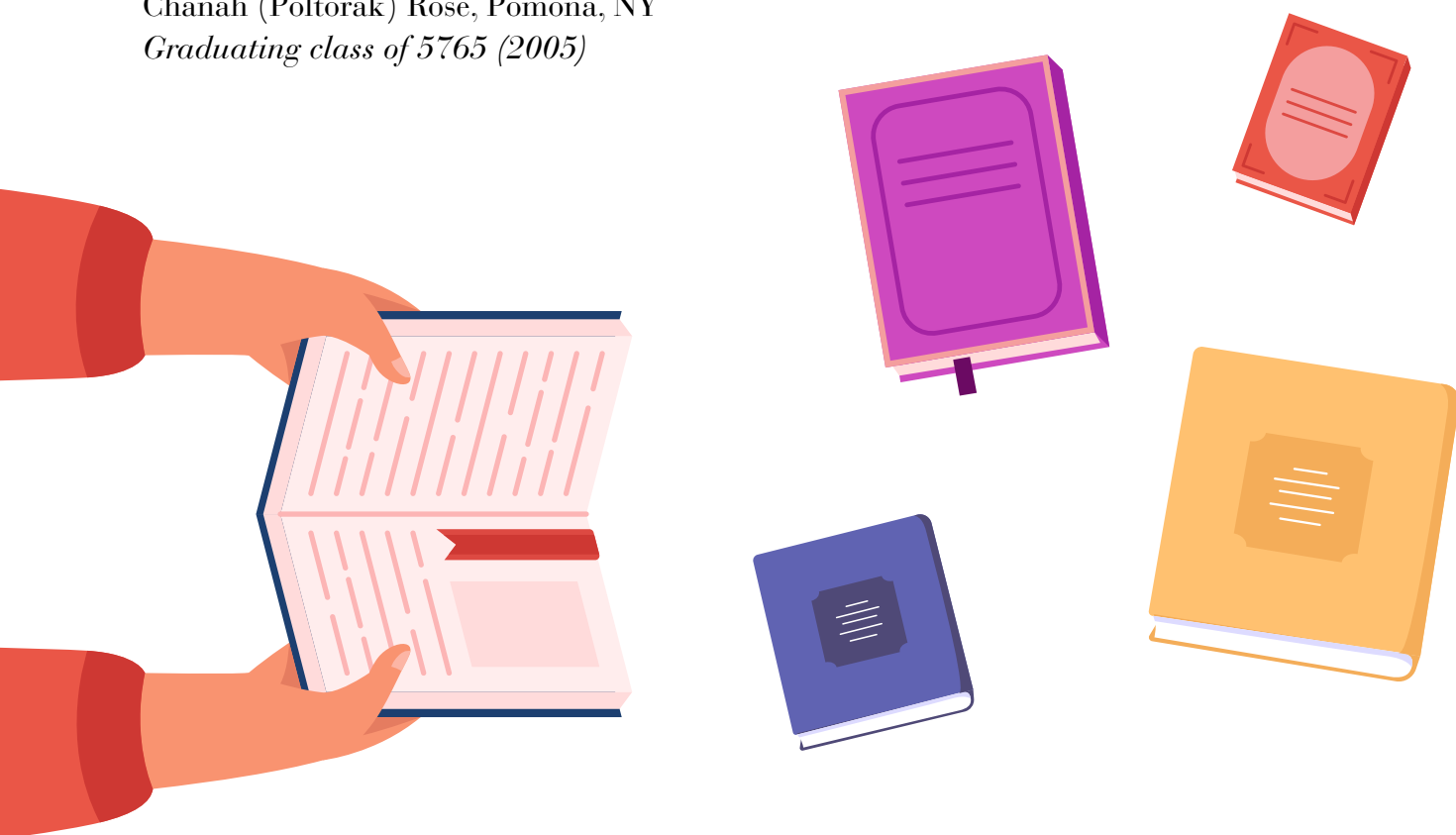


# CHINUCH FROM THE INSIDE OUT

# Teaching Tefillah

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



**T**he Friediker Rebbe once said:<sup>1</sup> “Tefillah is a foundation of Chassidus. Just like in learning, we need to learn how to learn, so too with tefillah — we have to learn how to daven.”

The first thing we learn from here is that tefillah is not just one of many things that we try to give over to the next generation. In a *chassidishe* chinuch, it is fundamental, and needs to be a primary goal and focus for parents and teachers. Secondly — and to me this was a bombshell — is that the emphasis on *how* over *what* in chinuch

applies even more so to tefillah.

From a young age, we teach our children what we need to daven and why, the translation and *pirushim* of the tefillos, and the necessary *halachos* and *minhagim*. All this is crucial. But are we also teaching them the how? More fundamentally, are we ourselves focused on the *how* — not just the mechanics of the davening, but *how* to access this incredible tool for connecting to Hashem and our neshomos?

Well, how do we work on the how of tefillah? What is the deeper meaning that makes it more meaningful?

In my years of teaching this subject in various grade levels, I've discovered the power of *mashalim* - parables and metaphors - in plumbing the depths of this topic. Many *mashalim* are well known - like the ladder of tefillah, or of standing before a King. Others are those that emerged for me in exploration of this topic, and that I found effective for myself and my students. I'd like to share with you here two lesser known *mashalim* to illustrate the deeper meanings behind tefillah.



## AVODAH – POLISHING DIAMONDS

Avodah literally means hard work, but there are some kinds of work that are as beautiful as they are challenging. In Chassidus, tefillah is almost synonymous with the word avodah; why?

This is because the work that we are doing during tefillah is the demanding and thrilling labor of polishing the diamond within each of us, by revealing and uncovering our neshoma.

The theme for my fourth grade Peirush Tefillah class was “Tefillah is My Time to Shine,”<sup>2</sup> and a journal was assigned wherein students wrote about what they “uncovered” through the deeper meaning of each tefillah.

This is because by davening, we are giving our neshoma a voice. We are providing her with the words that were really hers all along. And *kavona* during davening — the true Avodas HaTefillah — means that while the neshoma speaks, we truly listen. We listen to the neshoma's true priorities in life. We listen to her praising our Creator and become inspired. We embark on a journey of coming closer to the Aiber-

shter, and the rest of us, Nefesh Habehamis included, come along for the ride.

And so, every time we daven, our neshoma shines a little brighter. Our entire being is more receptive to her light. We have discovered and uncovered our inner diamond, through Avodas Hatefillah, a bit more each day.<sup>3</sup>

*We have discovered and uncovered our inner diamond, through Avodas Hatefillah, a bit more each day.*

The Navi<sup>4</sup> describes Bnei Yisrael as an Eretz Cheifetz, a desirable land, and Hayom Yom<sup>5</sup> dwells on this concept by describing the great riches and resources within every single Yid, that depend only on the diligence of the one digging to uncover them. Similarly, many are familiar with the story of the Rebbe answering an old woman on the Sunday dollars line, that the reason the Rebbe does not get tired while standing for hours giving dollars to Yidden, is that a person does not tire of counting diamonds. We are treasures. The neshoma is truly a gem that each of us holds.

Essentially, the avodah of tefillah is actually the work of accessing our true self. Should this seem a self-centered shift away from the focus on talking to Hashem during tefillah, I didn't make it up — the word tefillah itself comes from the reflexive verb *l'hisparallel*. When we are davening, we are focused on Hashem, it's true, but thereby we focus inward. As children, we learn that when we daven we are talking to Hashem, but when we delve deeper we learn that at the very same time, when we daven, we are talking to ourselves.

This leads us to ask ourselves what *hachlotos tovos* or paradigm shifts (*hanochos*) we are moved to as we truly focus on our davening. And if “Tefillah is My Time to Shine” seems like a lofty theme for young





*When we daven, pronounce each word, and learn its meanings, we are doing our neshoma the indescribable favor of learning her language!*

children, you can just flip through the journal entries of some real life fourth graders (with their permission, of course), or sit in on their year-end farbrengen where they shared their tefillah inspiration (luckily, those farbrengens may be recorded somewhere — this was in the Shluchim Online School!).

