



EMBRACE

Uniting and inspiring the worldwide community of Bais Rivkah Alumnae



MONEY MATTERS

**GREAT LOSS, A HOLE TO FILL:
THREE BAIS RIVKAH STUDENTS
HELP EACH OTHER IN LOSS**

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**HOW TO BE BROKE
(OR AT LEAST PRETEND
TO BE)**

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FRONTLINES IN ERETZ YISROEL
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~B"H~

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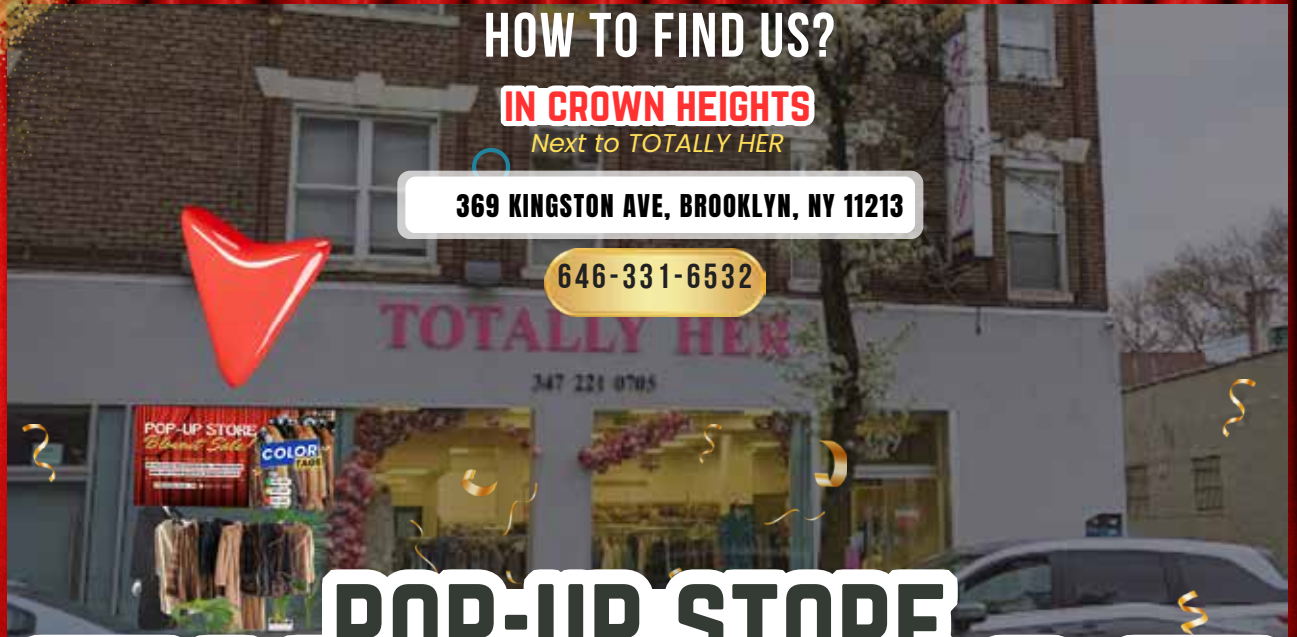
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Goldie Litvin's Journey of Education and Shlichus

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Note: Features and columns do not endorse or promote individual professions, and EmBRace does not assume responsibility for content on individual platforms or services advertised. The columns serve to inform alumnae.

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SPIRITUAL ABUNDANCE

Hashem decides each year how much money you will make.... Some people have more and some people have less. The beauty is that the Torah does not discriminate. Maaser is an obligation for all Yidden.



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ASKING FOR A FRIEND
Remember that as close and as precious as sibling relationships are, they should not come before the shalom bayis between a husband and wife.

From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

The Wheel of Fortune

By the Grace of G-d

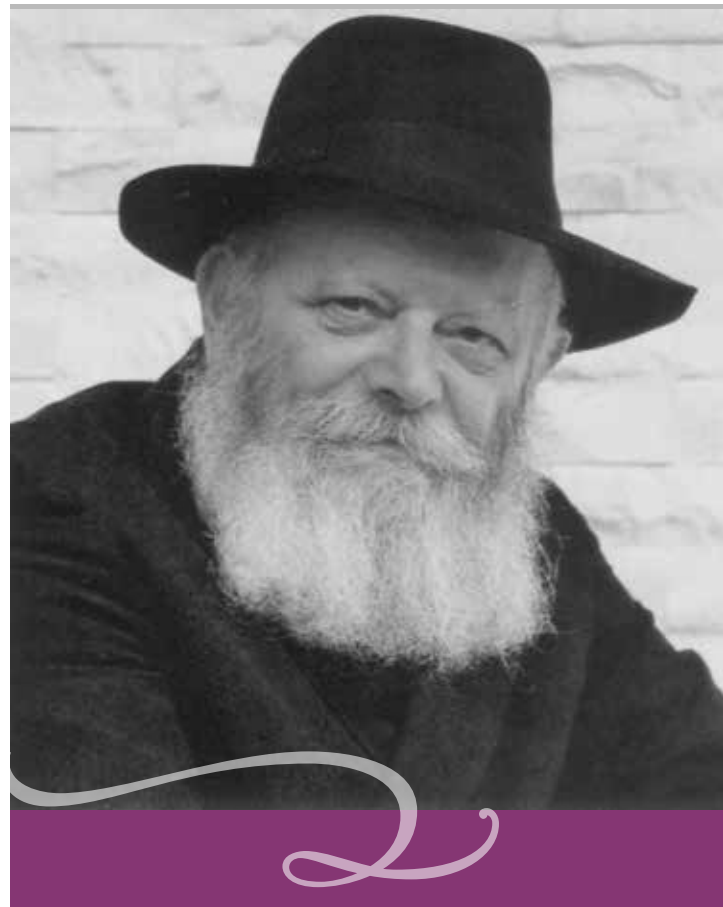
18th of Sivan, 5719 [June 24, 1959]

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your letter, in which you write about your anxiety in regard to the question of Parnassah.

Needless to say, I am much surprised at you, that you should allow yourself to be so affected by this. For you surely know how often our sages have impressed on us the importance of trust and confidence in G-d, in order that we realize that all difficulties encountered in life are only trials and tests of a passing nature. To be sure, the question of Parnassah is one of the most difficult tests — nevertheless, G-d does not subject one to a greater test than he can withstand, as our Rabbis expressed it, “According to the camel, so is its load.” The very trust in G-d is a vessel and channel to receive G-d’s blessings, apart from the fact that such confidence is good for one’s health, disposition, and therefore is also a natural means to the desired end. All the more so, since, as you write, you have



noticed an improvement in recent weeks. This should serve as an encouraging sign and greatly strengthen your trust in G-d. No doubt you also remember the commentary of my father-in-law of saintly memory, in regard to the saying of our Sages that “Life is like a turning wheel,” at which my father-in-law remarked that “When a print on the wheel reaches the lowest degree, it is bound to turn upwards again.”

As for your request for advice, in my opinion you ought to set a period of time for the study of Pniniyus of the Torah, namely, Chassidus, concerning which it is written in the Zohar (part 3, page 124b) “In the area of Pniniyus HaTorah there is no place for negative things and evil,” and as further explained in Iggeres HaKodesh, chapter 26.

In addition, I suggest that you should set aside a couple of pennies for Tzedakah every weekday

morning before prayer, and also before Minchah. Also to recite at least one Kapitel Tehillim after the morning prayers every day, including Shabbos and Yom Tov.

All the above should be Bli Neder, and at least until Rosh Hashanah. It would also be very good

The very trust in G-d is a vessel and channel to receive G-d's blessings, apart from the fact that such confidence is good for one's health, disposition, and therefore is also a natural means to the desired end.

for you to know by heart several Prakim Mishinayos, and at least one Perek Tanya.

I am confident that the above, together with an in-

creased measure of Bitachon will soon bring an improvement in your Parnassah.

In accordance with the teaching of our Sages (Bava Basra, 15:2) that money from a good and saintly source brings G-d's blessings, you will find enclosed a check from one of the treasuries for my father-in-law of saintly memory, to deposit to your business account, and may G-d grant that the predictions of our sages will be realized in your case also.

Hoping to hear good news from you,
With blessing,

[The Rebbe's signature]

Enclosed you will find a copy of a message, which I trust you will find useful. ■

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HOLY MONEY

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



A little before Tishrei, the EmBRace team met to discuss the theme for the Winter Issue of EmBRace. I was preparing for my son's Bar Mitzvah at the time, and I was in the midst of compiling a *Teshura* about my son's namesake, Reb Naftali Kravitsky. Among other things, I was always proud that my grandfather had been chosen by the Rebbe to run a gemach in Nachlas Har Chabad, and included that in the *Teshura*.

It reminded me of the story in *Likkutei Dibburim* of the Frierdike Rebbe. As a young child, he received a stipend from his parents and used it to run a gemach. At one point, most of the Frierdiker Rebbe's money was tied up and he had to decide whether to purchase a sefer or a watch.

"...Should I first buy the books, even though in the meantime I could manage by borrowing [books], or should I first buy the watch, which could not be borrowed? When the question had been duly weighed, the scales of my logic determined that the watch was more necessary, for it would be more useful towards disciplined timesaving."

I thought about the fact that as Yidden, nothing remains neutral — it all depends on what it is used for. Money is a tool that Hashem has given us to serve Him and make this world a *Dirah B'tachtonim*.

It ceases to be neutral and becomes holy when it is used to give Tzedakah, run a gemach, or provide for our families with the holy intention of living a life of Torah and Mitzvos.

We discussed how for the upcoming issue, we'd feature a few articles about money and how it can be used as the tool Hashem intended it to be.

Money is a tool that Hashem has given us to serve Him and make this world a Dirah B'tachtonim.

And then the attack on Simchas Torah happened. I first tried to wrack my brain to find a connection between the theme we'd decided on and the situation in Eretz Yisroel. And then I realized, there doesn't have to be a connection. Yes, everything else stopped as we daven and do what we can for the safety of our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel. And at the same time, Hashem wants us to continue living and doing what we can to shine light into our day-to-day life. And so in this magazine, you will find articles

about our original idea side by side with stories of Bais Rivkah Alumnae on the front lines doing what they can in Eretz Yisroel.

We are all davening that by the time this magazine is in your hands, not only will this war be won, but we will all be in Eretz Yisroel with the coming of the final Geula now!

1. Likkutei Dibburim, Volume IV, Chapter 37, Section 14, p. 257

Sara Blau
Sara Blau

A UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITY

Excerpt of the Teshura

A few months after Reb Naftali and his family arrived in Nachlas Har Chabad, the Rebbe sent a letter to the community instructing that a gemach, a free-loan society, be established. In the postscript, the Rebbe named three individuals to be in charge of the fund: Reb Dovber Rikman, Rabbi Yehuda Butrashvili, and Reb Naftali Kravitsky. In the letter, the Rebbe wrote that he was sending seven thousand dollars to launch the fund and that they were to lend to anyone, rich or poor, in need of a loan. By doing so, they would build the community, both physically and spiritually, enabling it to absorb more Russian immigrants in the future.

As one would expect, being hand-picked by the Rebbe was very special to Reb Naftali, and he embraced this responsibility to the fullest. He kept the gemach in perfect order with devotion, uncompromising diligence, and talent, despite everything else that took up his time. It was common for neighbors to see Reb Naftali letting people into his home at late hours — sometimes after eleven p.m. — to provide them with a loan. The house was busy almost every evening with people coming and going, and Reb Naftali embraced this as part of the Rebbe's orders.

Under his stewardship, the gemach acquired the necessary funds and made loans to thousands of people, benefiting locals and borrowers from all around Eretz Yisroel. Characteristically, Reb Naftali did all of this humbly, unpretentiously, and agreeably, all while ensuring that the finances were in perfect order. Often, during *yechidusen*, the Rebbe would inquire about the

status of the gemach from Rabbi Yaruslavski, the Rov of Nachlas Har Chabad.

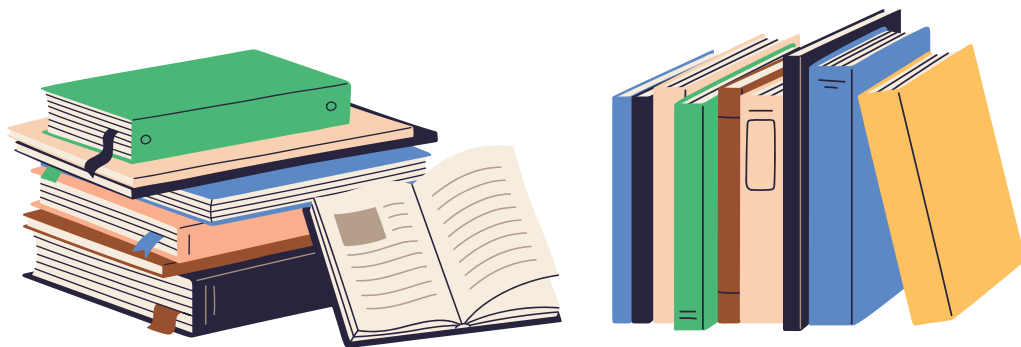
During the 1980s, inflation in Eretz Yisroel skyrocketed. Many gemachs in Eretz Yisroel switched to lending US dollars instead of shekalim as they offered much more stability. Having been previously instructed by the Rebbe only to lend shekalim, the administration of the gemach had Reb Dovber Rikman ask the Rebbe if they could change the policy. The Rebbe instructed him that they were to continue lending in shekalim and that they should increase their efforts in obtaining funding for the gemach. Interestingly, many gemachs in Eretz Yisroel had to close during that period, but the gemach in Nachlas Har Chabad stayed open.



The Rebbe's letter to the Residents of Nachlas Har Chabad about the launch of the gemach — At the Rebbe's Appointment

Message from the Chairman

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov שיח"י



Esteemed Alumnae, תחיינה, This edition of EmBRace is being published between the two special dates of *Hei Teves* — *Chag Haseforim* — and *Yud Shvat* commemorating the *histalkus* of the Friedike Rebbe זצוקלה"ה נבג"ם and the *Kabolas hanesius* of our Rebbe.

It is well known that “Didan Notzach” celebrated on *Hei Teves* as well as the *Kabolas Hanesius* on *Yud Shvat* are thanks in great measure to the role played by the Rebbetzin, זת"ע. This should serve as a special reminder and inspiration for the students and alumnae תחיינה of Bais Rivkah, regarding the extraordinary power that each of you, as נשי ובנות חב"ד, especially those blessed to be an עקרת הבית, have. This implies a great privilege as well as responsibility.

I would like to share with you a letter from the Rebbe ז"ע to Mr. Joseph Shestack, ע"ה, the leading attorney in the efforts to recover the Seforim and manuscripts belonging to the *Agudas Chassidei Chabad* library, a copy of which was sent to me at the time through the Rebbe’s secretariat. In this letter, the Rebbe — unusually — expresses his personal feelings in connection with the case.

I share the letter with you hoping that it will enhance your appreciation of the significance of *Hei Teves* as well as provide a unique insight into current events. Each of you will be able to extrapolate practical lessons to perhaps be applied in your personal lives.

With best wishes for success and confidence in the imminent *Geulah Hoamitis Vehashleima bekorov mamosh*,
Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

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By the Grace of G-d
11 Shevat, 5740
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. Joseph Shestack

Philadelphia, Pa. 19130

Greeting and Blessing:

With sincere apology for the tardiness, I take this first opportunity of conveying to you my profound gratitude for your dedicated and steadfast efforts which finally and happily resulted in restoring the sacred manuscripts to their rightful place in our Library.

As I had occasion to mention to you before, it is truly a case of "Pidyon Shvuim" for these manuscripts after they had languished so long "in captivity." And though a Mitzvah in general, and such a great Mitzvah in particular, hardly requires a human "thank you," the home-coming of these long lost and missed manuscripts, which had been so soulfully bound up with their authors and legatees, had so deeply touched me personally, that the least I can do is to let you know how much I appreciate what you have done and accomplished.