## MUSIC and TEfillah

There is a direct connection between music and tefillah. Our Rebbeim have emphasized the *pisgam*, “*Hakol me-orer hakavona*” — the voice arouses intent.” On a simple level, this means that hearing our own voice helps us have *kavona*, and therefore a person should daven out loud.

In Sefer HaNiggunim, the kol is explained as referring to the voice of *negina*, of music. As for the word

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TEfillah



Here are a few practical tips for how to have more *kavona* in davening, provided by *halacha* and Chassidus:

- Daven out loud, so that you can hear the words.
- Daven with a niggun. This is a fundamental *derech* in Chassidus!
- Learn Peirush Hamilos — the literal translation of the words.
- Choose one part of tefillah to concentrate on at a time. When you focus on a different paragraph each day or week, Hashem combines all of our tefillos and it is as though we davened the whole tefillah with *kavona* each day!
- Look inside - *osiyos machkimos*, the letters make us wise. The Rebbe surely knew the tefillos by heart, but always looked intently inside the siddur!
- If you can't daven in shul with the minyan, try to daven at the same time as the minyan even if you are elsewhere, as this is an *eis ratzon*.

- Have a set place — a spot in shul, a corner of your house, a certain chair, etc. — where you daven.
- Don't rush into davening, but pause for a moment to remove your mind from your day-to-day thoughts and worries. This may seem hard, but a person knows that in order to fall asleep, they have to put their daytime concerns out of their mind. Similarly, we can succeed in doing so before tefillah!
- Learn some Chassidus before davening, even a short thought or paragraph.
- Take your time whenever possible! Linger over the words. Give them time to sink and uplift you.
- Give Tzedakah, say Hareini, and look into your heart to ensure you feel united with your fellow Yidden so that your tefillos can flow freely without obstruction.
- Ask Hashem for help in having *kavona*!

(These tips are culled from a variety of sources, which were omitted for clarity but are available upon request.)

*“In Vilna, they teach you how to learn, but you already know how to learn. In Mezritch, they teach you how to daven, and that you do not yet know how to do. Go to Mezritch.”*

*kavona*, while it generally means voice or direction, it is also related to a word for window. Therefore, hearing a niggun opens a window in our hearts for inspiration to enter. (A way to act upon all the meanings of this *pisgam*? Daven with a niggun; there's nothing better!)

On a more subjective level, the analogy of music helps us relate better to the Nusach Hatefillah, the words that Chazal provided for us to use when we daven.

Have you ever played a musical instrument? I used to take piano lessons, and always envied those tal-

ented few who can play by ear, simply sitting down with beautiful music emerging from them. For most, musical achievement only comes after meticulous study of the notes and technique of your chosen instrument, and then learning a composition of an accomplished composer so that you can play it as your own. Only then can you begin to play with feeling. Only then, after playing a complex song ten, or twenty, or one hundred times, can you close your eyes and lose yourself in the music, with all of the emotional intent of the melody finally washing over you and those listening.

This is true with many artistic forms. While an artist might want to sit down and splash emotion on canvas, learning complex techniques involving color, light, and shadow can help them achieve this in a much deeper way. So too, with tefillah.

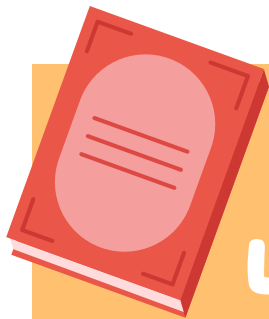
We may want to open our hearts and our mouths and express ourselves simply, wholeheartedly, to Hashem. There is room for that, as many *chassidishe* stories illustrate. In fact, the holiest days of the year are marked by the unstudied, unsophisticated, visceral cry of the shofar.

# ZLATA WIGS

כ"ב שבט  
*Wig Sale*

**FEBRUARY 9<sup>TH</sup>-13<sup>TH</sup>**  
**386 KINGSTON AVE.**

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# RESOURCES FOR Learning and Teaching ABOUT TEFillah

This is a non-exhaustive list of Seforim, resources, and teaching tools for the topic of tefillah. If you know of more that are not on this list, please send them to the author and/or EmBRace magazine so that we all can benefit!

- HaTefillah V'Ha'Avodah, by Rabbi Yekusiel Green
- Hayom Yom - look up tefillah in the index of topics
- My Prayer, by Rabbi Nissan Mandel
- Talelei Oros
- Chabad.org, search topic Jewish Prayer - Prayer in Judaism. Click on the Insights and Stories section in this compilation to dig deeper.
- EmBRace Magazine - special issue on tefillah can be found at [bethrivkah.edu/embrace](http://bethrivkah.edu/embrace)
- Chinuch Concepts Tefillah Curriculum for elementary school, by Mrs. Shaindy Schapiro (Contact [chinuchconcepts@gmail.com](mailto:chinuchconcepts@gmail.com))
- Ready, Set, Daven! A Guided Journal: Daily Thoughts to Inspire Your Davening, by Ms. Liba Rimler (Available on Amazon)
- My Tefillah Journal: A Fun and Engaging Tefillah Workbook, by Mrs. Leah Sollish (Available on Amazon)
- Tefillah Power! A Creative Jewish Prayer Journal and Curriculum, by Chana Voola (Available on Amazon)
- Tehillim Garden: Inspirational Coloring Book for Tranquility with Verses from Tehillim, by Chana Voola (Available on Amazon)
- The G.R.O.W. Method by Mrs. Nechama Laber, including curriculum, planner and resources ([GROWConnectionNetwork.com](http://GROWConnectionNetwork.com))
- Short Video on Making Tefillah Meaningful, with Mrs. Shaindy Schapiro ([MyMEF.org/videos](http://MyMEF.org/videos); click on Short Inspiration, and scroll down.)
- Short Video on Making Tefillah Meaningful, with Mrs. Sara Blau ([MyMEF.org/videos](http://MyMEF.org/videos); click on Short Inspiration, and scroll down.)
- MyMEF.org/blog, articles "A Moment of Silence: Not Just for Public Schools" by Mrs. Rena Udkoff, and "A Moment of Silence for Our Own," by Rabbi Chaim Yitzchok Vogel

But if we were to express ourselves in that way throughout the year, it would be like a symphony made of trumpets alone. There is so much nuance, so many shades of feeling, to our relationship with Hakadosh Boruch Hu. There is an instrument that we need to learn, a whole new language in fact — the language of the neshoma.

The Anshei Kneses HaGedola knew this language. They captured it for us; they arranged the music and wrote the score. When we daven, pronounce each word, and learn its meanings, we are doing our neshoma the indescribable favor of learning her language! Through tefillah, our neshoma can sing.

Indeed, when we learn *peirush hamilos*, when we dwell on the meaning of the words and think about how we can relate to them, when we pay attention to the flow and the cadence and the beauty of the tefillos, we begin to resonate with the music in the siddur. It is no coincidence that our Rebbeim would sing during tefillah. Think of the niggunim of the Tzemach Tzedek, which Chassidim learned by overhearing their Rebbe's davening.

As a young child, the Frierdiker Rebbe once told his uncle the Raza, "Father is eating and davening," when he was actually singing niggunim during a meal. He was so accustomed to hearing his father, the Rebbe Rashab, sing while davening, that he thought the word davening meant singing. Likkutei Dibburim<sup>7</sup> is replete with similarly evocative descriptions of Chassidim davening, singing, humming; descriptions that wrap us up in the beauty of tefillah.

This discussion addresses the question that many people have about the seemingly limiting nature of the Nusach Hatefillah. But on the contrary — the words of tefillah do not limit us. Instead, they set our neshoma free.