May G-d grant that you should continue doing good deeds and accomplish great things, with joy and gladness of heart, both for our Jewish people and for mankind (which is also part of a Jew's obligation given to us in the Torah from Sinai), all your life, in good health and happy circumstances.

Inasmuch as everything is by Divine Providence, I take this occasion to congratulate you on your appointment as American Representative and Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. May I add that what you have accomplished for the rights of the above mentioned manuscripts eminently fits in with your qualifications as a champion of human rights. My prayerful wishes for utmost Hatzlecho in utilizing in the fullest measure your prestige and capabilities, with which Divine Providence has richly endowed you.

With esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson

(more)





Mr. J. Shestack

Page Two

P.S. What follows here really deserves a special letter of its own. But in these hectic days it is wise to take prompt advantage of a good opportunity, even if it comes in the form of a P.S. - which, of course, in no way detracts from the importance and high priority of the subject at hand.

I refer to the recently published State Department report on human rights for 1979. According to my knowledge, the section dealing with the Land of Israel, particularly with the so-called "West Bank," is clearly prejudicial and, at least, obliquely critical, giving currency to unsubstantiated, indeed categorically refuted, allegations, unworthy of repetition here.

It is not surprising, though no less painful, that the prevailing attitude in the U.S. State Department would encourage such despicable bigotry as the world has just been treated to by a high-ranking Egyptian government official, said to be a close friend and confidant of Sadat, in his interview for a Kuwaiti newspaper, of which you are of course fully cognizant.

It is a pity that your appointment as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights was not made earlier, for you might have been able to influence the said report. But I am hopeful that you can still do something even at this stage, since a report of this kind takes long to prepare, and in a rapidly changing world cannot be considered as the final word. It no doubt leaves room for revisions and supplements. Thus the opportunity may still be present for you to assert your influence in the way you know best.



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Thank you for this issue of the Embrace Magazine (*Vol. 5, Issue 1*). I saved it for my Rosh Hashana “kosher reading” instead of *narishkeit*, and it was so good! Every time I finished an article that I enjoyed, I would turn the page and think, *There’s no way the next article is also going to be good*. But they just kept coming! It’s rare to read a magazine where you enjoy so much of it. What stood out, without going back to check, were Chiena Avtzon’s Yonah article (*A Whale of a Tale*) the palette article (*The Power of Color*), and the brilliant, spot-on response to why you published the article on homeopathy (*Letters to the Editor*). There were so many more that were thought-provoking and inspiring to read that aren’t coming to mind right now. So sincerely, thank you for publishing this. It really uplifted my Rosh Hashanah.

—Anonymous

Dear Editors:

Thank you very much for the beautiful article about Rebbetzin Y. Heller A”H (*Blueprint for Life, Vol. 4, Issue 3*).

The photo of Rebbetzin Heller on pg. 64 teaching in Bais Rivkah Seminary brought me right back to sitting on the edge of my seat, trying to get each word of Morah Heller’s brilliance as it left her pure, *emesdik* lips on its way to grasping my neshama, emotions mingling, passing through my body and with fingers tingling, attempting to get the *heilige* words of my favorite Chumash teacher quickly into my notebook so as not to lose one iota of kedusha.

Baruch Hashem, I am zoche to have Morah Heller A”H’s eternal words, voice, and lessons on cassette tapes and I still have a cassette player to listen to them often.

Thank you also for the excellent review of the book by Chaya Shuchat. Baruch Hashem, I was able to buy it quickly and locally in Toronto — I read it from cover to cover in one continuous day. It was the highlight of my week as Hashem gave me the opportunity to relish His Torah and I hoped it would continue forever.

Enjoying every page, every morsel brings me so much satisfaction and I learn more each time my eyes scan the pages after completing Chitas. I get rejuvenated every time the topics of each of the thirty-eight Torah sections make me appreciate the leaps I make at the sheer clarity of Hashem’s greatest gift of all time.

—Esther (Nemtsov) Tauby
Graduating class of 5740 (1980)



Letters 't', 'o', 'r', 's', 'i', 'd', 'r', 'e', 'D' are scattered across the page, some appearing to be part of a scroll or paper.



Dear Editor,

Estee Lieblich's parenting advice in the last EmBRace (*The Most Underrated Parenting Advice, Vol. 5 Issue 1*) was spot on! (If you didn't read her article, in a nutshell, her advice was that sometimes, or oftentimes, the answer is to just shvaig (be quiet)!)

Reminds me of growing up in a house full of siblings ka"n, and when there was fighting and one of us would cry out, "Maaaaaa, she's bothering me..." "She wore my favorite pantyhose without permission..." or, "She ate my grilled cheese..." my mother would calmly respond with, "Leave me out of it!" followed by, "You may call me if there's blood!"

If the bickering (sisters are prone to bickering which is sometimes more painful to listen to than boys throwing wood blocks at each other) would persist right in front of her, my mother would say, "If you don't mind, move this out of earshot, please. I am trying to read/eat/talk." If the fighting was too loud for us to even hear my mother's request for us to move, she would announce, "I'm going upstairs." That got us every time.

Wishing us all lots of nachas,

– Hindel (Deutsch) Levitin
Graduating class of 5760 (2000)

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Letters, comments, questions and suggestions are welcome!

Write to us at Embrace@bethrivkah.edu

More Than Enough

Aidele (Oster) Vigler, Houston, Texas
Graduating class of 5775 (2015)



Every year, when learning Parshas Vayakhel, I would sit in class, confused. We'd learn how the Yidden donated an abundance of materials to make the Mishkan, until finally, Moshe sent messengers out to announce, "Please don't give more donations, we have more than enough."

I could never wrap my head around it. The more the merrier, no? Why say "no" to *more* good? Couldn't they accept more donations and save them for later? What does "more than enough" even mean?

Until, one day, I heard myself saying, over and over, "It's so nice of you to offer, but we have more than enough, boruch Hashem." I finally understood that a point can be reached where people outdo their kindness and it truly is more than enough.

In Av of 5781 (2021), Bracha Tova (Graybar) Brown, my classmate and close friend since Pre 1A, gave birth to a beautiful boy named Chaim Aryeh,* or Aryeh for short. He was born with a rare condition called Moebius syndrome. Its symptoms vary from some which are less impeding, such as a weakness of facial muscles, to others which are more severe, such as difficulties in swallowing and breathing. This necessitated his use of and dependency on a ventilator to make sure his system got the oxygen it needed.

Chaim Aryeh spent the first three months of his life in the NICU. He subsequently “graduated” and was relocated to a children’s rehab, which was a less intensive environment. Bracha spent her time running between the rehab and getting tested for Covid every other day just to be allowed in. She gave her all to be there for her precious yingele.

I was inspired by the way Bracha and her husband did everything they could to ensure that Chaim Aryeh would always be surrounded by Yiddishe and pure things. They made sure to say Shema with him every night, played niggunim by his crib, and surrounded him with pictures of the Rebbeim, which he loved looking at. His father even learned the entire Aleph Beis with him, which they finished by the time he was about nine months old. His father would note that he was “very advanced for his age.”

Chaim Aryeh loved interacting with everyone who came to visit him. Many remarked that when he looked at them, they felt a deep connection to him. There was something so pure about him! He loved to play with his toys; his favorite were these colorful ribbons attached to bells that his parents hung on his mobile. He was fascinated by them and loved pulling on them and banging them on his crib. He was very strong and feisty — he would pull at the tube connecting him to the ventilator, and the nurses would come running, while he would look at them innocently, enjoying all of the attention. Chaim Aryeh especially loved Shabbos, when his parents were with him the whole time. After Shabbos, he would love smelling the besamim for Havdola.

Chaim Aryeh’s parents would travel to spend every Shabbos and Yom Tov together as a family, whether he was at his rehab facility in Queens or at the hospital in Upper Manhattan. Some of their fondest memories are of lighting the (electric) menorah with him in his room on Chanukah and dancing hakafos around his crib on Simchas Torah. For Purim, Chaim

His father even learned the entire Aleph Beis with him, which they finished by the time he was about nine months old.

Aryeh dressed up as a policeman and gave out mish-loach manos to all of his nurses.

To Bracha and her husband, Chaim Aryeh was and is a perfect and beautiful child. They feel privileged to have been given the zechus and the opportunity to be his parents. They showered him with love, devotion, and attention, just as they would with any child, whether he was well enough to be at home or not.

Throughout this time, I watched as my friend went through a tremendously difficult period. Despite the warm image depicted above, which is totally accurate, it is understandably not the most physically comfortable situation, to be traveling back and forth from rehab to hospital, and back home again, only to do it all over the next day. With so little time to do anything to take care of herself, I wanted to do something to support my friend, but I was at a loss as to how I could help her. I tried to text her now and then, but



Chaim Aryeh on Purim

understandably, she didn't always have what to say, and it wasn't clear how I could help. One day, while I was speaking with Bracha on the phone, she suggested, "Why don't you come visit Chaim Aryeh in rehab?"

I was surprised. "I'm allowed to?" I responded, "I thought I wouldn't be allowed in due to Covid."

"They changed the rules recently, and you can come see him."

As a teacher, I didn't have much time off during the year. And once the summer started, I was going to partake in a shlichus seminar, as we were due to move on shlichus a few months later. I didn't know when I would find the time to visit Chaim Aryeh, but I kept it at the top of my to-do list. I decided I would visit him right after the seminar. "I would love to come visit. I'll come as soon as the school year is over," I told her.

It was Erev Shabbos, Beis Tammuz, just after the school year ended. I glanced at my to-do list and saw that I needed to schedule a visit to Chaim Aryeh, and immediately felt the tension rise in me. Flashbacks of stories about people who pushed off asking for forgiveness until it was too late suddenly came to my

I couldn't understand why these thoughts were plaguing me, but I was overcome with an urgent need to visit Chaim Aryeh.

mind. I couldn't understand why these thoughts were plaguing me, but I was overcome with an urgent need to visit Chaim Aryeh. *Why are you pushing it off until the end of next week?* I thought. *It may be too late.*

I closed my to-do list and opened WhatsApp. A message read: "Baruch Dayan Haemes. Our sweet little baby didn't make it." I was numb, in shock. I immediately called Bracha and all I could hear was crying. Then I heard the voice of Chani Majeski of Friendship Circle. She told me, "Come over right now. We're outside her building."

I quickly fed my baby and ran to Bracha's building. There she was, standing and sobbing, holding her packed suitcase. She and her husband had been waiting to get into a taxi to spend Shabbos at the rehab with Chaim Aryeh, as they had done every



Shabbos for the past eleven months. While they were waiting for the taxi, they called to check in and see how Chaim Aryeh was doing and received the terrible news of his sudden passing.

While I sat with Bracha, Rabbi Berel and Chani Majeski made a few phone calls to figure out logistics for Shabbos. They set up Bracha and her husband to spend Shabbos with an amazing family who had experienced the tragedy of losing their baby many years earlier and lived a block away from Shomrei Hadas in Boro Park. With only a short time left until Shabbos, we all jumped in the car to accompany them, dropped them off, and rushed back to Crown Heights. We made it back just in time for Shabbos.

On Motzei Shabbos, the news started to circulate. One Bais Rivkah classmate texted me, “What can we do?” She decided to collect money for food during shivah and for a gift for Bracha from the entire grade. She sent a simple text and the money began pouring in. Within a few hours, we had so much money — more than enough for the food and the gift.

On Sunday, I tried to participate in the shlichus seminar, but I was preoccupied with Chaim Aryeh’s levaya and fielding the calls and messages of support from everyone. My phone wouldn’t stop buzzing the entire day — grade mates, girls who hadn’t necessarily been in touch with Bracha since we graduated Bais Rivkah seven years ago, were reaching out, “What can I do?” or, “Can I make a meal?”

The story that Moshe had to tell the Yidden to stop bringing donations for the Mishkan had always baffled me. But on that Sunday in Tammuz, receiving all those messages looking to help, I finally understood. I had to answer most of the messages with something to the effect of, “Thank you, but we’re all covered.” And it was true. All the meals were taken care of and there was more than enough money to buy extra food. I felt guilty responding this way because I saw how much every person wanted to be part of the mitzvah. One girl wouldn’t take no for an answer and made a meal train for lunch. That meal train got filled with meals for about a month past shivah!

We gave the extra money to Bracha to use towards a dedication for the zechus of her baby. Just in time for Chaim Aryeh’s shloshim, Bracha and her husband introduced an organization called Aryeh’s Special Smile. Their mission is to support families with young children going through difficult medical journeys involving extended hospital or rehabilitation stays.

My phone wouldn’t stop buzzing the entire day — grade mates, girls who hadn’t necessarily been in touch with Bracha since we graduated Bais Rivkah seven years ago, were reaching out.

Because of her experience, Bracha knows exactly what parents need, as packing a little suitcase to take to the hospital was nearly an everyday occurrence for her.



Aryeh's Special Smile gifts a duffle bag to any family with a child experiencing a prolonged hospital stay to make the stay just a bit easier. The bag is filled with practical items that parents might need, such as a comfortable blanket, socks, a Tehillim, and a book to read.


I've been inspired to watch my friend and her family handle this challenge that Hashem gave them. Learning from Chaim Aryeh during the short time his neshama was with us was an honor and I will never forget the lessons he taught me. I daven that

through the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisrael and being there for one another, we are zoche to Moshiach and the Geulah Sheleima now and be reunited with Chaim Aryeh a"h.

*Chaim Aryeh's full name is Chaim Aryeh Dovid Michoel. He is named after his father's father z"l.

לעילוי נשמת חיים ארי'ה דוד מיכאל ע"ה בן יבדלחט"א יצחק
הערשל שליט"א בראון

To request a hospital package, visit www.aryehsspecialsmile.org/request. ■



While the journey with Chaim Aryeh was quite tumultuous, aside from the legacy he leaves through Aryeh's Special Smile, precious baby Chaim Aryeh has also left me with lessons that will last a lifetime.

1. See the neshama, not the externals. Bracha and her husband did not see any of Chaim Aryeh's physical deformities, and they were not distracted by any apparent imperfections. They see Chaim Aryeh as the precious neshama that he is — a complete, whole neshama of someone special.

2. Do whatever it takes to connect. Baby Chaim Aryeh couldn't communicate due to his facial paralysis, but that didn't prevent Bracha and her husband from doing whatever it took to connect and bond with their child in the capacity that they could. Their genuine efforts paid off. While they could not communicate through facial expressions, Bracha and her husband learned to detect their baby's emotions, despite the barriers and difficulties.

3. Reach out. Yes! It's up to friends and even acquaintances to reach out and offer assistance when someone is going through a rough time. May we always be on the giving end.

4. Turn your challenge into a mission. Aryeh's Special Smile is there for parents experiencing what Bracha's family did. This challenge was turned into a springboard to help others and accomplish good in the world.



ARYEH'S SPECIAL SMILE

- Delivering smiles to families of babies & children with extra medical needs ●

לעילוי נשמת חיים אריה דוד מיכאל ע"ה בן יצחק הערשל שליט"א בראון

DO YOU HAVE A CHILD WITH EXTRA MEDICAL NEEDS THAT REQUIRES FREQUENT HOSPITAL VISITS?

YES

NO

ARE YOU FEELING OVERWHELMED, TIRED, LOST, OR LONELY?

YES

NO

COULD YOU USE A HOSPITAL CARE PACKAGE FILLED WITH MANY USEFUL AND COMFORTING ITEMS TO HAVE DURING THESE DAYS?

YES

NO

If you answered yes to all of the above questions,

CONTACT ARYEH'S SPECIAL SMILE!

 Bracha Brown: 646-831-4804

 www.aryehsspecialsmile.org  aryehsspecialsmile@gmail.com

That's a Principal Mrs. Gelfand

Chaya Mushka (Baumgarten) Spiero, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5779 (2019)



Three staff members share their memories of a longtime Bais Rivkah leader

At the end of Mrs. Gelfand's final year in Bais Rivkah, we asked a question in one of the third grade classrooms: What does a principal do?

Here are some answers:

"If someone isn't feeling well, the principal helps her feel better."

"She checks if you have a fever or are sick."

"She takes care of the whole school."

“Keeps kids safe.”

“She works so hard to help kids.”

That’s a principal. That was Mrs. Gelfand, a”h.

If you were in Bais Rivkah Primary in the years 5736-5776 (1976-2016), you know what that means.

For forty years, the Secular Department of Bais Rivkah Primary was run with Mrs. Gelfand’s trademark professionalism, mindfulness, and grace. I sat down with three staff members who were privileged to work closely with her. Here are some of the memories they share.

Mrs. Slavin’s Memories:

The Office

Mrs. Slavin started working in Bais Rivkah as Mrs. Gelfand’s assistant. Today, she serves as supervisor of Bais Rivkah’s Primary Division.

It was a cramped little space, barely earning the title of “office.” But that room, on the third floor of Bais Rivkah’s Crown Street building, will forever remain a treasure trove of memories and lessons for me. It was Mrs. Gelfand’s office.

I never heard Mrs. Gelfand complain about her small workspace. She took that room and turned it into a haven of understanding, dedication, and acceptance.

It was a room I wasn’t afraid to enter when I had to admit I made a mistake. It was a room I was comfortable entering to suggest changes or another way of approaching a situation. It was a room where I saw teachers and students being advocated for with the utmost determination.

Mrs. Gelfand’s expectations of her staff, whom she held to a high standard, were very clear. Timeliness was essential to her; she always wanted the teachers to arrive promptly — and she modeled that behavior consistently. Dressing as befitted of a Bais Rivkah staff member was also high on her list of importance. This, too, she modeled daily with elegance and utmost Tznius.

Mrs. Gelfand’s office was a place where people got along — she and Mrs. Feldman, a”h, the Limmudei Kodesh principal, were as different from each other as can be. Yet, they had the utmost respect and admiration for each other. It was beautiful to see.

For forty years, the Secular Department of Bais Rivkah Primary was run with Mrs. Gelfand’s trademark professionalism, mindfulness, and grace.

In that office, Mrs. Gelfand listened when people spoke. She kept track of every student and every teacher, and dealt with issues in a manner I can only describe as noble.

Working for Mrs. Gelfand was pleasant, positive, and enjoyable. She was always trying to protect others, be it a student or fellow staff member, from uncomfortable situations. She understood the many intricacies that running grades 1-3 required, and she did things properly and with grace.

Every day, shortly before dismissal time, Mrs. Gelfand’s office door would be closed. That’s when we all knew Mrs. Gelfand was taking a few minutes in her small space to focus, reconnect, and daven Mincha.

These memories are from a long time ago; that office space is long gone. But the warmth of connection, acceptance, and advocacy that was created there will forever stay real and vibrant to the thousands of students and teachers touched by Mrs. Gelfand.

Mrs. Brawer’s Memories:

Heart & Soul

Mrs. Brawer spent one year as assistant principal to Mrs. Gelfand before becoming the Limmudei Chol



principal of Bais Rivkah Primary. Today, she is putting the valuable lessons learned into practice.

Some people do their job just because they have to get it done. Then there are those who truly feel the achrayus they carry. I haven't met many people who take their jobs and responsibilities as seriously as Mrs. Gelfand did.

Investment. Dedication. Heart and soul. Those are the words that come to mind when I think of her. That's what was expressed in everything she did.

It played out in her notebooks.

Mrs. Gelfand started a new notebook every year. She kept careful records of every phone call she had with a parent, the background of the students, and the outcomes of any meetings. Nothing was typed; every word was carefully inscribed by hand in her distinct script handwriting. She kept every grade's notebook at arm's reach, year to year, until they graduated from her charge. Even without a computer, everything was always neat and organized.

It played out in the atmosphere.

In that office, Mrs. Gelfand listened when people spoke.

The floor of Bais Rivkah Primary had a calm, peaceful air to it. It felt like things were under control — and this feeling came from the top.

It played out in her interactions with students.

I was once in the office when she disciplined a first grader. This little girl had used the elevator, unsupervised — a big no-no. At first, Mrs. Gelfand was shocked at the infraction. But she didn't rush into discipline; first, she asked the girl why she did it. The girl innocently replied: "At home, I always go into the elevator alone. Everyone in my building does." And Mrs. Gelfand understood that what was considered a violation to her was completely normal for this little girl. She was able to reframe situations according to her students' back stories, and she tried to deal with every girl according to her unique situation.

It played out in her interactions with teachers.

When it came to substitutes, I don't think she would leave the building until she noted down the details of

The floor of Bais Rivkah Primary had a calm, peaceful air to it. It felt like things were under control — and this feeling came from the top.

the substitute and the job she did. There was no such thing as not compensating someone; even though she didn't have the power to hand over a paycheck, she took payroll and job tracking extremely seriously.

It played out in the transition from her as principal to my inheriting the role.

When I took the position of assistant principal for one year, Mrs. Gelfand knew that I would become the new principal — but never did she see me as a threat. On the contrary, she was so gracious about the handover. All she wanted was to make everything as straightforward as possible for me.

When we parted, she gave me a heartfelt bracha that the money problems she had to deal with should never come onto my radar. She carefully explained every system to me, doing the best she could to make the transition a smooth one.

Because it was never about her. It was about the holy work she did; it was about the students, the teachers, and everyone in between. She was truly invested, heart and soul.

Morah Avtzon's Memories:

*Professional
& Personal*

Morah Avtzon began as a teacher and Mrs. Gelfand's assistant. Today, she is the Limmudei Kodesh principal of grades 1-3 in Bais Rivkah Primary.

Professional, and personal. It's an elusive combination that all educators strive for — and Mrs. Gelfand achieved masterfully. As her secretary, I watched her do her job with the utmost professionalism while maintaining a warm, personal relationship with everyone she worked with.

All her phone conversations were held sensitively and

respectfully. She would speak very quietly, sometimes covering the phone with her hand so no one could hear what was being said. Everyone was treated with dignity and tznius which was shown in every one of her interactions.

She got things done in a no-drama manner, and she did them right, yet never at someone else's expense. As much as Mrs. Gelfand valued efficiency and organization, she valued her students, teachers, and co-workers far more.

She was calm and graceful, even as she gave critique. If there was ever something she needed to be corrected, it was never harsh. Her feedback was always pleasant and constructive.

Then there was her personal touch. It was heart-warming to know that my boss was proud of my accomplishments, not only in my work in school but in my personal life too! She was so proud when I became the Limmudei Kodesh principal. When she wished me much hatzlacha in her trademark graceful way, it was clear that she meant it with every fiber of her being. At the end of each year, she would hand-write a thank you note to each of her teachers.

I know that it wasn't just me who was touched by her genuineness.

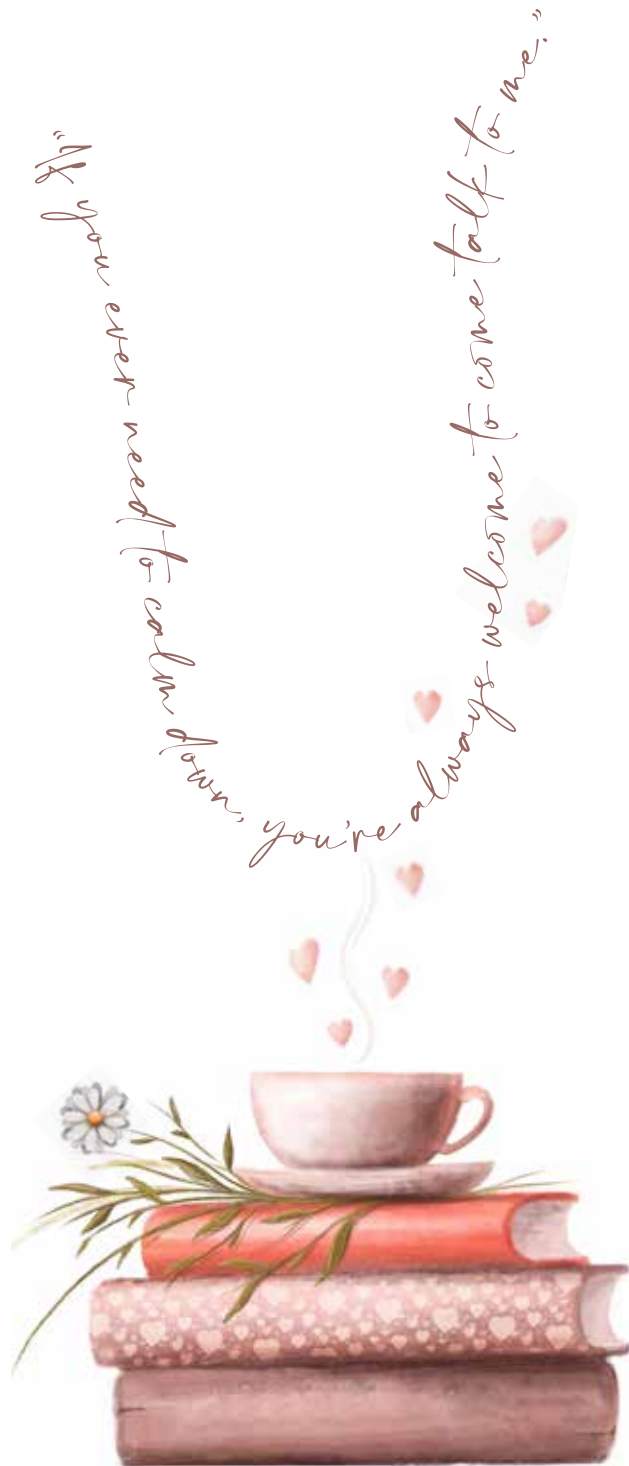
I remember one particular student who had an overabundance of energy and was going through a difficult time. I can still see Mrs. Gelfand calling her over and telling her so gently: "If you ever need to calm down, you're always welcome to come talk to me."

That's how Mrs. Gelfand operated. Professional, getting the job done, and always recognizing the human in each situation. We will never forget her.

Forty years.

Mrs. Gelfand, watched students come and go, a building switch over, and the turn of a century. Through it all, her values remained consistently steadfast, investing her heart and soul into helping her Bais Rivkah students become the best they could be.

Today, thousands of women around the globe owe their strong foundation to her. As she looks down from Gan Eden, there's no doubt that Mrs. Gelfand has an immeasurable amount of pride in her Bais Rivkah girls, the saplings she so cared for, now giving forth fruit of their own.



Noble. Gracious. Professional. Wise.

That's a principal.

That was Mrs. Gelfand. ▀

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Great Loss, a Hole to Fill

*The story of three Bais Rivkah students
assisting each other in times of loss*

Dovid Zaklikowski for EmBRace Magazine

Photos: Family Collections and Lubavitch Archives



1: Rabbi Majeski.

2: Rabbi Yisroel Noach Belenitsky with his children: Rivkah Gansburg, Yitzchok and Chaya Majeski.



3: Rabbi and Mrs. Majeski with their oldest son Froyim.



It was a difficult few months for the Majeski family. Their father, Rabbi Yaakov Majeski, the longtime elementary principal of Bais Rivkah was ill, and the doctor gave a terminal prognosis. The family kept their faith high, keeping in mind what the Rebbe told them, “The doctors only have permission [from Hashem] to heal, and not to make prognoses.”

But as the news from the hospital became more difficult, his wife Chaya was despondent. On a winter night of 5733 (1973), she was looking for a boost.

The story goes that Rabbi Majeski, an Aleksander chossid, escaped with his fellow students from Poland to Samarkand, Uzbekistan. One day, while walking through the city, the young man heard someone davening in ecstasy. He figured that there must be a reason for him davening that way on an ordinary day. He returned the next day, and it was the same. This went on for days, and he could not understand how during those difficult days, someone could daven slowly, diligently, and calmly, as if there were no worries in the world.

After a while, he knocked on the door, where he met Rabbi Yisroel Noach Belenitsky, and later recalled, “His head may have been in the davening, but his feet were grounded and he was involved in assisting the city’s starving refugees.”

Over time he became close to Rabbi Belenitsky, and shortly before Pesach 5705 (1945), Rabbi Majeski married his daughter Chaya. It was a marriage built on the love of Chabad Chassidus, with the deep emunah it demanded. Now, Chaya was worried.

Her son was going into yechidus with the Rebbe in honor of his birthday. While normally she would not have joined him, on the night of his fifteenth birthday, because of her husband’s illness, the Rebbe’s aide granted her permission.

Mrs. Majeski asked the Rebbe to give a blessing that her husband would return home. The Rebbe avoided answering. The wife, mother of six, would not give up and begged the Rebbe to assure her that he would be well. “What kind of greater blessing can there be,” the Rebbe responded, “than all of the blessings that others gave should be fulfilled.” Mrs. Majeski saw that the Rebbe was reaffirming others’ blessings that her husband should be well. It was what she wanted.

That night, from the Rebbe’s office, Mrs. Majeski and several of her children went to the hospital. After staying some time, Mrs. Majeski, full of faith, told them that she was going home, “What the Rebbe said, will be.”

The Rebbe responded, “all of the blessings that others gave should be fulfilled.”

Two children, including twelfth-grade Bais Rivkah student Devory Munitz, remained at their father’s bedside. “By the time they got to the house,” she recalled, “we notified them” that their father passed away, “and they came right back.”

Young Loss

Those who have not experienced the death of a young family member have difficulty comprehending what it means. Few could express what it is like to lose a parent, spouse, sibling, or child at a young age. It is devastating. For each family member, it is a personal world falling apart.

When Rabbi Majeski passed away, her life had been sheltered, Mrs. Munitz recalled, “No one got divorced, no one passed away [young], it really didn’t happen.” A classmate of Mrs. Munitz told her decades later, “When your father passed away, it was the first time I ever knew that a father could pass away.”

But in truth, no one discussed these topics, so it seemed to be the case, but it was not. It was 5728 (1968) when Sholom Deitsch suffered a heart attack at fifty years old. He was rushed to the hospital, and while he survived, he never resumed his former work schedule. Over the next few years, he had additional heart complications.

In the winter of the next year, his son Zalman became engaged to Cyrel Edelman. As the wedding neared, the family found more reason to rejoice. Their father’s health seemed to be improving. But then, one day, in the middle of the night Sholom suffered another heart attack. The family called an ambulance, but when the paramedics arrived, they reported, that there was nothing they could do.

When the Rebbe was informed, the Rebbe said that “they should keep an eye on their mother.” Many people participated in the funeral, including the Rebbe, who joined the procession as it passed 770. During *Minchah* that day, the Chassidim saw tears rolling down the Rebbe’s face.

In her short autobiography, a glimpse into the feelings of someone who is suffering while unable to express it, Mirel Deitsch poured out her heart. “I have decided

to put this all on paper,” she wrote two decades after her husband’s passing, “I am writing this for you, our children and grandchildren, so you’ll know about your past — good and bad... But I can’t enjoy my writings because they are full of pain and anguish.”

She wrote that people like to read and hear only good, “Woe to me!” For her, it was just suffering alone, “My life, my ‘grapes of wrath’... How can I fight the situation? There’s no solution. I can only live and suffer, suffer. I can’t forget or feel comforted.”

Similar to what many feel when their loved ones pass away, she wrote, “Fate tore him away from us. I still take it very hard and I miss him terribly. I am sorry for him alone — that he didn’t get to live a full life... I buried myself together with him because, without him, I have no life.”

Tragedy Again

At the age of nineteen, after graduating from the United Lubavitch Yeshivoh on Bedford and Dean, Yankel Kotlarsky continued his studies at the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Montreal. When the vibrant student had a goal, he would see it finished to the end. He would rally his friends — anyone who would listen — about its importance.