\*\*\*

The Alter Rebbe was at a crossroads when he needed to choose whether to continue his studies in Vilna, the famed seat of Torah scholarship at that time, or Mezritch, the seat of Chassidus. His brother, the Maharil, advised him: "In Vilna, they teach you how to learn, but you already know how to learn. In Mezritch, they teach you how to daven, and that you do not yet know how to do. Go to Mezritch."

If the bottom line of Chassidus, of choosing Mezritch, is represented by tefillah, it deserves a fundamental place in our lives and in our chinuch. And when we do focus on tefillah, although the *what* is vitally important, remember the Frierdiker Rebbe's urging that we focus on the *how*. After all, the *what* of davening — its meticulous *halachos*, its translation, and even its deeper meaning — is surely something the Alter Rebbe already knew. It is the *how* of davening, which is the gateway to the entire path of avodah and of Chassidus, which he was looking for in Mezritch.

We are the Mezritch for our students and for our children. Let's give them one of the greatest gifts that Chassidus gives us — the *how* of tefillah. ■

1. ספר השיחות לה"ק תש"ד-קכד ("התפילה והעבוד", הרב יקותיאל גרין, דף 156)

2. See also Likkutei Torah on Parshas Ki Seitzei, where the Alter Rebbe describes the time of tefillah as a time of battle, and at war, everything "shines" because our *kochos* are brought out to the utmost. (Many thanks to Rabbi Hirsch Rabiski, shaliach in Toronto, CA, for making this connection.)

3. See the Tanya's explanation in פרק י"ב of the *roshem*, the lasting impression, that tefillah leaves on a person for the remainder of the day.

4. מלאכי ג'יב

5. היום יום ב' אלול

6. 'קצש"ע סימן ו' סעיף א

7. See for example Volume 1, page 242-246 (English translation) - especially recommended to learn/teach during Elul and the Yamim Noraim!



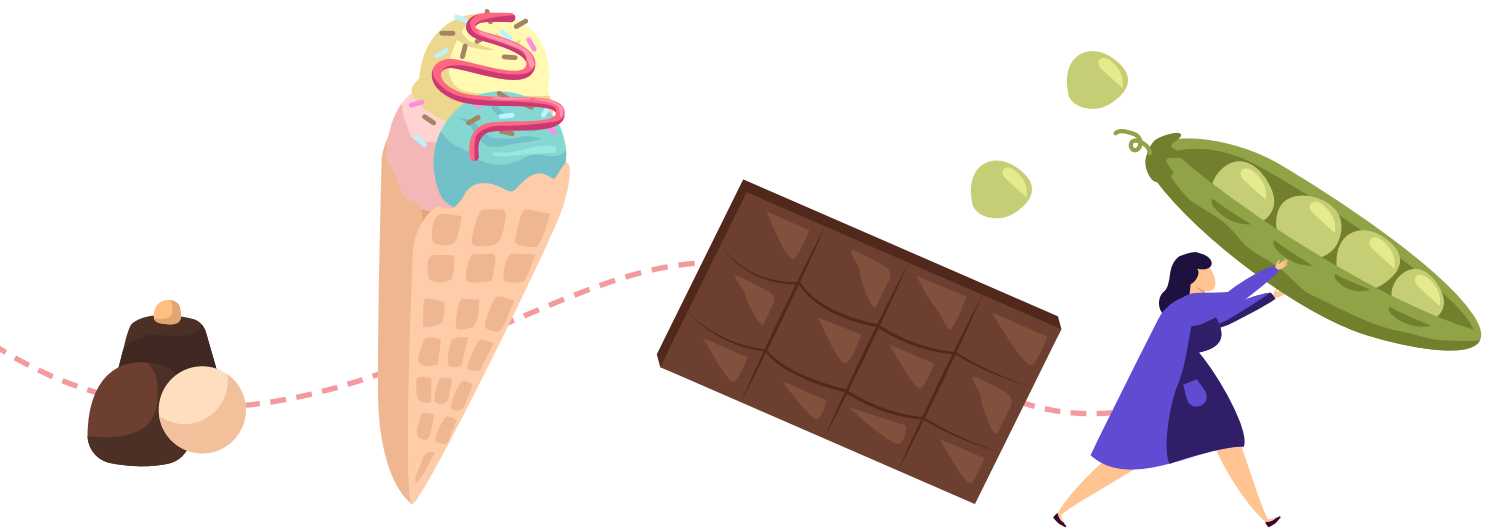


# SUGAR LOVERS ANONYMOUS

SOBERING UP *from* AN  
ADDICTION *to* ALL THINGS SWEET

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



## DID YOU EAT BREAKFAST TODAY?

On those mornings when you're rushing, grabbing a granola bar for the road or finishing a half-eaten bag of chips you found in the car, how do you feel? What about the mornings when you sit down with a steaming mug of tea, carefully buttering your toast and sprinkling freshly ground pepper on your eggs?

I'll be honest; over the last few months, I had gotten lazy. Pretzels and cheese were lunch every single day. There just wasn't time for anything better than that! If I did, on the chance occasion, make eggs, I didn't even bother adding salt — the clock was ticking and I had to be at pickup in how long — oh, man!

*Venishmartem me'od le'nafshoseichem* - a famous Torah obligation but one that I didn't give much thought to until recently. The Rambam writes in Hilchos De'os in chapter 4 that, "maintaining a healthy and whole body is an integral part of [one's] *Avodas Hashem*." As well, in a letter to his son, the Mezritcher Maggid writes, "A small hole in the body causes a large hole in the neshoma." It is with this premise in mind that I strive to make healthier choices when it comes to my food and meals.

Food is fuel. What we put into our bodies can power us through everything we need to get done. Or it can drain us.

Food is also medicine. The right foods can truly help our bodies heal.

Can I get away with cereal, yogurt, pizza, hot dogs, pancakes, or fish sticks for dinner every night because my kids love that? Or do I want to train my kids to eat broccoli, radishes, celery, zucchini, brussels sprouts, mushrooms, quinoa, lentils, garlic, and kale?

So lately I've been trying to step it up when it comes to what I eat and what I serve my kids. My husband loves a well-prepared meal so he's been thrilled.

*The Mezritcher Maggid writes, "A small hole in the body causes a large hole in the neshoma." It is with this premise in mind that I strive to make healthier choices when it comes to my food and meals.*

"I'm really fine with eating healthy," he said after a few days of having power lunch bowls served to him at his home office.

"I think you might be fine with any food that's served to you on a plate with a fork, right?"

We both laughed.

As with any new initiative, there are two strategies: *sur mera*, eliminating the obstacles; and *aseh tov*, setting yourself up for success.

So here are a few examples of my plan in action:

## FOR THE KIDS:

**Sur Mera:** My oldest son, who is five, is happy to eat twelve squeeze-pouch yogurts a day and nothing else. I can't do that, of course, because have you seen how much those things cost? But even more importantly, those yogurts are PACKED with sugar. So no more of that.

**Aseh Tov:** My kids love smoothies! I got a huge package of spinach along with chia seeds, flax seeds, and nuts. The berries and bananas will make everything sweet, and with that fun purple color and a straw, my kids will not miss their squeezies for a minute.



## WHITE IS THE ENEMY

White sugar, white flour, white rice — these things are heavily processed, contain few nutrients, and are toxic to our bodies. They spike blood sugar and make it so much harder to stay regulated. Sugar is clearly linked to acne. There are tons of studies out there showing how processed foods are connected to diseases. Food coloring can mess with our nervous systems. High fructose corn syrup is a foreign substance that our body has a very hard time dealing with. Margarine has been linked to lots of different sicknesses, including cancer (yikes). So what does this mean for us? We should really psych ourselves up to HATE things that are bad for us. Look at a fruit roll-up and say "Gross! Do you know the links between Red 40 and allergies, ADHD, migraines, and more?"