The custom at the yeshivah was that the students would eat the Shabbos day meal with families in the community. “It is good for the students who are away from their families, and it is good for the family to see a good Chassidische student,” Rabbi Leib Kramer, the director of the

Few could express what it is like to lose a parent, spouse, sibling, or child at a young age. It is devastating.

school, once explained.

Nineteen-year-old Yankel wanted the students to eat together. “The life of a *Tomim*,” he repeated again and again, “spiritually and materially, should be in the four walls of the yeshivah.”

The week of Parshas Vayechi, 5727 (1966), he finally got his way. He organized a meal and purchased the fish, meat, challah, and wine. At the end of the meal, there was a grand farbrengen. After a while, many of the students returned to their rooms to nap. Not Yankel. Sitting on his bed, he continued to farbreng with his friends.

The star of the proceedings, his voice boomed out his ideas: the need to seriously learn Chassidus, to spread its teachings, and totally devote themselves to the Rebbe. Then there was silence. When the students turned to him, he was lying down; he looked like he was taking his Shabbos rest. But he was not. It was Yankel’s last breath.

At that time, the Kotlarskys had no family living near them in Crown Heights. They were murdered by the Germans. Their family was the fellow students of their father, Rabbi Hersch Kotlarsky, who at the guidance



4: Sholom and Mirel Deitsch.

5: Sholom Deitsch speaks at the bar mitzvah of his son.

6: Mirel Deitsch, after the passing of Sholom, with several of her children.



7: A young Yankel Kotlarsky (left) with his younger brother Moshe.

8: Yankel Kotlarsky (right) holds the chupah pole at a wedding where the Rebbe officiated.



9: Rabbi and Mrs. Kotlarsky.

of the Rebbe Rayatz escaped Poland and over the next seven years came to North America. There were the Bukiet, Tennenbaum, and Wineberg families.

After Shabbos, one of his surrogate family members came to his home, called him outside, and delivered the tragic news. Rabbi Kotlarsky placed his head on the table in silence. "It was a shock," his daughter Esti Wilschanski recalled, "I never saw my father in so much pain."

Rabbi Kotlarsky would quote Yaakov Avinu, "For with my staff I crossed this *Yarden*," and then add, "I did not even have a staff." Now the person he raised and had so much nachas from, the "American family," was no longer here.

For Esti, it was a difficult time. "I had a phenomenal relationship with my brother," she said. Looking back, she learned how to be dedicated to the Rebbe's ideas from him. She recalled how he would spend nights making copies of the Rebbe's talks. How he would come back from the yeshivah in Montreal, say hello to his parents, and without taking a moment to rest or a bite, he would sprint to 770.

It is still hard for her to talk about the tragedy. "Parents are not supposed to bury little kids," she said as her voice cracked, "eventually they go to *Olam Haemes*. But a child? A young person? I still cannot get over it."

Fatherly Figure

The topic of death is a most painful one for Chana Sharfstein. On New Year's Eve, 5712 (1952), she planned to meet with some old friends for her birthday. That evening, Chana's father, Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Zuber, decided to accompany his daughter through the park to meet her friends. He donned his black hat and long black coat, and they set out.

After dropping off his daughter, he headed home. Suddenly, several thugs jumped on him, robbing him of a measly sum of money, and leaving him bleeding to death. The beloved rabbi, community leader, and scholar died from his wounds.

"Life contains many dark elements," she later wrote, "almost cruel ones that can be difficult to overcome."

A few years later, in 5718 (1958), her mother died; and then not long after being married, in 5719 (1959), her mother-in-law passed away. Mrs. Sharfstein was devastated. She had grown up in Sweden without relatives and had always envisioned her children surrounded by doting grandparents. Now, they were alone.

During the period after her father's passing, the Rebbe guided her as a father would. Following the slew of fresh losses, she penned her sorrows to the Rebbe and sched-

A glimpse into the feelings of someone who is suffering while unable to express it, Mirel Deitsch poured out her heart.

uled an appointment to see him. In a private audience with the Rebbe, she burst into tears.

With great compassion, the Rebbe explained, "It is our firm belief that Hashem is the Master of the world, and constantly attends to everything that occurs, as well as to every individual. It is impossible for the human mind to fully grasp the ways of Hashem."

In a letter, the Rebbe expounded on this idea, giving us an idea of how we should respond to a mourner's lament. "All religious people, even non-Jews, believe that the Creator of the world is Infinite and Incomprehensible. It is also a fundamental belief that not only did G-d create the world so many thousands of years ago... But, it is our firm belief that G-d is also the continuous Master of the world, Who is constantly watching over it and taking care of everything and every individual."

For a human whose mind is limited, the Rebbe wrote, to understand the ways of G-d is impossible. Just like a person matures and discovers new ideas that were previously unknown to them, in G-d's infinite kindness, "G-d has revealed in the Torah ... our guide in everyday life ... that G-d does is for the good of man, whether the person concerned understands it or not."

The young mother didn't receive all of the answers she wanted. "There is no justification we could ever give for the loss of a loved one," she said, "We cannot explain life's suffering."

What she did find was compassion, "With fatherly love and compassion, with patience and concern," the Rebbe guided her by giving "of himself; of his precious time to a small, insignificant person as well as the most important leaders of our generation."

In Montreal, the young Esti Frimerman felt the same way. The Rebbe was an integral part of her Montreal family life. "We always knew that my father asked the Rebbe everything," Mrs. Frimerman recalled, "We felt very close to the Rebbe; we did nothing without the Rebbe."

At least once a year for the 19th of Kislev he would travel from Montreal to New York for the Rebbe's farbrengen.

While the young Esti did not join her father every year, one of the times she did, they went into the Rebbe for

“The Rebbe was a part of our life, it was just very normal.”

yechidus. Before entering the Rebbe’s room, he instructed her on the proper way to conduct herself, such as not to sit down. The Rebbe asked Esti what she was learning, and then asked her questions on Chumash. “The Rebbe was a part of our life,” she recalled thinking at the time which included questions a grandfather would ask their grandchildren, “it was just very normal.”

Linguist, Educator, Father

Known for her flair for ideas, passion for education, and love for young Jewish women, Mrs. Frimerman, the founder of the global Bat Mitzvah Club, talked in glowing terms of her father, Rabbi Dr. Yosef Slavin.

Those who knew him speak of his height, which competed with his large forehead — an indication of his decades of intellectual pursuits and depth of understanding.

Growing up under communist rule, the young Yosef studied in public school, and later in a military language school. When WWII arrived at the doorsteps of the Soviet Union, the family fled to Tashkent, where he taught at the local university, and to earn extra funds, worked with various Lubavitchers in the black market. There he also met the famed chassid Rabbi Peretz Mochkin, who became his mentor.

Yitzchok Zakon, who also fled to the city with his family, heard about the young Yosef, a language teacher at the local university who immersed daily in the mikvah. Sensing a good match for his daughter Pola, the couple married in 5706 (1946), and soon smuggled across the border to Poland, eventually arriving in Montreal, where they joined the Lubavitch community. There, Dr. Slavin became a Gemara teacher at Herzliah High School and later principal of the Beth Rivkah Academy.

The third of six children, Mrs. Frimerman has fleeting memories of her father. While a good student, in her own words she was lazy, and would rather read comics than do homework. She would hide the small comic book in the large volume. Instead of admonishing her, Dr. Slavin would encourage her not to waste her time, “Small books are for small minds. Big books are for bigger minds.”

Once her friends were going bowling and he did not approve. When Esti complained, claiming that “everyone was going,” the father responded that in fact, “Not everybody is going.” Puzzled, she said that even the most

frum girls in her class were joining. “You are not going,” he explained, “so it is not everybody.” The father then told a parable to bring home the point (see sidebar).

Looking back, while she may have not been interested in the Chumash he was learning with her, “over which he would get frustrated,” she saw how someone could have such a love for the subject. “He understood things very well,” she said, “and related to people and how they could internalize the subject at hand.”

One time, she had to write a paper on Lord of the Flies, but had no interest, “To me it was impossible.” Dr. Slavin read the book and then worked with her on writing the paper. The father introduced the concept of *Nefesh Habehamis* and *Elokis*, “If you give in to the beastly instinct, this is what could happen to a person.” He explained to her that this was Chassidus, and thus was her first introduction to its teachings.

In 5732 (1971), the family traveled to New York to celebrate the engagement of their son Michoel. Esti saw a chance to remain a few extra days in New York and asked her parents for permission to stay. Her class in Montreal was small; she had Crown Heights friends from Camp Pardas Chanah, and a new niece whom she wanted to dote on. “It’s exciting to be in New York,” she told them.

The parents relented and made their way back to Montreal without her. When the phone at her sister’s home became available, she began to call her friends to tell them that she was in New York to stay.



As she was talking to one of them, the operator interrupted the call, stating that it was an emergency. Someone came on the line, “There was a terrible accident, someone needs to pick up your sisters.”

“It was terrible, terrible, terrible,” she said, “I was definitely in shock.” She began to say Tehillim, and blocked out everything else happening around her. “I most probably didn’t want to know what was going on at the hospital.”

Until today, the exact details are fuzzy to her. She learned after Shabbos that her father was killed by a truck on the highway. Everyone else in the car was okay. She recalled that she didn’t want to go to the funeral or see her mother, “I couldn’t imagine her without my father; it just didn’t make sense. I couldn’t accept it. For a long time, I was in denial.”

A Listening Ear

When the week of mourning was over, Mrs. Frimerman walked around Crown Heights in shock, while everything continued as normal. “My father just died,” she thought to herself, “The world stopped. How can people just casually go to the dry cleaners?”

No one discussed feelings, Mrs. Frimerman recalled. “It did not exist. I never heard of the word emotion until my children were growing up. Therapists were unheard of. At the time, if you went to someone, you went to a psychiatrist, and if you went to a psychiatrist, you were crazy.”

At home, she played a game she now calls “Suffer in

Silence” with her mother. She didn’t want to talk about her pain, “Because I didn’t want [my mother] to suffer because of my suffering.” In turn, her mother did the same, because “she didn’t want me to suffer because of her suffering.”

As Mrs. Frimerman was going through her pain, Mrs. Wilschanski was still withering every time she heard about death, two years after her brother Yankel died on his bed. “I understood what death was,” she said, “what it meant. It was very realistic,” when she heard about the car accident that killed Dr. Slavin.

One day she met Mrs. Frimerman and they spoke. The young Esti felt understood, “She was the only other person who could relate to me. This was a girl who experienced a death.”

Over many months, despite the age gap, the two developed a strong relationship. “She spoke it out,” Mrs. Wilschanski recalled, “we were able to discuss it.” It was not that she was a professional, it was two friends who understood each other, so that they could “get through that week, that day, just to be in a better place.”

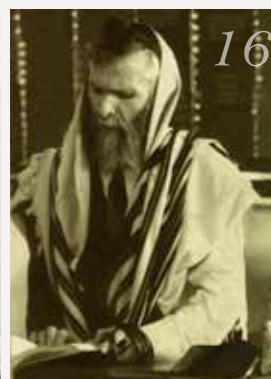
It was a lifesaver for the young Esti. While the friends in her class were supportive, her older Bais Rivkah friend was there during difficult moments. Every Shabbos Mrs. Wilschanski would visit her, and during the week pop in and ask her if she wanted to go on an outing.

Two years later, Mrs. Frimerman did the same for Devory Munitz. While the Slavin family moved to Crown Heights, making it easier for Esti to start anew,

10: Rabbi Yaakov Zuber.

11: Chana Sharfstein and her mother (center), and the extended Zuber family, at her wedding.

12: Mottel Sharfstein is led down the aisle by his brother-in-law Mendel (left).



13: Rabbi Dr. Yosef and Mrs. Pola Slavin in Paris.

14: Rabbi Dr. Yosef Slavin (center) with his brother Hershel (left) and Rabbi Yehoshua Heshil Tzeitlin at the Lubavitch yeshivah in Montreal, Quebec.

15: Rabbi Dr. Yosef Slavin (right) dancing at the wedding of Rabbi Chaim Osher and Sarah Miriam Kahanov.

16: Rabbi Dr. Yosef Slavin.

for Devory it was different. The Crown Heights community at the time was tight-knit, “Everyone knew my father because he was the principal.”

Her father’s passing was a shock to the entire community, but no one knew how to process it. “It was a hard time,” she said, “I was the first classmate that lost a father.” Compounding the pain was that Mrs. Majeski was unable to process her husband’s passing.

For Mrs. Munitz, every person who walked into their home during shivah made a difference, “We knew each face that was there. It was a very special thing that no one should know or understand.”

Then Esti came, sat down near her and said, “I hear that your father is buried not far from my father.” It was just the icebreaker that Devory needed, “None of my classmates went through something like that. She was the only one in that room that could understand what I was going through.”

From that moment, they “became very close,” where Esti understood her, “Not just to nod their head and say ‘yes, yes.’” Because they were able to openly share their feelings, their experiences, anxieties, that made the relationship “special.”

When the Dust Settles

Crown Heights embraced the Slavin family. Esti had cousins, a sister, and friends, but it didn’t make her pain

go away, “My father’s absence left me in terrible pain. I felt like I had a big hole inside of me, and I needed to fill it.”

She needed comfort to fill that hole, and she found it in the conversations with the older people who came to her sister’s house. “I liked the attention,” and the food. Together with her next-door neighbor, she would go to the bakery at night, where they would purchase eclairs and pickles, “and naughtily eat them.”

These “big sins” were her effort for comfort. But it did not work. With no other adult to pour out her soul, she naturally turned to the Rebbe, “complaining, crying, asking what should I do?”

One time she wrote the Rebbe a twelve-page letter grieving, worrying, and wondering how to move on. At the end of the letter, she asked that the Rebbe please answer, because someone who was annoyed with her made a remark about whether she deserved an answer from the Rebbe. At the end, she noted in the postscript that she did not want any of the Rebbe’s aides to read the letter.

One day, the Rebbe’s aide called, “You have to come over.” What did he want? The last time she heard those words was when they called her to notify her about her father’s death. It hit her like a boulder. She felt like she couldn’t. It took a lot of courage, but after a while, she made her way to 770.

When she arrived, the aide took out a pile of small pieces of paper; the Rebbe had cut out his answers on her letter. The Rebbe had left only a few words so that she would

17: Esti Frimerman on the lap of her father.

18: A young Esti (standing, right center) with her grandmother and Slavin cousins.

19: Mrs. Frimerman (top row, second from the left) with her Beth Rivkah Montreal class on the 19th of Kislev.

20: Mrs. Munitz celebrating at the wedding of Mrs. Frimerman.

21: The Rebbe gives Mrs. Frimmerman a packet of dimes to give to her students, 1983.

22: The Rebbe and Mrs. Frimerman.

23: Mrs. Frimerman explains the Rebbe's answer that began her career as an educator.

24: Mrs. Frimerman, together with a group of parents, and their newly born daughters named for the Rebbetzin at the groundbreaking of the Bais Rivkah campus on Lefferts Avenue.



be the only one to know what the response was referring to. Until today she has difficulty with the fact that she wasted the Rebbe's time, "Because this simple girl said 'I don't want any of the Rebbe's aides to read it.'"

The first point from the Rebbe addressed her comment that she was unworthy for the Rebbe to respond: "G-d forbid," the Rebbe wrote, underlining the word twice, "to say that."

Then the Rebbe wrote (adapted from the Hebrew), "Because your father *kocht*," using the Yiddish word for enthusiastic, "in the education of Jewish people, you should become involved in education and do even more."

Soon after receiving the answer, she became an assistant in a preschool in the afternoons, while still going to seminary in the mornings. At seminary, Morah Leah Kahan guided her in how to create a lesson plan. She would have the student teachers teach a period in one of the Bais Rivkah elementary classes. Morah Kahan would write the lesson that they would deliver.

On the scheduled morning, Morah Kahan sat in the fourth-grade class as the young Esti delivered the lesson. "I was nervous," Mrs. Frimerman recalled, "My legs were shaking."

After the lesson, Mrs. Kahan complimented her on her excellent delivery. When Mrs. Frimerman told her how anxious she had been, the teacher responded, "If giving such a good lesson makes you nervous, you should always be that way."

*The young Esti felt understood,
"She was the only other person
who could relate to me."*

It gave her the feeling that the way she taught was okay. "She was an integral part of what shaped me as a teacher." After seminary she began to teach at the school, "It became my life; day and night."

"Until I started to teach," she said, "nothing really filled that hole. I now had what to live for, and that filled that gaping hole left by my father's absence."

She would stay up late creating lessons that the students would "remember forever." She derived comfort and gratification from seeing happy students. It was not just a distraction from the pain that made her forget her sorrow; "Teaching was what my father did, so teaching made my father less dead."

One student wrote in prose her feelings about her teaching:

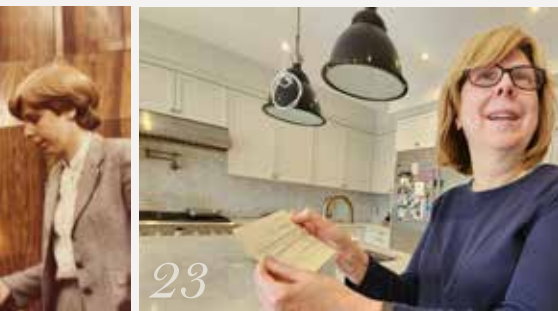
This is a year / We can't compare / Because Morah Frimerman was here! / She taught us so much / With her special touch / She taught us very many things / Which gave our learning special meaning / ... [It] could've been as boring as can be / But with your exciting lessons it was fun for me / ... Now that the time has come to say good-bye / We do so with a heavy sigh / Our time together has come to an end / Good-bye and thank you to our teacher, our friend

She said that she debated the cause of her success as an educator: "Did I have it in me and the Rebbe just highlighted it; or was it because the Rebbe put me there and I became a good teacher because of that?"

Over the years she continued to write to the Rebbe about her challenges or to report on her projects as a teacher. As her family grew, she thought about becoming a stay at home Mother. The Rebbe responded that she should continue as long as the teaching does not interfere with her family life. She continued to teach. "The Rebbe gave me a lifetime path: my priority is my family, and teaching, which I loved, was secondary to that."

Despite the clear direction, it was hard to balance both, and she wrote many times about it, asking the Rebbe for Yiddishe and Chassidische nachas. The Rebbe circled those words, "at least in seven different letters," she recalled, and he wrote, "the merit of the many assists."

Rabbi Leibel Newman was "very instrumental" in her teaching career. "We [teachers] learned so much from



him,” she said, “he really shaped our lives.”

Before there was official teachers’ education, he would give them teaching guidance in small groups. “In his quiet way, he was such a strength.”

Under the Rebbe’s guidance, and with the encouragement of Morah Chana Gorowitz, Mrs. Frimerman started Bat Mitzvah Club International under the auspices of Tzivos Hashem, which today has hundreds of chapters across the globe. ■

Dovid Zaklikowski is a biographer, the author of over forty books, and the proud father of Shaina, a Bais Rivkah student. His books can be found on HasidicArchives.com, and he can be reached at DovidZak@gmail.com

Every article is a collaborative effort between many individuals. However, this article took extra courage from those interviewed. For many, they have never spoken about their experiences and pain. I thank those mentioned in the article and those who assisted with background material: Ari



Sarah Rivkah Kohn, founder of LINKS, an organization that assists teens who lost a parent, trains Bais Rivkah teachers in how to deal with children in grief.

Blesofsky, Avrohom Moshe Deitsch, Rabbi Chaim Majeski, Eli Slavin, Elisha Pearl, Mendel Bendet, Mendel Gansburg, and Yossi Rapoport. For the article, I referenced the books Yisroel Noach Hagadol; Zichronos Aaron; A Chassid, A Businessman; Advice for Life: From Life to Life; and an article by Rabbi Dovid Vichmin on Dr. Slavin.

Following the Blind Horse

By Esti Frimerman

It was a cold winter evening in Siberia and the end of a hard day for the local factory workers. As they had many times before, a group of workers got together at their favorite tavern at the edge of town. They laughed, drank, and were merry until one of the men collapsed on the floor, exhausted and drunk. As the night wore on, the second, third, and fourth man eventually all passed out in the tavern. Little did they know that while they were snoring in a deep drunken sleep, a blizzard was swirling.

In the early morning, the first man woke up. Still feeling a little drunk, he glanced at the clock and realized he had to leave right away to get to work. As he hurried to the door of the tavern, he was shocked to discover a sea of white outside.

Several feet of snow had blanketed the land and flakes were still floating through the dimly lit sky. There was no sign to direct, no path to follow, and no way of knowing how to make it back to the factory. “You know the way, right?” he slurred to his horse as he mounted. With a little smack, the horse began walking blindly into the snowstorm in the direction it was facing at the time. Unfortunately for the man, the horse hap-

pened to be facing the exact opposite direction of the factory.

Shortly after, the next man woke up. Also rushing to get to work at the factory, he, too, was shocked at the sight of the snow-covered land. He got to his horse and to his relief saw a faint trail of horse prints in the snow. “Oh!” he thought to himself, “Now I know where to go! I will just follow the path of the previous horse to the factory!”

Like the men before him, the third man woke up in a rush to get to work. This time, he could see a clearer trail made by the previous men on their horses. By the time the last man stumbled to his horse, the prints had created a very clear path. The fourth man didn’t even bother to look around to see if he could spot the lights of the town or factory — instead, he immediately guided his horse onto the well-used trail, confident that it was the way to work. Of course, no one ever did arrive.

With this story, my father taught me that one should not blindly follow the crowd or presume one is on the right track just because it seems to be a well-beaten path.

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Socially Savvy

A Parenting Panel

Written by Libby (Zuntz) Herz, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5759 (1999)

Tzippy Rubashkin, Riverview, Florida
Graduating class of 5759 (1999)

Libby (Slavin) Klein, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5759 (1999)

Estee (Goldberg) Lieblich, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5759 (1999)

Chanie (Kessler) Katz, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5759 (1999)



In the world of parenting, few aspects are as important as helping children develop effective social skills. Healthy relationships, self-confidence, and a sense of connection are traits that are often taken for granted. Yet, these traits are connected to almost every aspect of a sense of well-being and happiness. When things are alright on the social front, children will be happy and doing their best. But a lack of friends, or the inability to get along with others, can make other aspects of life feel painful.

In Pirkei Avos we are instructed: “קנה לך חבר — Acquire for yourself a good friend.” Our children’s friends have a great influence on them, and choosing the right friends can affect the trajectory of their lives. The right skills will lead to increased comfort with others and more success in making friends!

Thankfully, social skills can be learned. The steps to positive social skills are paved with perspective-taking, empathy, friendship management, conversational skills, and communication.

Libby Herz, interviewer for Embrace Magazine, sat down with a group of friends, community members, and experts who have decades of parenting and educating experience. Libby Klein, Special Educator; Chanie Katz, Learning Behavioral Analyst; Tzippy Rubashkin, Shlucha in Riverview, FL; and Estee Liebllich, Parenting Coach and Temperament Specialist share their wisdom to help parents navigate the complex world of social skills.

Below are various skills you may choose to implement to help your child. We suggest you focus on one at length before moving on to another skill.

Libby Klein’s Creative and Effective Strategies for Teaching Social Skills in the Younger Years

Perspective Taking: Encourage children to consider different viewpoints to help them understand why others may act the way they do.

Alternative Endings: After understanding various perspectives, guide children to think about how they could handle situations differently next time, to create a more positive outcome.

Puppet Shows: Use dolls, puppets, or mentchies to re-create a scenario that happened at home or in the classroom. This helps children see the full picture. Puppet show scenarios should demonstrate the right way to behave in various situations and encourage children to emulate positive behaviors. Allowing the child to act out different roles in the story helps him or her feel more in control.

Social Groups: Small groups of children can learn social skills together. Focusing on one particular skill is particularly effective, as the children get to practice the skill in real-time. One example is teaching chil-

When teaching listening skills, for example, have your child listen as her peer explains how she likes her hot cocoa.

dren to be good listeners. Explain why it’s important to listen to others, and then do an activity related to the skill. When teaching listening skills, for example, have your child listen as her peer explains how she likes her hot cocoa. Then, have the child put together the cocoa that her friend asked for. Once the drink is made, the children switch roles, and the second friend makes hot cocoa based on the first friend’s directions.

Build Them Up: Perhaps most crucially, discover what our child is good at, and work on building his or her self-confidence. When a child feels good about himself, it is much easier to make his friends, classmates, and siblings feel good about themselves in return.

Chanie Katz’s Best Bets for Social Skills For Teens and Tweens

Age Matters: Children’s social skill requirements evolve as they grow older. What’s appropriate for an



eight-year-old differs significantly from what's expected of a teenager. Being mindful of, and adapting to, these age-related changes is crucial for their social development.

Self-Regulation and Coping Skills: Self-regulation and coping skills are the secret weapons that enable children to manage disappointment and navigate emotional challenges effectively. Practice taking deep, calming breaths when needed, and taking time to relax before reacting. Even the most socially skilled individuals can falter without self-calming techniques.

Express Yourself: Effective communication is the cornerstone of human connection. Teaching children to recognize and express their own thoughts and feelings is crucial for fostering genuine connections.

Know Thyself: The journey to exceptional social skills begins with self-awareness. Parents should talk with their children and help them recognize their innate strengths, weaknesses, and interests to build their friendship toolkit. Knowing what they bring to the table and what they seek in a friend helps to establish balanced and complementary relationships. For example, a girl who loves jumping rope and playing tag can look for a friend who loves the same activities. A boy who loves talking about the latest Jewish books will most likely get along with another boy who shares those interests.

Friendship Qualities: Finding true friends is akin to searching for treasures in a vast sea. Genuine, quality friendships are not built on popularity, but on mutual respect, support, and the ability to let each

Finding true friends is akin to searching for treasures in a vast sea.

other shine. This idea applies to all friendships but is particularly helpful for teens and tweens who must overcome unique social hurdles on a daily basis.

Shallow vs. True Connections: In today's world of social media and fleeting interactions, it's easy to confuse popularity with genuine connection. True friends are the ones who stand the test of time and provide unwavering support and understanding.

Tzippy Rubashkin: Navigating Social Skills on Shlichus

While Tzippy grew up in the middle of Crown Heights, her children are being raised on shlichus in a small town and leading a very different childhood experience than her own. They attend small schools and online schools, which often means they don't have immediate access to friends.

Despite these challenges, Tzippy emphasizes that her children didn't "miss out" on developing social skills. Instead, they adapt to unique circumstances, fostering valuable life skills.

Sending her children to summer camp posed unique challenges, as they often had to board buses filled with unfamiliar faces. Although daunting at first, Tzippy realizes that this experience teaches her children to be independent and make friends on their own.

Tzippy believes that growing up on shlichus helps build strength, as her children have learned to navigate new situations independently. They learn to rely on themselves to make friends, which is a valuable skill for the future.

In addition to learning how to make friends on their own, Tzippy's children have developed independence and resilience. They learned to navigate life by being confident in their own abilities.

Estee Lieblich's Insights on Sibling Rivalry and Parenting

Estee Lieblich, a parenting coach and temperament



specialist, offers valuable insights on how parents can approach conflicts and support their children.

Sibling Rivalry as a Learning Opportunity: Sibling rivalry is a normal and healthy part of a child's learning and development. It's an essential process for their inner growth and for their relationships with others.

Negotiating Skills: Sibling rivalry can help children learn valuable life skills such as negotiation, assertiveness, and collaboration.

Parental Intervention: Parents often struggle to tolerate their children's emotional experiences during conflicts, leading them to intervene and rescue their kids from the struggle. But children can handle the challenges better than parents might think. Often, when siblings argue loudly with each other, they are back to playing together moments later. But when parents intervene, that is less likely to happen.

Offering Support: When your children turn to you during their argument, offer kind words and hugs, but take a neutral stance so as not to get caught in all the details.

Finding Calm: The key lesson is to learn how to

When your child is going through a tough time, you don't need to get caught up in the chaos. Believe in your child.

find calm within yourself when your children are in conflict with each other. When your child is going through a tough time, you don't need to get caught up in the chaos. Believe in your child. By not joining the fight, everyone benefits.

~~

Navigating the intricate world of parenting and social skills is a journey filled with depth, nuance, and endless possibilities. The strategies provided will help children develop social skills and navigate conflicts, ensuring their emotional growth and well-being. By using these tips alongside saying plenty of Tehillim, you can unlock the secrets to nurturing well-rounded, socially adept, and happy children. ♣



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Beyond the Checklist

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



How Do We Measure Growth?

In the quest to measure, track, and encourage the growth of our students and children, parents and teachers use checklists as a helpful tool. Within the school system, checklists often come with an incentive at the end, further encouraging growth in an age-appropriate way. Outside of school, a checklist — literal or internal — is a form of Cheshbon Hanefesh, and there are many benefits to checklists of various kinds:

1. Checklists can turn lofty aspirations into SMART goals: Small, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
2. Growth becomes concrete as you incorporate visual and tactile modalities into setting and meeting your goals.
3. That dopamine rush when you check off a box as complete! (Yes, I'm one of those people who starts every to-do list with items I've already done, just so I can check them off.)
4. אדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו — a person is affected by his actions. By using checklists, you can accustom yourself to habits, routines, and behaviors that will ultimately become part of you and shape who you are.

These advantages are many and they are real. However, sometimes, and for some people, there are also pitfalls. By being aware of these concerns we can ensure that checklists meet the goal of encouraging true and lasting growth, instead of merely measuring it in the short term.

A Yardstick to Measure by... Or a Ladder to Grow On?

The main challenge is with checklists applied to personal growth. As educators, we need to ask ourselves the following questions: Is growth linear? Is it always apparent and measurable? Beyond Halacha, are Yiddishkeit and *Chassidishkeit* one size fits all? When we check off our list, have we “arrived,” or rather, is Avodas Hashem infinite and lifelong?

We have so internalized the Rebbe’s horaos, and our ideal version of what a Chassid should look like, that we all have an internal checklist that we use as a measuring stick. Because Avodas Hashem is infinite, inevitably, we — and others we use the measuring stick for — fall short.

Perhaps instead of thinking of a checklist, we should think of a ladder — steps provided to us to climb ever higher in our quest to serve Hashem and bring Moshiach. In this way, it matters not where we are on the ladder, but that we are climbing.

In a famous story, someone visiting the Rebbe asked how he could be considered a Chossid. The Rebbe answered, “If you decide each day to be a little bit better than the day before, I’m happy to consider you my Chossid.”

Have we truly internalized this message? In seminary, Rebbetzin Sara Kaplan of Tzfas made a powerful point to us young women: Why do you think that the Rebbe loves every Jew on the dollar line, with long hair and ripped jeans, but not a Lubavitch girl who hasn’t said Chitas?

Especially as women and mothers, we may find that the checklist mentality stops working for us, yet it persists, putting a downer on our self-concept as *chassidische* women, who have very different schedules and priorities than *chassidische* seminary girls.

For me personally, as a mother of young children, I have had to realize that my avodah is not necessarily to

Do I panic when comparing my children to neighbors?

do everything on the “checklist” — but to choose this path as mine, so that I am always growing on it. As a high school and seminary girl, I had time for more of its quantitative aspects. Now, as a busy mother BH, I’m privileged to focus more on quality. And one day, when I have more free time again, instead of a mid-life crisis I’ll have my “checklist” — or rather ladder — of the Rebbe’s *inyonim* that await.