## SNACKS :

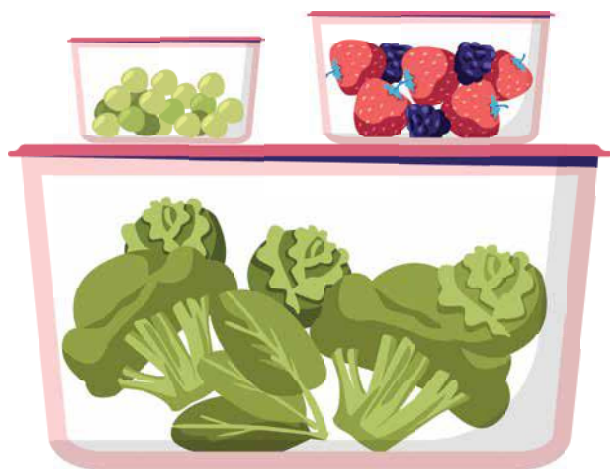
**Sur Mera:** I'm addicted to sugar. Every time I pass the kitchen I crave something. I work with a bag of food next to my desk at all times — usually chocolate chips, which I eat one at a time so they last longer. But not anymore. The easiest way to stop this habit is to stop buying treats. So now I literally have nothing to choose from.

**Aseh Tov:** The need for a snack while I work doesn't always have to do with the food itself. Sometimes I just need a little something to boost me up. Exit sugar and enter... tea! Yes, hot drinks have a calming and regulating effect on anxiety. And tea tastes kind of sweet, even without the sugar. Plus, I'm going caffeine-free, so there really are only benefits here. My urn is full, and now I think it's time to splurge on some Harney and Sons Sweet Cinnamon (my favorite flavor ever).

## EVENTS :

**Sur Mera:** Birthday parties, l'chaims, outings — these get tricky when it comes to eating healthy. It's hard to hold back when buffets of goodies surround us. So what's the game plan? I start by making sure that my family does not show up to an event hungry. I have more self-control that way, and my kids are less interested in candy, too.

**Aseh Tov:** Events are busy, and I usually find it hard to eat more than a few things. So if I fill my plate with something innocent right away, like salad, then by the time I make it to the ice cream bar I'm already one foot out the door. ■



## THE Healthy EATING TEST

You get one point for each statement that's true. Multiply your answer by four and that's your sugar score!

- ☐ I don't drink coffee with sugar.
- ☐ I don't drink tea with sugar.
- ☐ I only eat plain yogurt.
- ☐ My kids only eat plain yogurt.
- ☐ My kids only eat vanilla yogurt because the strawberry flavor has Red 40.
- ☐ I don't buy white sugar.
- ☐ I don't buy white flour.
- ☐ I don't ever use margarine.
- ☐ There is no candy in my house at the moment.
- ☐ There are no baked goods in my house at the moment.
- ☐ I only drink water or seltzer.
- ☐ I don't buy juice or soda.
- ☐ I don't buy white bread.
- ☐ I only buy Ezekiel-style or sourdough bread.
- ☐ I only eat bread on Shabbos.
- ☐ I buy pasture-raised eggs.
- ☐ I buy mostly organic produce.
- ☐ I try to buy grass-fed meat whenever I can.
- ☐ I try to buy wild salmon instead of farmed fish.
- ☐ I make brown or basmati rice instead of white rice.
- ☐ I have more than four different fruits available to eat in my house right now.
- ☐ I have more than four different vegetables available to eat in my house right now.
- ☐ I served fruit or vegetables at every meal today.
- ☐ I only buy unsweetened applesauce.
- ☐ I check labels to look for added sugar.



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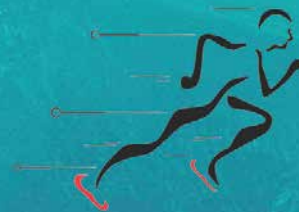
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# Confessions of a Quitter

## LESSONS FROM MY SHORT-LIVED CAREER AS A TEACHER

---

Pessi (Tauber) Stolik, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5755 (1995)*



I always knew I was going to be a teacher. I loved to learn — all subjects — but especially language and math. I would spend hours tutoring and in study groups just so I could see a classmate’s face light up when she finally understood a sticky subject. Straight out of seminary, I started teaching English and math to the sixth grade at my alma mater, Bais Rivkah. But I was a miserable failure in the classroom.

I didn’t last a year.

Before I even got to first-term report cards, I had moved on to preschool. I finished the year as an assistant and then became a head teacher in kindergarten at a Long Island school.

“Isn’t it great to catch them when it’s still fun — before we force them into desks against their nature and inclination for hours a day?” my Aunt Rochel once asked me. A veteran *mechaneches* with five decades of experience in the classroom, she spent the first half of her career in elementary school and the second, more happily, as the famous Morah Yaffe of Bais Rivkah Head Start.

Yes, preschool was comfortable, clear-cut, and brought out my creative side; it was also a cover for what I viewed as my biggest shortcomings as a teacher.

Like disciplining students. I still can’t say exactly why I couldn’t do this properly. I’d had good, intense training from Dr. Ray Lewis, an education professor of renown from Melbourne. When I started to struggle as a disciplinarian and my math classes were turning rowdy, I attended some workshops on classroom management. Throughout those fraught two-and-a-half months at the front of that chaotic sixth-grade classroom, I also benefited from the support and professional expertise of upper elementary school teachers who were at Bais Rivkah for decades, as well as intervention from the attentive *hanhalah*.

My mentors listened and observed. They assured me that it wasn’t an innate character flaw that prevented me from being able to teach or caused the cycle of misbehavior. I wasn’t a boring instructor unable to get the girls to engage or a reactionary prone to losing it during flare-ups in the classroom. “Look, it’s better in English class,” they said. (It was far from perfect.)

They offered advice — small tweaks that made day-to-day operations bearable. “You’re all over the place. Sit behind the teacher’s desk, so you command respect,” the assistant principal said. “I stand in the doorway stone-faced and don’t enter the classroom until there’s perfect decorum,” my old science teacher shared. I was learning all of my former teachers’ best secrets.

“Toughen up, it will get better,” they encouraged.

Honestly, had I persevered on that path instead of retreating from Church Avenue back to Crown Street and preschool, I would probably have been fine. More experience would have surely improved my performance. My nurturing, affirmative leadership qualities have grown in the interim years in my role as a mother and a manager in the workplace, so it’s con-

## *I was a miserable failure in the classroom.*

ceivable that I would be a successful English teacher.

Preschool though- it was oh, so much better. “Circle Time” was limited to ten, maybe fifteen, minutes, morning and afternoon. Oral lessons were accompanied by felt boards, wipe-off storyboards, student participation (no hand-raising required, just respect for someone else speaking), and sometimes even puppets with funny voices. The rest of the time we played and laughed and sang. Discipline was a no-brainer — it required the basic preemptive structure of a regular schedule and good classroom flow. From the teacher: good communication (“Ten minutes left to play!”), doses of positive encouragement and, when absolutely needed, gentle redirection.

I loved preschool. I stayed there for twenty years.

\*\*\*

After my fourth child was born, I started working from home, guided by another passion of mine — writing and editing. I still loved working on kids’ educational projects best. My eventual ascension to full-time work as the editor-in-chief of a popular Tzivos Hashem children’s magazine followed by my appointment as Director of Curriculum at Tut Altz Kids all felt like — sorry, pun police — a life mission fulfilled.

My past follows me. No matter how many years have gone by, that awkward and inexperienced nineteen-year-old lives in the back of my mind. But I have recently discovered that it rears its presence in a way that can only be described as redemptive.





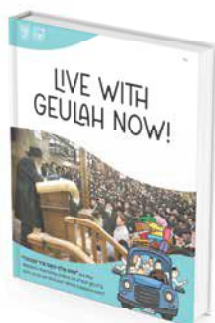
Rochel, Shmuli, and Yosef Stolik are top-notch Tut Altz beta testers as they take a first peek at their mother's most recent publication.

This past year, my work life entailed planning, directing, and honing the content for our Live With Geulah Now! Curriculum for grade-school children. When I talk (or more often communicate via virtual workspaces and Google Docs) to my colleagues, we discuss modern educational ideals that have come a long way from the days of instruction-centered learning. We design creative curricula and multimedia aids that put teachers in the back of the classroom, at least part of the time. The foundational learning texts are magazine-quality learning booklets that children can study completely on their own or with a chavrusa.

I like to think of our lessons as the preschool model, all grown up: they're colorful and anecdotal, imaginative and playful, experiential, group-based, and kinesthetic. For every hour of book learning, there's a fun

activity sheet and a team-building game. My favorite part of the job is hearing from our clientele, educators across the spectrum, so I know this: to successfully

*No matter how many years have gone by, that awkward and inexperienced nineteen-year-old lives in the back of my mind. But I have recently discovered that it rears its presence in a way that can only be described as redemptive.*



teach a Tut Altz class, I could sit behind the desk or in front of it, be a novice or an old-timer, a Type A or Type B personality.

Twenty-six years later, the teacher who quit can still be a teacher, after all. ■

View all Tut Altz materials for school or home at [www.tutaltz.com/kids](http://www.tutaltz.com/kids).



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# ALUMNAE

*Who, What, Where*  
The Beauty of Friendship



Miriam Weiss  
Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5762 (2002)*

## CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

I am a coordinator for the Rofeh Cholim Cancer Society (RCCS), an organization that helps people who are fighting cancer, as well as their families. Every year, RCCS holds a Chinese auction to raise important funds for the work they're doing.

Before the pandemic, one of the ways they would network and spread awareness was through hosting parties in private homes throughout different communities, such as Flatbush, Williamsburg, Crown Heights, and even in Florida. There would be food and entertainment. They would sell tickets for their upcoming auction. A representative from RCCS would then come to collect the tickets for the auction. Since Covid, we haven't been doing in-person parties, and the events and auction have all been online.

I have been hosting parties for eleven years, and five years ago, I became the coordinator for the Crown Heights community. My work is to network, to have people sign up for the party and to participate in the auction. The auction used to raise fifty to sixty thousand dollars; but since Covid hit, we have proudly been able to raise the bar, raising one hundred thousand dollars each year.

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN RCCS?

I used to not know what RCCS even was. To me, it was just another auction catalog we'd get in the mail and throw out. Rochie (Lebovic) Korolitzky was the coordinator of the events in Crown Heights and one day she posted on Facebook that she was looking for people to get involved. It piqued my interest, because I enjoy hosting parties and events so I asked her for more information. She explained to me what RCCS was and it started from there. First, I only hosted parties, and then when it was getting overwhelming for Rochie, as she is also involved in Bikur Cholim, I took over her role as coordinator. When I started, I had thought of two of my Bais Rivkah classmates, who were sick with cancer and had passed away. I was friends with them and I wanted to honor their memory.

## CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THOSE TWO SPECIAL GIRLS?

These two girls were so special. Even when things in life got hard for them, you would never have known from the smile on their faces. They both had such joy in life that it was contagious and spread to everyone around them.

Chana (Raskin) Wolvovsky A"H was someone who always had a smile on her face. Chana was beautiful not just on the outside, but where it counted the most. She worked hard to make everyone around her feel included, and she had all types of friends. Until this day, her friends still gather in her memory. The love and care she showed for everyone truly came from her heart.

Chaya Gottlieb A"H was always involved with her friends and family, making sure everyone was included. She made a point to be helpful and kind. She very much enjoyed being outdoors and living life to the fullest. She was always one of the first to volunteer to help out with programs.

If you would meet either of them on the street they always had an extra minute for you.

## HOW DID YOUR YEARS IN BAIS RIVKAH IMPACT YOU?

Bais Rivkah is where I made all of my friends! I'm an extrovert and I loved the social part of high school.

In high school, I was always collecting money for different things, whether it was for a graduation trip or for a family friend who had a rare disease. I don't find it difficult because it's not for me! No one should ever need it, but I like to help people and the money being raised is always going to people who really need it.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST INSPIRING PART OF YOUR WORK?

Friends of mine have told me how RCCS helped their family members. It's inspiring to hear the stories of how families got help in their time of need.

## HOW DO YOU FIT THIS AMAZING WORK IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

My main job is very flexible so I have time to help



RCCS with their campaign. I do have to put in the time and effort, but I enjoy it and I wanted to do something in memory of my high school friends so it's part of my yearly schedule at this point.

## WHAT IS A MESSAGE YOU HAVE FOR ALUMNAE AND CURRENT BAIS RIVKAH STUDENTS?

We should always be on the giving end rather than the receiving end. No one should ever need the help of RCCS (or any such organization) so if you don't need it, it's a brocha — try to be on the giving end. The more you give, the more brochos you receive and always be kind. That's who Chana and Chaya A"H were.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE YOUR SPECIAL WORK WITH EM-BRACE READERS! WE HOPE AND DAVEN THAT A TIME WILL COME SOON WHEN RCCS AND SICKNESS WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST! ■

# ALWAYS ON CALL

## *a Doula's Life*

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Interview with  
Fraydie (Smith) Liberow, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5745 (1985)*

Elkie (Lipszyc) Finkelstein, Brooklyn, NY  
*Graduating class of 5751 (1991)*

Interviewed by Gitty Krinsky



*Fraydie and Elkie both work as birth doulas. Throughout the years, they have both assisted dozens of mothers through the birthing process, from beginning to end.*

## How did you get into this profession?

*Fraidy*: It's very interesting, actually. I had helped women during birth even before becoming a doula. I didn't have the training and wasn't being paid, but I enjoyed it and wanted to help. In 5773 (2013), someone asked me if I wanted to take a doula course with her. The rest is history. I have been doing it ever since.

*Elkie*: I love helping people and I wanted a job that would allow me more flexibility and leeway for time for my family and myself.

## What do you love most about your job?

*Fraidy*: It's an immensely rewarding job. It's so beautiful to help bring new life into the world.

*Elkie*: There is nothing like watching the miracle of birth. The beauty of the whole process is just incredible. It gives me such a good feeling when I see the *nissim* of Hashem firsthand.

## How does your role impact the birthing mother?

*Fraidy*: I'm there as emotional and physical support for the mother. Some women don't have any family members with them and their husbands can't provide the physical support that many women need during birth. Through the pain, women often feel like they can't continue. I am there to show them that they can. Our relationship doesn't just start on the day of the birth — a deeper connection is developed in the months leading up to the birth. Sometimes things happen during labor as a result of emotions the woman isn't even aware of; for example, trauma from her youth can cause her labor to stop. In such situations, I work with the woman to find the root and

*Through the pain, women often feel like they can't continue. I am there to show them that they can.*

deal with it instead of only focusing on the symptom it causes.

*Elkie*: As Fraidy said, we are there to support women with their needs and help them find comfort during birth. My hope is to lead them toward a smoother birthing process. Something I assist a new mother with is finding her voice to express how she wants her birth to look. I do not try to plant ideas into her head. My goal is to guide her to realize her dreams for birth. I can't speak for her, but I help her through the decision making process, ultimately leading her to bring out her true desires.

*There is so much kedusha at the time of birth, bringing a new neshoma into the world. What is your role in the mothers' experience b'ruchniyus?*

*Fraidy*: I have a *ruchniyus hachona* for birth according to Chassidus that I review with all women. Throughout labor, I play My First Niggunim, and as soon as the baby is born I turn on a recording of the Rebbe saying Modeh Ani and Shema. No matter what community they are from, the parents are always moved by this way of welcoming a new baby into the world.

*Elkie*: It really depends on the person, and I do what the mother wants. Depending on the community, there are different minhagim pertaining to the birth, so when I talk to mothers before birth, I try to get a feel of what they want. Some women want me to bring along a playlist of niggunim; others ask for specific seforim. I'll give ideas for segulos and teach them halachos that they



don't necessarily know. My goal in this area is to bring the woman's ruchniyus into the birth in her special way.