In fact, the things we don’t yet do are what give us a reason to wake up in the morning. Chassidus opens up our horizons, gives us goals that are bigger than ourselves, and expands new dimensions in what we aspire to, filling a real existential need to constantly grow. Even if someone has checked everything off of their current checklist, they will be happy to know that in Chassidus, we have never arrived. The rungs of the ladder that we have not yet attained are as important to our spiritual growth as those that are already behind us.

A Lens to View Others

Just as we need to be wary of constantly measuring ourselves up against a checklist, we need to be careful of how we view others.

Do I look at my students as either the ones who do everything they’re supposed to and the ones who don’t, or do I look at them as unique individuals with infinite permutations of strengths, challenges, and potential? Do I quickly size up and categorize other women I meet, instead of waiting patiently to get to know their interests,



Let's free up our inner resources from self-criticism, allowing more energy for true growth.

struggles, passions, and goals? Do I panic when comparing my children to neighbors who may daven on vacation days and say Shabbos Mevorchim Tehillim without fail, or do I look at them with a lifetime of growth ahead and seek to discover what they need to help them grow right now?

What about children with sensory or executive functioning challenges they need to overcome to help them organize their time and their tasks? And what of our friends, students, and community members who have been through or are in the process of working through gigantic personal, health, or family challenges that constitute a very different and immeasurably meaningful Avoda?

When we break the Matza each year at the Pesach Seder and choose the bigger half to put away from Afikomen, we quote the famous response of the Tzemech Tzedek to a guest who was carefully measuring which half was bigger: “*A gadol vas men darf em mestin, iz kein gadol nit* — one whose greatness has to be measured, is not really great.” We can keep the ladder, but let go of the yardstick because we never really know the greatness of another neshama.

All or Nothing

Another potential pitfall to the checklist mentality that some children and adults can fall prey to is an “all or nothing,” “throw out the baby with the bathwater” approach. I once experienced this when I missed counting Sefiras Ha’omer on — gulp — the second night. Subsequently, when my husband reminded me to count Sefira, I responded with a wave of the hand and an indifferent look that indicated, “Oh, I don’t do that this year.” Psychologically, it was easier to define myself as not the kind of person who counts Sefira than to face my dismal flop by counting without a bracha when I did remember.

This experience was a powerful lesson for me. Many young people may look at a lofty goal and become paralyzed by anxiety, defining themselves by the boxes they missed instead of those they checked off. Kids might collapse in tears or give up entirely because of perfectionism. Older children might have a different reaction to mask a similar feeling. Similarly to how I rearranged my

self-concept during Sefira that year to protect my pride, a teenager might build a wall of cynicism that says, “Oh, that’s not me,” as a self-preservation tool.

Many children thrive on the challenge and the adrenaline of traditional checklists and incentive programs. For those who don’t, understanding why might help us to “talk them off the cliff” and calm their anxiety. Or, we can modify or offer an alternative that works for them.

Tool or Mindset?

Clearly, checklists are a valuable tool in our arsenal of *Chassidische* chinuch. However we decide to use them, let’s remember that any chinuch tool also translates into a mindset. The way that we communicate about these checklists, as well as the other avenues for chinuch we provide, will make all the difference in how students view themselves and the process of growth throughout their lives.

Let’s gift our children and ourselves an inner ladder, not just an inner yardstick.

Let’s free up our inner resources from self-criticism, allowing more energy for true growth.

Let’s emphasize a core identity that is not defined by outward behavior only, and that can sustain flexibility, changing circumstances, and individual challenges.

And let’s remember to celebrate growth in all of its forms, big or small, linear or non-linear, visible or hidden. Now that’s something you can keep checking off your list! ■

1. ספר החינוך

Chanah Rose is the Educational Director of the Menachem Education Foundation. She can be contacted at c.rose@mymef.org.



A Checklist of Modified Checklists

There are many ways to modify checklists when appropriate, for those children who don't respond well to them, or for more abstract and less measurable goals. Here are just a few:

Self-check: We are used to students checking off their achievements in Tzivos Hashem and other areas. But this becomes even more important in areas that the teacher can't objectively measure — such as *kavona* in davening, Ahavas Yisrael, etc. While these themes have an observable aspect, asking students to mark themselves on their inner dimension helps the checklist feel more authentic.

Individualized goals: In addition to the students marking themselves, maybe they can choose the goals in the first place. What is their growth target this semester for improvement in davening? How much more often can they push themselves to be punctual, organized, or another aspect of school work? Which three of this list of *chassidische hanhagos* do they want to choose to grow in this year?

Shades of gray: Sometimes, an aspect of growth is black and white, and sometimes it's more gray — a continuum. Perhaps providing a Likert scale-type checklist — including answers such as “some of the time” or “most of the time,” “some improvement” or “much improvement,” and other nuanced responses instead of just yes or no — can help students internalize the subtle nature of personal growth. A five-point scale (choose a number from one to five, with one being never and five being always, or one being not at all and five being extremely well) can also do the trick.

Journals and portfolios: I may be accused of being partial to journaling as it shows up in almost every one of my chinuch articles! But it's true, there is a certain magic to free-writing to reflect on personal growth and draw lessons from each day's attempts. For example, write a few sentences on how you feel your learning went today, or your davening, etc. Portfolios are more structured and ask students to collect samples of their work over the course of the year. Both allow us to look back to the beginning of the year and compare it to the end, tracking and celebrating growth.

A LIFE *of* DEDICATION

Goldie Litvin's Journey of Education and Shlichus

Goldie (Weiss) Litvin, Louisville, Kentucky
Graduating seminary class of 5743 (1983)

Written by Libby (Zuntz) Herz, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5759 (1999)



There's a thriving Jewish school in the heart of Louisville, Kentucky, that rests upon the labor and love of Goldie Litvin. Goldie has been running both of Louisville's Jewish educational institutions: Louisville Jewish Day School and the preschool, Gan Torah, since 5756 (1996).

Early Years and Shlichus Beginnings

Goldie's journey into shlichus began in the early 5740s (1980s). In her second year at Bais Rivkah seminary, in 5743 (1983), she married Rabbi Avremy Litvin; two short years later, the duo set out on shlichus

to Louisville, Kentucky, on a mission to bring authentic Torah and Yiddishkeit to the Jewish community there.

The Founding of a Chabad School

After eleven years on Shlichus, Goldie embarked on a new mission: the opening of a Chabad school in Louisville. At the time, the city had a Jewish day school which had been operational since 5748 (1988), but Goldie and her husband felt the need to provide a more authentic form of education to the local Jewish community. “The school was incompatible with the education I wanted for my children,” says Goldie. “Other people also asked us to provide a different form of education.” The Litvins faced initial challenges and skepticism, but they believed in the importance of Torah education for the city.

“After Gimmel Tammuz,” Goldie recalls, “My husband and I wrote a long letter to the Rebbe, bringing up various points for why we should or should not start the school.” Her husband was adamant about one thing. “He said that we need Igros Kodesh Chelek Yud, which we did not have at the time. There were other Shluchim in the town, but nobody had Chelek Yud.”

Finally, Goldie did what every smart Jewish girl does. She called her mother. “I asked her to open a Chelek Yud from the seforim shaffeh. My mother read the letter to me — it was a letter from the Frierdiker Rebbe — which answered our letter point-by-point. It was a clear brocha to start the school!”

The letter stated that the city should know about Lubavitch chinuch and that even if there might be another Jewish school, one must provide Torah education. It added that the city would eventually accept the school, even if it wasn’t initially accepted. “Sometimes you search for an answer,” says Goldie. “But this was not something you had to search for. This answer was very clear.”

The unequivocal response granted a brocha to start the school and emphasized the importance of Lubavitch chinuch, even in the face of potential opposition. For Goldie, this was an unmistakable sign that their mission had the Rebbe’s approval.

Chinuch in their Veins

Goldie’s dedication to education is a family tradition. From her grandfather to her siblings, and now to her own children, everyone is involved in chinuch. “My grandfather came to America from Russia in 5670

“Sometimes you search for an answer,” says Goldie. “But this was not something you had to search for. This answer was very clear.”

(1910),” she says, “and he brought all of his siblings to America. He was a peddler, but all of his brothers were in chinuch. My brothers were always in chinuch, too. My father, Rabbi Kehos Weiss a”h, was sent by the Rebbe to be involved in chinuch and was the principal and administrator of the school in Pittsburgh for many years.”

Growing up, her father, Rabbi Weiss, was the principal of her school. “My father was a physically big man,” she recalls. “If you got called to the office, it was scary. Once, I was called to his office and I said, ‘But I didn’t do anything!’ But my father had only called me in to write up a speech in honor of my Bubby.”

Rabbi Weiss’s invaluable expertise in education and his innovative approach to introducing new programs in Pittsburgh have been a constant source of support for Goldie. When she started her own school, Goldie would constantly consult with her father on curriculum, discipline, and anything that came up during the day.

“My father was very innovative,” Goldie says. “He brought avante-garde programs to school. He would test out the ideas and if he didn’t like it, we would stop. It’s important to try new things and see if they work. If it’s positive, we continue; if not, we try something else.” His commitment to experimentation and adaptability, and an ever-willingness to try new methods and approaches to inspire students was passed on to the next generation.

Chassidic Pedagogy

Goldie utilizes the principles of Chassidus to infuse secular studies with a Yiddishe perspective. For instance, last year, students were taught a geography unit from a unique angle; they scoured a map and considered places in the world where there aren’t Shluchim. Then, they researched communities and formed a thesis on why it’s essential to send Shluchim there. The study helped students foster a deep connection to Yiddishkeit while inspiring them to understand their responsibilities to the broader Jewish community.

“I give the kids a constant reminder of where they come from,” Goldie says. She puts figures symbolizing Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov up on the wall, and students in the older grades are required to learn a self-taught unit on general Jewish knowledge on which they are quizzed weekly. This requirement engraves important Jewish facts into students’ minds, including important events from Tanach, the names of Chumashim, and basic events in Jewish history. “They hated me for those tests,” Goldie smiles wryly. But a grown student of hers once met Goldie years later. After a brief chat, he said, “At the time, I definitely did not like learning all those facts. But at my next school, they asked me how I knew so much. I told them that my teacher used to torture me! But in all seriousness, thank you so much for doing that.”

Wearing All the Hats, All At Once

At Louisville Jewish Day School, you can catch Goldie cooking up a gigantic pot of pasta, mopping a classroom floor, and, moments later, at her desk writing up a curriculum. With her boundless energy and deep commitment to the cause, she wears many hats throughout the day. Goldie is the cook, the janitor, the principal, and the teacher — whatever the school and her community need at the moment. Her multifaceted approach has not only enabled her school to thrive but also reflects the true spirit of shlichus, where every task is an opportunity to serve and educate.

Still, for Goldie, the classroom is where she feels at home. “When I’m in the classroom,” she says, “it’s the only place I want to be. But when I’m out of the classroom, I don’t want to go back,” she adds with a laugh.

A Changing Population

Louisville Jewish Day School began as a very small school with just five students. Since then, it has seen years with up to fifty pupils. Louisville tends to be a transient community, explains Goldie. “The school’s size varies according to the community’s needs, with grades fluctuating depending on their student population. Sometimes we have not frum kids, and sometimes we have frum kids who are not Chabad. We need to be able to give over Chassidus in a way that is accepted.”

Goldie’s children all attended Louisville Jewish Day School and Gan Torah, and many of her grandchildren are currently in attendance. “My son who lives eighty miles away sends his children here each day. They could be homeschooled, but it’s important to

All part of a legacy that she continues to build.

be with other children. Every day they come, except on Fridays in the winter. But as soon as Shabbos starts at six, they are back.”

Goldie’s eyes light up as she recalls the delight of two grandchildren who are the same age. “There are two cousins who see each other at school every day. They hug each other whenever they see each other. It’s a big simcha every day!”

A Cherished Legacy

“I get out of bed with my creaky bones, but you need all the energy you can muster,” she says. “Now I teach first- and second-grade English because I couldn’t find an English teacher this year. I need to switch my brain from teaching Alef Beis to teaching English. You need an attitude of simcha here.”

The Chabad school in Kentucky has produced graduates who have gone on to become lawyers, teachers, engineers, and rabbis. They’ve served in various capacities from the military in Eretz Yisroel to providing outreach and education in different parts of the world. The impact of her school is a testament to Goldie’s dedication to bringing up the next generation. “It’s important that children leave my school knowing that we love Hashem and Hashem loves us.”

For Goldie, Shlichus is a way of life. Her commitment to the Louisville community, her tireless service in a multitude of roles, and her unshakable emunah are all part of a legacy that she continues to build. And it’s a journey that is still unfolding, with no end in sight. ■



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ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

FINDING THE BALANCE



DEAR CHAYA,

I come from a very large, warm, and loving family, baruch Hashem. We live spread out all over the US and Canada, and we don't see each other very often. When our families do get together for Kinus or simchas, there is an uncomfortable dilemma that often arises: is it acceptable to make a siblings-only get-together? We have a siblings-only WhatsApp group, which we feel is needed for some sensitive conversations (like shidduchim for siblings).

I know that some of the sisters-in-law have mentioned that they feel left out etc., although not outright hurt by being excluded from that group... So if the WhatsApp group is tolerated, albeit not loved, do you think an in-person sibling-only reunion while the spouses are in town is crossing the line? Thank you!

Signed,

Trying to be sensitive



DEAR TRYING,

Good for you for taking the initiative and for your sensitivity in bringing up this question. Often, in sticky situations like this which involve many others, people will leave things at status quo to avoid making waves, sometimes even when others may be hurt in the process. It takes courage to take responsibility for your part in this dynamic, ask for advice, and do what you can to ensure that the feelings of others are respected.

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Siblings share a special bond that comes from growing up together, including shared memories, a similar outlook, personality traits, or a common temperament.

The bond of marriage, while it begins later in life, is extremely precious and important, and comes along with a strong commitment of love and respect for each other.

These are two relationships that need to be balanced in this scenario: on the one hand, we feel a loyalty to our siblings who were the first close relationships in our lives, and on the other hand, we (and our siblings) now have a new commitment to our respective spouses, one which also takes precedence over all other relationships in our lives.

ANALYZING THE SITUATION

Therefore, the first factor that needs to be considered in this scenario is the possibility that a siblings-only get-together, excluding in-laws — and perhaps it is more appropriate to refer to them as spouses — may have an impact on marriage relationships in the family. This possibility differs in every family and at different times; for example, a newlywed couple is likely to have

Remember that as close and as precious as sibling relationships are, they should not come before the shalom bayis between a husband and wife.

a more delicate relationship with each other than an older couple who has years of connection to support it. If there's a family history of competition or in-law friction, this will serve to rub it in. In any of those cases, it may be unwise and even damaging to hold such a get-together, as the potential risks outweigh the benefits.

Another aspect to think about is the family culture and dynamics in general, and more specifically:

Will there be one or more other family gatherings at this time that include in-laws? Are in-laws in general respected and included in family conversations and get-togethers?

If that is the case, chances are higher that spouses will be secure and comfortable enough not to feel threatened by being excluded at this one event. If not, it is probably not a risk worth taking.

Remember that as close and as precious as sibling relationships are, they should not come before the shalom bayis between a husband and wife.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

Now, in case it is determined that it's acceptable to go ahead under your specific circumstances, there are a few other details to work out first: What are the in-laws expected to be doing at the time of this hypothetical gathering? Are they going to be left watching all the



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

Being mevater is not just an action but an internal decision to really forget and forgive, even when something that was rightfully yours was given to another.

kids alone without help, causing them to resent the situation even more? Is there somewhere comfortable for them to hang out at that time? Considering their situation and feelings at this time would also contribute to making it all possible without any hard feelings.

Especially since you already have a WhatsApp group where it is possible to discuss almost anything in private, the sensitive choice may well be to avoid the potential strife caused by an exclusive in-person gathering. As close and dear as our siblings are to us, our priority lies with our spouses, the peace between us and them, and the new families that they are building together.