## *What does your role look like pre-birth?*

*Fragdie:* I meet with the woman to develop a connection, we do exercises together as preparation for the birth, and work on building a sense of trust. I am there to be her go-to person for any questions that may come up throughout the pregnancy. Even if it's a medical concern, many women will turn to their doula to check if what they're experiencing

*I sleep in "half mode" — ready to be woken at any time, carry my phone at all times, and sometimes end up away from home for Shabbos or Yom Tov.*

is normal before turning to their doctor. (It goes without saying that for any true medical concern, a doula is not enough and a doctor should be consulted.) I'm there for them as a support throughout the pregnancy and birthing process. A lot of a doula's job is to help the woman prepare her body for birth.

*Ellie:* I'm available for her as soon as I'm hired. Different people have different needs. Some need a "Mommy" for nine months, and some I don't hear anything from until they are in labor. Once a mother hits her ninth month, I'm on call for her 24/7. I sleep in "half mode" — ready to be woken at any time, carry my phone at all times, and sometimes end up away from home for Shabbos or Yom Tov.



## *The Rebbe's Hora's for Pregnancy & Birth:*

*Below are some of the Rebbe's teachings on minhagim related to birth, excerpted from Kovetz Minhagim: Customs of Pregnancy and Birth. For more information, this book is available online at sie.org.*

- **It is customary** to hang a Shir Lamaalos in the room of the new mother and the newborn, immediately upon the expectant mother's arrival at the hospital. This serves as a safeguard for the mother etc., both during the birth itself so that it will proceed normally and easily, and also during the following days, so that they will survive for a long life.
- **According to the instructions** issued by the Tzemach Tzedek to his sons during the birth of the Rebbe Maharash, the following chapters of Tehillim are recited: 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 33, 47, 72, 86, 90, 91, 92, 93, 104, 112, and 113 to the end.

## *What impact did Bais Rivkah have on you?*

*Fragdie:* I loved it! I loved that there were always extracurricular activities and I loved connections built within the school walls. I graduated in 5745 in a class of around fifty girls. We now have an active WhatsApp chat and are constantly in touch. Our class is like one big family; we attend each other's simchos — a classmate recently made a wedding and women flew in from out of the country! The group chat didn't magically create something from nothing. A beautiful *achdus* existed in our grade throughout all our school years and only grows stronger as time goes by.

*Ellie:* I still go to events that my grade arranges from time to time. I really enjoy these opportunities to connect with my classmates and be back in the Bais Rivkah environment.

## *What message would you*

## *like to leave with expectant mothers?*

*Fraydie:* During your ninth month you are my priority — I have missed family simchos for births. Remember, we doulas chose this career and in doing so agreed to be on call at all times. We're here to help so don't hesitate to reach out at any time of day or night.

*Elkie:* We are here for you to make this process the smoothest it can possibly be.

## **TIPS FROM FRAYDIE & ELKIE:**

1 When choosing a doula, remember that it's like a shidduch. Just because that specific doula worked for someone else doesn't mean she's the right person for you. We end up making strong connections with our clients, so make sure you are comfortable with your prospective doula.

*Our class is like one big family; we attend each other's simchos — a classmate recently made a wedding and women flew in from out of the country!*

2 Physically prepare your body for birth:

- Eat well.
- Exercise regularly — not only during pregnancy but at all times. Exercising before, during, and after birth is really important for your body and helps with a smoother birth. Pelvic floor exercises specifically will help situate the baby in the optimal position.
- Make sure to show up to all your prenatal visits.

3 Stay home as long as you can. There's nothing wrong with using an epidural; a doula is there to support you no matter what you choose regarding your birth. That being said, if a woman decides that she doesn't want to have an epidural, our advice would be to stay at home as long as possible once labor starts. Once you're in the hospital, your stress levels go up, and you are more likely to give up as a result. In general, you'll end up fighting less when you're in the calm environment of your own home. It goes without saying that you should be responsible about it, though; don't risk not making it to the hospital in time. If you usually have quick labors, don't play around.

4 Take birthing classes. There are many new approaches that can be very helpful to you, both during pregnancy and during labor and birth.

*Thank you so much Fraydie and Elkie for all the insight and tips! May everyone be benched with many healthy children with smooth pregnancies, labors, and births! ■*



# A Taste of Bais Rivkah



Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Fast, easy,  
picky eater-friendly  
recipes for the  
busy mother!

## FAST, EASY, PICKY EATER- FRIENDLY recipes for the busy woman!

A new column for the busy woman who is looking to make nutritious, healthy, and delicious meals in a short amount of time!

We'd love to hear from you! Send us your quick and easy recipes. If you'd like to be featured in the next issue, please email [esty@baisrivkah.edu](mailto:esty@baisrivkah.edu)



## FEATURED MOTHER:

Esty (Kessler) Borenstein, Crown Heights  
*Graduating Class of 5764 (2004)*

## ABOUT:

As the owner of Prestige Embroidery ("The Original Leather Tallis and Tefillin Bag"), I always come home at the same time as my children. This makes dinner making difficult. I need to whip up a meal while attending to the kids, plus make sure my picky eaters have a proper meal, without compromising the rest of the family on a delicious dinner. Over the years, I've compiled recipes that are easy to make, with some tricks to quicken the process as well as easy adjustments for the picky children. I have one child who won't touch chicken, two who won't touch tomatoes or ketchup, one who can't have vegetables with his food, etc. Boruch Hashem for my Italian husband, they all like pasta. (Only Barilla brand and it must be cooked exactly like the box instructions).

Here is a list of my children's favorite dinners: (I.e. the ones that they complain the least about.)





## CHIENA'S MEATBALLS

*Recipe Credit: Chiena (Borenstein) Hershkop  
Graduating Class of 5766 (2006)*

For this recipe, I use estimates and eyeball the amounts.

### INGREDIENTS

Approx. 2-3 lbs ground meat

1 egg per pound of ground meat

About ½ cup breadcrumbs, adjusted to  
desired consistency

A few squirts ketchup

Salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder,  
to taste

1 jar marinara sauce

1 ½ jars filled with water

Optional: spices mentioned above

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix first six ingredients in a bowl.
2. Shape meat into balls and place in pot along with marinara sauce and water.
3. Bring pot to boil and cook on low flame for 40 minutes.

*Alternative:* Place in a 9x13 pan. Bake for 2 hours at 350°.



## MEAT PIZZA

### INGREDIENTS

Pas thin pizza crust

1.5 lbs chopped meat

Salt, pepper, garlic powder, to taste

¾ cup BBQ sauce

1 tbsp honey

1 tbsp mustard

4 tbsp ketchup

Spicy option: chili sauce

Optional toppings:

Onion, mushrooms and/or red pepper, sliced  
and sauteed, spicy mayo



## DIRECTIONS:

1. Brown 1.5 lb chopped meat using wooden spoon. Spill out excess liquid. Mix in the rest of the sauce ingredients.
2. Layer meat and vegetables on Pas thin pizza crust. You can cut the dough first for easy serving.
3. Bake for 15 minutes at 375°.

*Alternative uses for meat:* make Shabbos afternoon meat roll. Roll meat mixture in flaky dough and follow box instructions for bake time. You can also make kreplach with the flaky dough squares and meat mixture.



## TACOS

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ lb chopped meat
- 1 ½ cups hot water
- 3 tbsp paprika
- Salt
- Garlic powder

Dice and place in separate bowls:  
Pickles

- Lettuce
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Peppers
- Mushrooms, sauteed
- Onions, sauteed

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Brown chopped meat with wooden spoon. Spill out excess liquid. Mix in hot water and spices. Cook until most of the liquid is gone.
2. Set out meat, veggies, and tacos, and each person can create a personalized taco.

Alternatively, eat as a salad with taco broken into pieces. Or by using small-size wraps and heating them directly on the stove.



## TUNA PATTIES

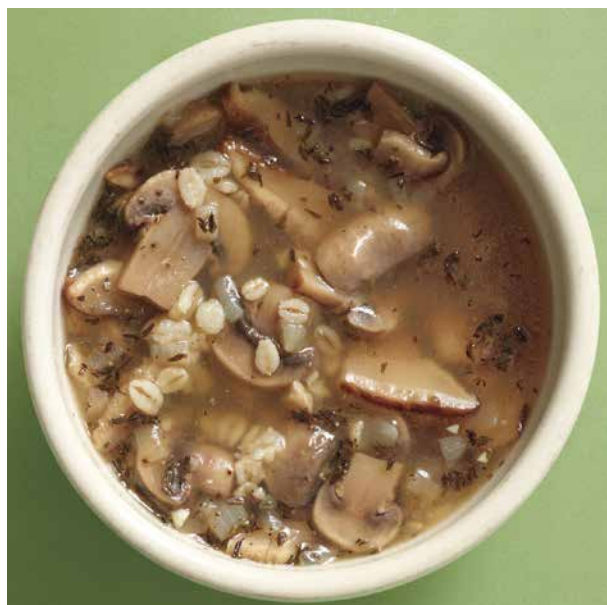
### INGREDIENTS

- 1 can tuna
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp bread crumbs
- 1 tbsp everything bagel spice
- (allergen-free option: onion powder and salt)

Optional: mashed chickpeas for added nutrients and calories

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix all ingredients and shape into patties.
  2. Fry on both sides for a few minutes over medium flame.
  3. Do not squeeze patties for optimal taste.
  4. Yields 2 servings. Multiply as needed.
- 



## MUSHROOM BARLEY SOUP

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 onions
- 2 packages of mushrooms
- 6 crushed garlic cubes
- Dash of parsley flakes (fresh is always better)
- 8 cups hot water
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- Salt to taste
- 1 tsp paprika
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup barley

1. Sauté the onions. When translucent, add mushrooms, garlic and parsley. Sauté until mushrooms are browned.
  2. Add hot water and bring to a boil. Mix in soy sauce, salt, paprika and barley. Cook on low flame for 50 minutes. ■
- 

## Kitchen Hack:

For browning and separating minced meat, I've always used a potato masher and it came out decent. But now I use a wooden spoon (in order to protect the metal pan). With a fast motion, bang the meat. Let sit for two minutes. Mix and repeat. Keep repeating the process until the meat is all separated and browned.



# - BAIS RIVKAH - Talent



## STUCK

### *A Cancer Girl's Diary*

Anonymous

There's a car in front of me  
A truck behind me  
And the next exit is ten miles away.  
Oh and we're not moving.  
The only thing moving is our ETA.

It happens to us all,  
Getting stuck in traffic jams.  
Some are short lived  
And end with a sigh of relief  
And some take extended amount of time  
And leave us frustrated for a while.

In life we like to move,  
We like to accomplish  
We like to fulfill.  
And being stuck in traffic lets us do none of that.

"Gam zeh yaavor"  
We are told.  
One day  
This will be history.  
You won't even remember it.

I am excited for that moment  
That the traffic lets up  
And we begin to move again.  
But I don't allow my excitement for the  
future to let the present slip through my fingers.

As stuck as I feel  
I will find a way to move within the traffic jam.  
I will not wait for the traffic to "yaavor"  
In order to accomplish.

I will use the time in traffic to turn to my Creator  
Spend some quality time with Him.



Try to figure out what He's trying to teach me,  
And I will turn up the volume button in the car  
So that I can bounce to the music

## MASTER OF IT ALL

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

Money is a thing that may mean lots to you  
It may feel that it controls many things that you do  
So I'm here to tell you there is a Master of it  
And it's not dependent on what you do to acquire it

This Master wants to give you abundance of it  
He gives in many different ways- actually without limit  
Just the medium hides the Giver  
So it may seem the money came from the fundraiser

Or it may seem it came from the job or that guy  
And if not for that - oh my oh my  
No no -remember who is the true Source  
Of life and sustenance- you know of course!

So before you rely on that job or guy  
And feel like you can't fulfill your mission and dreams  
so high  
Because they have demands that you can't seem to  
fulfill  
Know that only Hashem is the One to expect of us and  
we can fulfill

He's the only One who's got the control  
And He's ready to give you it all  
Open your heart to the mission He's given you  
and you'll find Him providing abundantly for all that you do



# MAKE NEW FRIENDS BUT KEEP THE OLD

This **כ"ב שבט**, BR EmBRace challenges every grade of alumnae to make a **הקהל** gathering.

## It's your school friends.

*(The ones who...ate french fries and tuna with you.)*

*(...who studied **חיל** אשת with you.)*

*(...who really want to see you again!)*

Don't let your grade be left out.

Email [alumni@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:alumni@bethrivkah.edu)  
to get involved in your grade's **הקהל**





# Keepsakes

## *Bais Rivkah graduation photos, 5730's (1970's).*

Do you recognize anyone in the photos or know the precise year? Let us know at [history@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:history@bethrivkah.edu)

Have photos of your Bais Rivkah experience? Please let us know.





***Class of 5719 (1959) photo:***

**Top row (L-R):** Esther Weissler, Chaya (Hodakov) Kramer, Lenore Heilbrun, Sara Schlisselfeld, Alice Sprung, Rita Title, Rachel (Kalmanson) Heber.

**Middle row (L-R):** Millie Angerman, Arlene Ginsberg, Tziporah Lish, Pearl Shapiro, Phyllis Sternfeld, Yocheved (Gordon) Baitelman, Branda (Brina) (Grinberg) Berkowitz.

**Bottom row (L-R):** Reva Weingot, Bracha (Sudak) Bogomilsky, Rebbetzin Matlin, L. Simakow, Sharon Bishop, Miriam (Locksen) Cunin.

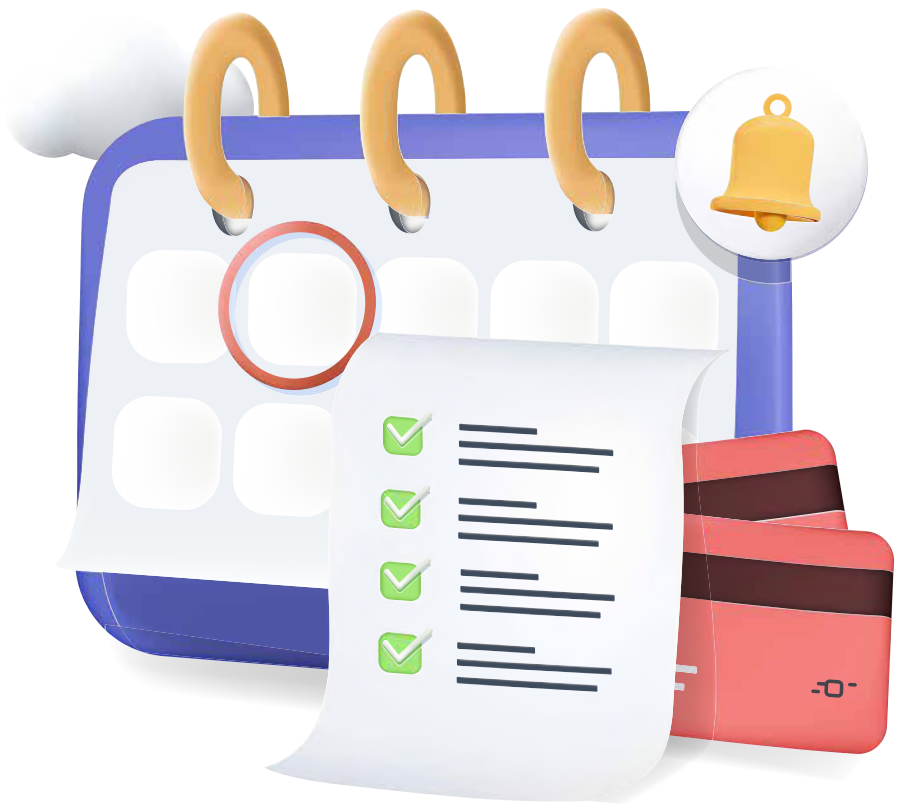
*Not in photo: Geraldine Stern*



# Be A Hakhel-er

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Gitty (Spritzer) Stolik, Crown Heights  
*Graduating Year of 5729 (1969)*



Why did the Rebbe mention 'shoemaker' in reference with how Hakhel should be run - as well as tailor, and farmer?