Wishing you much success in raising your family in a spirit of love, joy, and peace, which it seems you are well on your way to doing by your very example.

All the best,


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“Jewish wealth is not houses and gold.

The everlasting Jewish wealth is: Being Jews who keep Torah and Mitzvot, and bringing into the world children and grandchildren who keep Torah and Mitzvos.” (Hayom Yom 9 Nissan)

The Rebbe delineates what Jewish wealth is. Yet, in a physical world where the gashmiyus in our lives is propelled by money, EmBRace presents to you our money issue (pun intended). In the maamar *Mayim Rabim*, the mighty waters are defined as *tirdos haparnassah*, financial concerns. Recognizing the reality and role of finances in our lives, our team felt it important to address this million-dollar topic.

In Shaar Habitachon, the purpose of money is emphasized. Money is a conduit; it’s a medium to serve Hashem, whether with a tight budget or a non-existent one. Money does not exist to govern our lives, but its presence is a tool for us to use in reaching our ultimate goal of serving Hashem in the best way possible and raising a family on the basis of Torah and Mitzvos.

There is a famous story about the chassid who had become overly involved in his boot business. When he was at a yechidus with the Rebbe Rashab, he excitedly detailed the nuances of his boot manufacturing company to the Rebbe. The Rebbe told him, “Feet in boots, I have seen — but a head in boots...?”

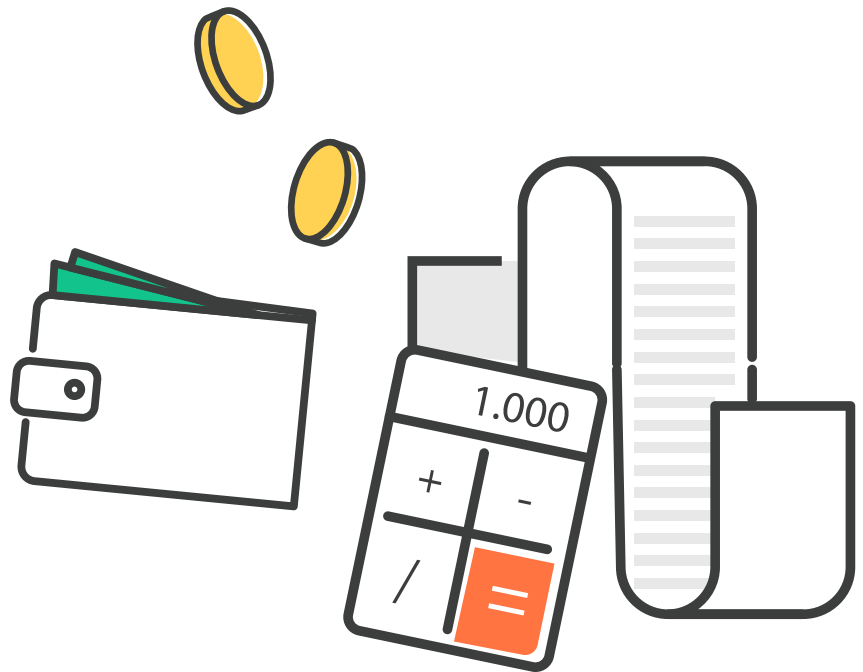
While money can drown us as its waves come crashing, Chasidus teaches us that the right perspective on money has us riding those waves. With this in mind, the following articles share insight and wisdom, both practical and inspiring, so that we can be educated in money matters so that money does not matter most. Many beautiful mitzvos can be fulfilled with money, like *hachnosas kallah*, supporting *mosdos*, and maaser. Yet, when financial woes feel overwhelming, our views of money can be skewed, putting our heads in boots. We hope that the following articles fulfill their vision of education, pragmatism, and inspiration in money matters. This way, money woes will never extinguish your love for Hashem, His Torah, and Mitzvos.



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BEHIND THE BUDGET

Leah (Dubroff) Abraham, East Flatbush
Graduating class of 5761 (2001)



There is a famous story told by Reb Nachman of Breslov:
A Jew once dreamt that under a certain bridge in Vienna, he would find a great treasure. He traveled to Vienna and stood near the bridge, trying to figure out what to do next. A policeman who was passing by became suspicious and asked him what he was standing there for. Sensing that honesty would be the best policy, the Jew told him about his dream. If the policeman was willing to help him dig up the treasure, he offered, he would be happy to share it with him. The policeman laughed and said, “You Jews are only interested in dreams. I also had a dream, and also saw a treasure.” The policeman then went on to accurately describe the man’s city and house. “In my dream, that’s where the treasure is buried,” he concluded. The Jew rushed home, dug under his house, and sure enough found the treasure.

Many people dream of one day finding a treasure or winning the lottery. Finances affect all of us, and until Moshiach comes, we often find ourselves digging, dreaming, and looking for better. There are many sides to improving your financial situation. There are *ruchniyusdike* sides — giving *choimesh*, davening, etc. — and there are practical ways to increase your cash flow, e.g. make more money.

Improving your financial situation by increasing your income is foundational but not my area of expertise. I want to talk about your own treasure, the money under your own house.

When you are intentional about the income that, with Hashem's help, you do have, and use it in a way that best benefits your family, you allow yourself to discover the treasure underneath it all.

That all starts with a budget. Now, I already hear the groaning — but a budget is not a tool to make you skimp or be stingy. Following a budget is simply being intentional with your money. It's like a schedule for dollars, deciding ahead of time how you want to use the income you have.

Before you set up a budget, it is a good idea to look at how you are already spending your money. You want

I want to talk about your own treasure, the money under your own house.

to look at two things. First, the big numbers — where are the big chunks of money going; are you surprised that you spend hundreds of dollars in Kidichic or the grocery store? Then look at the small amounts of money. What are small expenses that are adding up? Amazon, Dollar Tree, and Target may be some offenders. I am not going to tell you that you need to spend less money on clothes and that it's time to cut out dollar store prizes for the kids. What I want you to do is ask yourself, am I okay with these numbers; do they reflect how I want to spend my money?

Budgeting experts are known to say that if you want to know what someone values, check their bank statements (or credit card bills). Not only is this true, i.e. you will find patterns in your spending that reflect what is important to you, but it also helps you as you create a budget. When you look at your statements

The bottom line is that you spend money on things that you attribute value to.

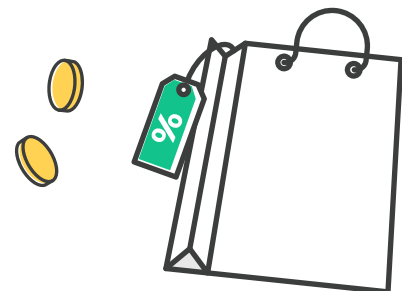
and ask yourself if you are okay with those numbers, what you are asking yourself is, “Do these expenditures reflect my values?”

Here are some examples of values and their corresponding expenditures:

- A budgeting expert would tell you that unless you're rich, don't send your children to private school. If you value *Chinuch Al Taharas Hakodesh*, you spend money on tuition.
- Following Halacha requires tznius clothes, kosher food, tefillin, mezuzos, etc.; all of which come at a price.
- As a compassionate and giving nation, tzedaka and helping others is a big value.
- Celebrating Shabbos and Yom Tov with special foods and with guests costs money, too.
- If you live far from 770 and the Ohel, you'll be spending money to visit Crown Heights and inspire your entire shlichus.

Some values are more personal or individual and you may notice that you spend more in some areas than a friend and vice versa:

- Healthy, organic food
- Family vacations
- Toys/games
- Self-care
- Therapies
- Extracurricular activities
- Date nights
- Cleaning help
- Books/magazine subscriptions



If you aren't sure if you want to buy something, wait twenty-four hours and then decide .

The bottom line is that you spend money on things that you attribute value to. There is no right or wrong way to spend your money, as not everyone shares the same values. The only rules are 1. Spend only the money you have, and 2. Spend money that reflects your values, i.e. be intentional with your money.

How is one intentional with money? Let's talk about setting up a budget, and creating a system where you decide in advance how you want to spend your income.

There are two categories in every budget: spending and savings.

In your spending budget, you'll have both fixed and flexible expenses. The fixed category includes monthly/annual payments that cost the same or about the same on a consistent basis. Examples of this are housing, tuition, maaser, utilities, retirement, bus fees, insurance, etc. The flexible category includes as-needed expenses, and the amount you spend may vary from month to month. This is a category where the funds can be moved around as you decide how you want to spend your money. Examples may include groceries, cleaning help, clothing, date nights, and gifts.

There is a bonus spending category that every family on a budget should include and that is fun money or blow money, otherwise known as discretionary funds. This is a sum of money given to each adult (or child in the form of allowance) that can be used at their discretion. It is very challenging and often stifling to follow a budget; everyone needs a bit of breathing room, like the ability to pick up a milkshake or get a manicure without overthinking it. This money actually *helps* you stay financially responsible and avoid burnout.

Now what about those non-consistent, big expenses or emergency expenses? This is where savings come in. Within your savings account, create a category called funds. It can even be divided into multiple small savings accounts, each to fund an individual expense. Slowly contribute to these accounts to avoid spending money you don't have on a credit card. Some examples of funds may be a simcha fund,

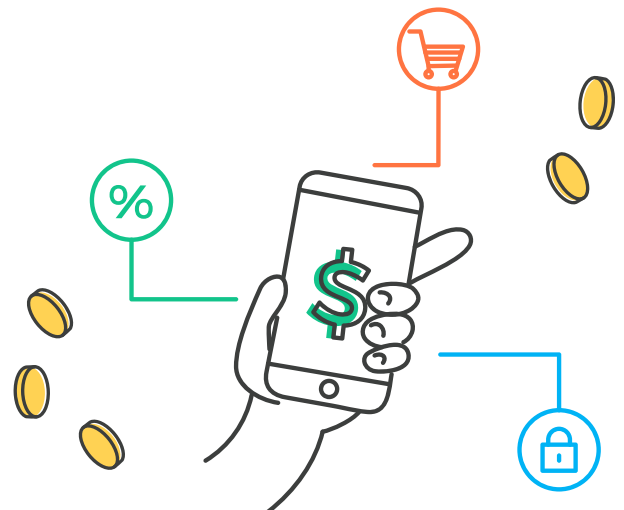
camp fund, new sheitel fund, family vacation fund, emergency fund, etc. Think about big expenses that might be coming up and put away some money each month to build up cash to pay for them.

Other types of savings that may be part of your budget are long-term savings and investments. This is a whole other discussion and completely above my pay grade. I will leave that to the experts to cover.

Some people budget to the dollar, others only budget their fixed expenses and then make sure not to overdraft on the flexible ones. How you choose to use your budget is your choice, but knowledge is power and you deserve that with your money.

Some practical tips to be intentional with your spending:

- **The 24-Hour Rule:** If you aren't sure if you want to buy something, wait twenty-four hours and then decide (Amazon has a save-for-later cart for those of us who need it).
- **The Time = Money Rule:** Before swiping your card, ask yourself how many hours you need to work to pay for this item.
- **The Two-Out-of-Three Rule:** My husband's grandfather taught me this one. Everything you spend money on has three characteristics — quality, ease/time, and cost. You can only get two out of the three, and you need to decide which is most important to you (values, again). If you need something cheap right away, you will compromise on quality; if you want a quality item for a cheap price, you may need to spend time finding it, making it, or waiting for a sale; and if you want a quality item immediately, you're going to have to spend a lot. Decide your priorities before spending.



- Ask yourself: 1. Do I really need this? 2. Do I need it now? 3. Is there a way to get this for a lower price?
- Acknowledge what will happen if you don't spend this money — will you end up paying for it in other ways later (e.g. dental care, mental health needs, oil changes)?
- Know Thyself: Are you someone who impulse shops and will do better with an Instacart list? Do you shop sales in stores or are you good at comparing prices (we've saved a lot of money by having my husband grocery shop)? Do you need to delete the Amazon app? Would you rather work more hours and buy takeout, or have more guests but serve simpler foods? Do you spend more using cash or a card? Credit or debit? Are you good at returning? And are you really going to turn all those bananas no one in your house eats but you bought on sale into smoothies?

Conclusively, perhaps the *mashal* we started with is not perfectly accurate. The money you have is not your own treasure. Money is a tool and a gift from Hashem; you are merely the distributor of your

A way to show Hashem that we appreciate the gift of parnassa and we will act responsibly with it.

income. It's important to prioritize your money in ways that reflect that parnassah all comes from Hashem. When money is tight and there isn't much room in the budget, ask yourself, "How does Hashem want me to spend this money?" It's an opportune time to add in your learning and bitachon and ask Hashem to give so that you have more to give.

Ultimately it is Hashem who provides for your needs, and creating a budget or spending with intention is not about *kochi v'otzem yodi* (you can budget perfectly and still not have enough, or *chas v'shalom* end up with an emergency that completely throws your finances off) but rather a way to show Hashem that we appreciate the gift of parnassa and we will act responsibly with it.

May Hashem bench us with unlimited brochos and herald in the time of ultimate harchava, the coming of Moshiach now. ■

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ACU FOR ATHLETES

SPIRITUAL ABUNDANCE

Chaya (Gopin) Margolin, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5767 (2007)



רבינו הזקן אמר: אידישע גשמיות איז רוחניות, דער אויבערשטער גיט אונז גשמיות, מיר זאלן דערפון מאכען רוחניות. אמאל אז עס איז לרגע ניש אזוי, דארפען געבען דעם אויבערשטען אפילו מנחת עני גיט ער א פולע. (היום יום כ"ז שבת)

“The Alter Rebbe said: Jewish physical matter is spiritual. Hashem gives us material bounty for us to transform into something spiritual. When occasionally it is not so at the moment (Hashem has not provided the material wealth), then we must give Hashem whatever we can, even a ‘pauper’s offering,’ and then He gives generously.”

This Hayom Yom is the overall mantra for how I approach (and encourage others to approach) finances in all areas.

It is not easy to remember why we work so hard to earn money. However, it is clear here that it is for the specific purpose of spending money on mitzvos. To be able to fulfill Hachnosas Orchim

with abundance, to buy a more beautiful esrog, to buy pounds and pounds of matzah. And nothing is more important than giving Tzedakah, the ultimate mitzvah we can do with our hard-earned money to bring the Geulah closer. We won't always have an abundance of money to spend on all these things, but the Alter Rebbe teaches that money is important and we have a specific mission to accomplish with it. And if we give even when it's hard, Hashem will repay us generously.

This Hayom Yom really changed my outlook on money. Of course, we should budget. Of course, we should save for emergencies and future expenses. But what is the purpose of earning money? The purpose is to spend on Hashem. As we all know, any money we have isn't ours. The money is given to us to spend on the mitzvos, specifically Tzedakah.

So how do we make our finances revolve around mitzvos? Here is where I start with the tips. Some are tools my clients and I put into place in their budgets and allowed me to share.

TIP 1:

When making money, prioritize Hashem in the earning, spending, and saving of the money.

A question that comes up often is; "We write up our budget, but by the time we finish with our basic expenses and we get down to the maaser part of the list, there is no more money left!"

Here are two ideas for how to prioritize your maaser:

As soon as your paycheck comes in, immediately put ten percent of it into a separate bank account with its own debit card. This bank account can be labeled "Maaser Account" or something that works for you. All maaser that you give will come out of this account. After you transfer your money, the rest of the money is what you consider as part of your budget.

This is one that we do personally. We consider maaser to be an expense just like my mortgage and electricity bill. It must be paid. It's high up on our budget sheet and some of the organizations that we send maaser to even charge the card automatically on the first of the month. We automated our maaser just like we automated our WiFi and life insurance.

Before I started organizing our family finances, we might have been able to afford to give the ten percent obligation of maaser. Because our finances were a mess, I had no idea how much money we were

The ultimate mitzvah we can do with our hard-earned money to bring the Geulah closer.

making, how much we were giving away, and very often we didn't give enough maaser. The above two tips ensure that you are fulfilling the mitzvah fully and not skimping on what you are able to do because you don't have a clear account of it.