Why did the Rebbe share all the Hakhel organization details, even minute ones, with everyone at the farbrengen? (such as - how to file the Hakhel registration cards systematically and how to avoid having duplicate listings, what exactly should be printed on each card, etc.)

Did you even know that the Rebbe asked everyone to sign up for Hakhel using a physical card?

What does the word 'tefach' have to do with Hakhel?

Why did the Rebbe specify what size the sign-up cards should be?

Even before you discover answers to these questions, you probably learned something already -- that the Rebbe was very, very engaged in Hakhel, that there is momentous significance in it, and that we should give it our maximum focus and participation.

In order to fulfill our Hakhel participation, we need to know what is required of us.

## Hakhel Mindset #1: Hakhel Success

The Rebbe's Hakhel program had three important success boosters:

1. **Commitment power:** When we commit our pledges in writing, we are more likely to succeed. Sign up at [NsheiHakhel.com](http://NsheiHakhel.com).
2. **Monthly check-ins:** Keep the momentum flowing. Knowing that someone is 'watching' is a most powerful leverage on a person's behavior. (As famously discussed in Tanya, perek 41, 42, etc. "May the fear of Heaven be like the fear of man.")
3. **A central network:** This makes it possible to see the numbers adding up and feeds the excitement. Everyone's doing it! We get swept into the Hakhel fever. So we're not only maintaining the momentum (as the monthly reminders do)- we're creating more momentum! ברוב עם הדרת מלך "The greater the multitude the greater the King's glory" (Notice the words- that is Hakhel in a nutshell!)

## Hakhel Mindset #2: How to Hakhel

The Rebbe mapped out many instructions regarding the Hakhel setup, as if everyone at the farbrengen was part of the organizing committee.

He dictated details in rapid succession:

1. **Immediate action:** The Hakhel cards should be printed immediately – even though that meant doing it on Chol Hamoed!
2. **Keep it brief:** Cards should feature the name of the organization, a brief description, and contact information. Stick to a text that is user-friendly for all circles.
3. **Promote in major news outlets:** The cards

*Everyone is a "king" in some capacity; we all have leadership leverage on a person or group.*

should be reproduced in major newspapers so readers can cut them out and send them in.

4. **Organization of the cards:** They should be kept in alphabetical order. The Rebbe even explained how to avoid duplicate listings.
5. **Center hub:** Each community and school can have its own card system, but they should all feed into the central network.
6. **Hire a person:** A full-time person should be hired to manage registration, cards, and contacts.
7. **For which demographic:** For everyone! The goal is to reach every possible Jewish group! From chinuch establishments to shoemakers, tailors and farmers associations (notice the far-reaching possibilities!) And of course, our own outreach organizations such as Tzach and N'shei Chabad.

## Hakhel Mindset #3: Leadership Roles

Makes you wonder. Why didn't the Rebbe direct these details to the people running the Hakhel organization? Because each of us will! Each of us is empowered to act like a King.

Really?! Me, a King?

Yes! Here's how:







We all have status. Everyone is a "king" in some capacity, we all have leadership leverage on a person or group. And, here's something amazing that I recently discovered:

The Rebbe redefined — 'upgraded' — our leadership role, that the Nasi is hakol — everyone. (see Purim 5747 and other sichos)

Why is it so important to step into our King power?

Because the Hakhel initiative differs from the typical outreach model. In addition to joining a Hakhel, we use the "king" within us to reveal the King in the next person — and turn them on to form ongoing Hakhel gatherings in their own circles. Until everyone — all Yidden — will join!

### Hakhel Mindset #4: A specified size

I remember my amused but bemused reaction when I heard the Rebbe outline the project with explicit details. "Listen up, everyone, we're going to need 3" x 3" index cards for our next project." That's teacher talk! — so incongruous! I mean, this is the Rebbe at a farbrengen with adults. The Rebbe didn't say 3" x 3". He actually said, "The cards should be one tefach by one tefach." -approximately 3.2 inches square.

Why this specific size?

*Today's technology makes the magnitude of the Rebbe's vision for Hakhel more possible than ever.*

Answer: To connect the cards to Torah- a tefach is a measure used in Torah (for Sukka, lulav etc).

Every card will be in Hebrew, but wherever there is a need for an additional language, they should make the cards longer — 1 x 2 tefachim.

(Notice it's still based on the tefach measurement.)

### Hakhel Mindset #5: Abundant Brochos

Our chachomim teach, 'kos shel brocha' - a cup of blessing - should be raised up a tefach. Association with tefach brings our brochos 'up' to a more elevated place- brochos for children, health, parnosa, and - with shleimus, in a most complete manner.

עס איז אינגאנצן אן אנדערע ענין - It becomes a whole new reality!



Hakhel card benefits:

- By filling out a card, we join an initiative under authority of the Rebbe/King.
- Connecting the card to a tefach brings powerful brochos.
- The card is the Rebbe's signature running throughout the program!

### Hakhel Mindset #6: Hakhel and Geula

Notice how Hakhel aligns with the Geula process (you'll recognize the terms from the Rambam-Hilchos Melachim, chapter 11:4).

**Two examples:**

1. Hakhel goal: The overarching goal of Hakhel is to strengthen Yiddishkeit.  
Geula goal: ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בְּדָקָה — [Loosely translated] Moshiach will get all Yidden on board to follow Torah ways. Perfect match!
2. Hakhel goal: Gathering all Yidden under the Hakhel umbrella as part of the grand Hakhel initiative.  
Geula goal: וקיבץ נדחי ישראל — the ingathering of all Yidden (the very last activity of the presumed Moshiach when he establishes himself as Final Redeemer).

## Hakhel Mindset #7: Hakhel and Technology

Today's technology makes the magnitude of the Rebbe's vision for Hakhel more possible than ever. The Rebbe not only foresaw the development of technology, but he was the first to capitalize on it as a vehicle for Geula. When the Rebbe outlined this project, we had no idea, but he did.

## Hakhel Mindset #8: Parting Message

Participating in Hakhel - in any capacity, no matter what your background - is commitment to the one who arranged the whole project, from scratch! — The Rebbe, the Nasi, the King.

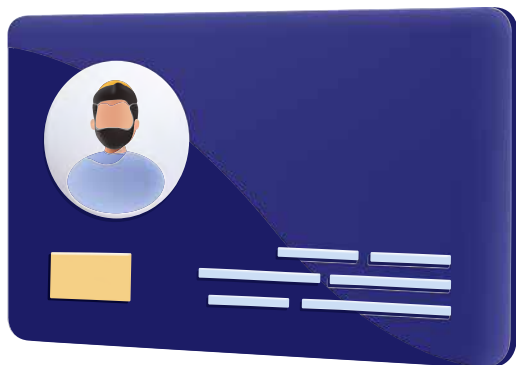
## Hakhel Mindset #9: Let's get practical

- Turn any encounter into a Hakhel.
- Turn any party or event into a Hakhel.
- Go through your contacts. Who might not have heard about Hakhel?



Then,

- Have a Hakhel with them.
- Ask them to add the Hakhel label to their meet-



ings and events (and some Torah words obviously). And,

- Can they organize one - and better yet - one per month.

Show them how simple and wonderful it is to bring the power of Hakhel into their events.

Let's go Hakhel-ing. Let's go Hakhel-king! ▀

*Credit:*

*The inspiration for this Hakhel Mindset series is a Hakhel publication 'Bima Gedola' published by HaMaaseh hu Ha'Ikar (A Call to Action). Available at ichossid.com (select 'Hebrew').*

*The Hakhel instructions were issued at the farbrengen of 13 Tishrei 5748.*





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