TIP 2:

This is in regards to Tzedakah on top of maaser. You can allocate a certain amount of money each month towards Tzedakah in your monthly budget. This way, when you get a WhatsApp, email, phone call, knock at your door, or even meet a person on the street asking for Tzedakah, you can pull it out of your Tzedakah budget and be comfortable that the money being given has already been designated for Tzedakah (and not encroaching on your grocery bill).

TIP 3:

Hashem decides each year how much money you will make, as it says in the Machzor; who will be rich and who will be poor. Some people have more and some people have less. The beauty is that the Torah does not discriminate. Maaser is an obligation for all Yidden. But what happens to those who don't have enough money to pay even their most basic of expenses? They've sat down, made a super tight budget, and worked out all possible streams of income, and it still doesn't cover. This is when it's time to call a Rov. A Rov can pasken what this obligation means for you on a personal level.

For one of my clients, the Rov said that tuition for



Beautify your mitzvos in whatever way you can.

their daughters' yeshiva can be used as maaser. For another, the value of their time doing certain things was able to be considered maaser. Disclaimer: This was specific advice given to individuals; do not use this as your own psak. Call your own Rov to discuss your options.

TIP 4:

Beautify your mitzvos in whatever way you can. Squeeze in a fancier cut of meat for your Yom Tov table to show Hashem that you are going out of your comfort zone for His sake. Yiddishe Gashmius IS Ruchnius! Buying your daughter Shabbos tights is Ruchnius! Differentiate in your budget what is a splurge for your physical satisfaction and what is a splurge for Hashem.

B'ezras Hashem, we should all be zoche to be able to have so much wealth to be able to give to Hashem in abundance! ■

Chaya Margolin is a financial coach and has assisted hundreds of couples and singles set themselves on sound financial footing, helping them achieve financial freedom. Chaya can be reached at chayamargolin@gmail.com.



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How to be Broke (Or at least pretend)

Because one way to accumulate lots of money... is not to spend any

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



Okay, so you want to buy a house. The problem is you have exactly \$3,206 in your savings account. This might be an encouraging start, except your nephew's Bar Mitzvah is coming up and you could really use a new wig. Oh, of course, you already have a wig, and it would theoretically be okay, but it's just not luscious enough. You know, like all your friends' wigs. Like everybody's wig EXCEPT yours.

Hi, I'm Chava Witkes, and I'm not here to tell you how to spend your money except... wait, yes I am. I spent a solid ten years putting every dollar toward a down payment on our Crown Heights brownstone. We covered 90% of the costs on our own without receiving a trust fund, making it big in Bitcoin, or creating a best-seller for Amazon. So that's why I feel qualified to tell you this piece of unsolicited advice: DO NOT BUY THAT WIG.

Why not? Well, because the path to becoming the millionaire next door is not lined with designer boutiques. Yes, the saying goes "You have to spend money to make money," but the people who said that were talking about buying a laundromat or something — not keeping USPS in business with your retail therapy. Saving money means putting one foot in front of the other, day after day, sacrificing today's happiness for tomorrow's.

Lubavitchers love to think big. When it comes to gashmiyus, maybe it's time we learned an important skill: How to Act Broke.

Lubavitchers love to think big; the Rebbe ingrained it in us. Harchava b'gashmiyus ub'ruchniyus, right? Well, maybe it's time to realize that big hasagos aren't always about "thinking rich." We can think big when it comes to fulfilling our potential, expanding our mosdos, or giving Tzedakah — not planning our winter vacation. When it comes to gashmiyus, maybe it's time we learned an important skill: How to Act Broke.

Because, hopefully, you're not broke. And maybe if you cut back here and there, you really could afford that wig. Still, before you swipe (tap?) your card, try on the Broke Mindset. Your future self just might thank you.

Step 1: Unfollow Everyone

Hayom Yom says to look at people who have less than you when it comes to stuff. Please, I beg you: stop scrolling through Instagram. There are SO many reasons not to be on social media that are way beyond the scope of this article (hello, *hashkafa*, mental

You're out for brunch and she pulls out her card first. "Don't worry, I got it," she waves her hand. What do you do?

health!) but right now let's stay on topic.

When I followed wealthy influencers who were constantly showing off their rose quartz counters, it didn't make me look at my rental-chic linoleum with a generous eye. The targeted ads knew everything I wanted — from a reusable paper towel that made cleaning look like a party to Mango's new must-have looks for this season.

It's hard to unsee that stuff. Every time I rip off a sheet of Bounty now, I think of that fun, colorful, eco-friendly paper towel that would make cleaning such a breeze. When I try to get dressed, I start comparing the contents of my hodgepodge wardrobe to the curated closets of social media's fashionistas.

Do I need that? I did myself and my bank account a huge favor when I stopped following stores and influencers who spend hours crafting the perfectly filmed reel intended to help you part with your money.

Who can I look to as role models? I can take inspiration from someone who lives more simply than I do but is utterly happy with what they have. Maybe their kitchen design is nothing to write home about, but they have the sweetest kids. Or their wig isn't even lace-front (whoa) but their emunah is something to aspire to. Without Instagram and its constant reminders of the endless ocean of items to spend on, I can have the time and headspace to aspire to higher levels of ruchniyus instead.



Sometimes you really do need that manicure. Or maybe self-care means turning your phone off and spending a night doing a 1,000-piece puzzle.

Step 2: Boycott Amazon

Amazon should technically be kosher, right? I mean I can buy anything from a new broom to new earrings. But there's something just too suspiciously convenient about the platform, something about the rush of getting a package with my name on it. The speed of online shopping and instant checkouts makes overspending so easy.

I have a friend who was a software engineer for AfterPay. You know what her entire job was? Shortening the checkout process — by milliseconds — so that more people would make impulse purchases and pay for them later. (That friend is a person of integrity and has since quit that job.)

More unsolicited advice: don't get sucked into the brilliance of Silicon Valley speed. The best thing I've implemented when I am about to buy something is STOP. Wait. One day, two, a week. Then see if I still need it. I sit down at my laptop (never my phone) and checkout with the things I really need.

Think about it this way: if I buy socks the first day my kid whines about not having their favorite ones clean, then they'll never learn that some days they need to go to school wearing their sister's socks. (KIDDING.) Or maybe I'm the one who needs to figure out a better system for laundry (guilty). I don't need to throw money at every pain point. A little pain is good — it's what gets us to change. If you pause before purchasing, you'll be proud of how many solutions you can find that don't involve spending a dollar.

Step 3: Rewrite the Rules

Maybe you have a script in your head that's telling you, "But I HAVE to get my kids patent leather shoes handmade in Spain for school." Really? And what's going to happen if you don't? Nothing. The fashion police will not come banging down your door. The disapproving looks on your sister-in-law's faces are in your head. Or maybe they are real — they'll only last a few seconds, anyway. Your kids will still have

friends, and as a bonus, they won't have any blisters.

Think about it this way: In communities that aren't Jewish, people of the same income bracket end up all living in the same area. If someone makes a lower income, they live on the cheaper side of town, where they send their kids to the same schools as everyone else with the same-priced house. Keeping up is a lot easier. Outside of the frum world, do you know who buys Bugaboos? Celebrities. But it's hard to remember that here, when the economic differences between us and our neighbors can be invisible.

Step 4: Accept Help

Maybe your sister just got a fat new tennis bracelet and is making plans to take the whole family to Eretz Yisroel for Pesach. You're out for brunch and she pulls out her card first. "Don't worry, I got it," she waves her hand. What do you do? Do you freeze with shame and start stuttering about how it's okay? Or do you flash a wide smile with a gracious, "Wow, that's so sweet, thank you!"?

What do you think would make your sister feel better? If you are in situations where you need to rely on others to pick up a tab, give you hand-me-downs, or chip in extra for gifts, don't let your embarrassment get in the way of gratitude. People want to give, and when you allow them to help — and show your gratitude — it'll make them feel better too. (Plus, it's just plain nice.) You can work on your own inadequacy at a different time.

Step 5: Define True Wealth

When you're trying to save money, the road can be long and hard, and sometimes really uninspiring.



You might see others constantly getting manicures, ordering sushi, and shopping this-season; it's hard to swallow your pride and keep your head down. That's why it helps to keep your goals in sight. Why are you trying to save money? Sof Machshava b'Machshava T'chila. Focus on your vision. Sit down with your husband, mashpia, or friend and go over your why. Keep your lower self (aka *Nefesh Habehamis*) convinced of the end goal.

Consumerism or Self-Care?

Sometimes you really do need that manicure. Or, more accurately, maybe it's a session with a chiropractor that your body is craving. Self-care is important, and it's also important to understand the true desire behind the impulse to splurge constantly. Maybe there's a stored emotion or unmet need that is calling for attention. Maybe a three-dollar bath bomb and a five-dollar scented candle are all you need to help yourself destress after a long day. Or maybe self-care means turning your phone off and spending a night doing a 1,000-piece puzzle. If taking care of yourself always meant spending on yourself, maybe it's time to question that and come up with some new strategies.

Finally, above all, remember that no material goods will make you as happy as you imagine they will. It's always the eternal stuff, the kind that feels like work in the moment (kids, I'm looking at you) that brings us true joy and inner peace. And that's priceless. ■

Becoming Frugal

Ready to cut back, but not sure how? Here are a few habits I've picked up from when we were deep in the down-payment-saving days.

Pantry Eats

You open the fridge and there's one empty carton of eggs and five different mustards. Do you call the pizza shop? Hold up — first, check your pantry. Force yourself to get creative with whatever you already have in the house. Maybe you'll pull off a delicious pea soup... or maybe it will be quinoa bowls with tomato sauce and cheese. Whatever you come up with, it'll definitely be cheaper than takeout. When I'm running low on food, I love clearing out those random cans and containers from the back of the cabinet, and, boruch Hashem, my husband is okay with a hodgepodge dinner every once in a while.

Clothing Swap

Arrange or join a clothing swap. Everyone brings a bag of stuff they're done with, and then goes through to see what they like. Sometimes you have a lot of great clothes; you're just bored of them. So switch it up! Try on your friend's wardrobes and go home with a few gems. You can get a group of neighbors together and do this with kids' clothing (or toys) too! Some of my best pieces are clothing swap finds.

Monetize Your Stuff

Do you have a car that you only use during the week? Are you going to your in-laws for the entire Chanukah and have an empty apartment? What about a parking space that you'd be willing to give up? Or a spare room in the house that could make a great office? A few really nice gowns? Take a look at what you have, and see if there's a way to make a little passive income off it. In Crown Heights, there are so many opportunities to do a little side hustle (and let's brainstorm some ways to make things work out of town too).

Spend Long

If you do want to buy yourself something, figure out a way to swap it in for a different expense. I really wanted a blow dryer brush, so I decided that I would skip getting a wash and set for at least the next few months and do my wig myself instead. (Spoiler alert: I should have waited longer before buying it.) Want a new pair of expensive shoes? Sell your old, still beautiful boots first. Need a new vacuum (and not another garbage one)? Maybe your sister can take your cleaning lady one day a week for a bit until you make back that money. Instead of saying "we can't afford it," remember that you can almost always afford it if you think outside the box. Play the long game!

Where Does My Cash Flow Go?

Rivky (Berkowitz) Sternberg, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5779 (2019)
Teacher, Bais Rivkah Elementary School



Growing up, I enjoyed any creative outlet I could find. I appreciated all forms of art, like theatrics and music. I loved planning, brainstorming, storytelling, and writing. I always had a pretty vivid and active imagination. At the moment, I am a very proud Bais Rivkah teacher and I love how I can utilize my creativity in educating.

I never imagined I would be educating people about finances. Money? That means numbers. I don't like numbers. I prefer the spontaneity of creativity and the thrill of brainstorming ideas and seeing them come to life. Numbers have always been boring to me.

So what changed? A few months out of school, I realized I knew almost nothing about how money works or how to make smart financial decisions. Always looking to expand my knowl-

edge, I jumped at the opportunity to join a Basics of Finance Literacy class that my friend, Zlota Shira (Lavrinnoff) Muller, a financial literacy coach, was arranging. That's when everything changed. I learned how important being financially literate is. I realized that it doesn't need to be hard or overwhelming. I walked away from that class feeling empowered by this new information and I knew I needed to learn more. I knew that I needed to make sure my loved ones were educated. I knew that this was information everyone could and should know.

So, here are six steps that can help you achieve a better financial state for you and your family.

1. Cash Flow

Taking account of your cash flow is the first step. Ask yourself: How much am I making and spending? Am I living beyond my means? Am I living paycheck to paycheck? Do I need to budget better? Do I need to increase my income? It's crucial to know how your money is going in and going out.

I'm not saying to cut back on all extras, like going out for coffee here and there or getting a manicure, because we are all human and sometimes those extras can be essentials. If you become too restrictive on yourself, you'll become resentful and quit. However, I will suggest that you should give yourself advice on your spending as if you're giving advice to a younger sibling or someone else

Money? That means numbers. I don't like numbers.

you care about. Try to be objective while still being kind to yourself.

2. Emergency Fund

This next, very necessary step is often overlooked. Although income can get interrupted, bills are constant. Having an emergency fund of fluid cash can keep you afloat when there is a surprise expense or when income is interrupted, like a broken washing machine, a leak in the roof, getting laid off, having a baby, etc.

It is recommended to have three to six months of income in your emergency fund. Saving needs to be consistent and should be automatic. If an emergency bill comes up and one does not have an emergency fund, they might be forced to liquidate money from a mutual fund or IRA, which comes with tax and penalties, or they will use their credit card which can lead them into debt. An emergency fund acts as a cushion for unexpected bills or situations.

3. Debt Management

Debt is something that holds many families back.



Compound Interest

THE RULE OF 72⁷

The examples below show how much you can earn over time with an investment of \$10,000 dollars at different rates of return starting at age 29.

1%		4%		6%		10%	
Doubles Every 72 Years		Doubles Every 18 Years		Doubles Every 12 Years		Doubles Every 7.2 Years	
Age	Value	Age	Value	Age	Value	Age	Value
29	\$10,000	29	\$10,000	29	\$10,000	29	\$10,000
10	\$20,000	47	\$20,000	41	\$20,000	36	\$20,000
1		65	\$40,000	53	\$40,000	43	\$40,000
				65	\$80,000	50	\$80,000
						57	\$160,000
						65	\$320,000
						72	\$640,000

If you become too restrictive on yourself, you'll become resentful and quit.

Some of the most common forms of debt are credit card debt, student debt, medical bills, and IRS-tax-related debt. Credit cards commonly hold high interest rates and many individuals and families have more than one account open. It would be a good idea to see if there are accounts with lower interest rates as an option for you. Some companies have debt forgiveness programs. Understanding debt consolidation is key. Debt needs to be tackled. There is a difference though, between bad debt and good debt. When you have bad debt, you owe money; you're in a deficit. However when you're building equity in a home, one day you can sell your home. So yes, a mortgage is debt, but you're building equity in a home. That is good debt.

It's important to note: YOU are your most important bill. That means that while paying off debt, you need to pay yourself first. You can save while simultaneously paying off your debt at the same time. Don't wait until your debt is paid off to start saving. It may take longer to get out of debt, but it will ensure you *stay* out of debt.

4. Proper Protection

When you care about something or it has value to you, you make sure it's safe and protected. We protect our homes, cars, health, our lives, and our money. One form of protection is insurance, allowing the insurance company to cover any large expenses instead of using our own hard-earned money. There can, *chas veshalom*, be unexpected emergency costs for a car accident, a medical procedure, a flood, or a funeral. Your hard-earned money is for you and your family. Let the insurance company deal with it.

Our most precious possession is our life. I like to call life insurance "love insurance" because the money will go to the people we love. A common misconception is that stay-at-home moms don't need life insurance, but that isn't the case. The role of a stay-at-home mother is valuable — she pro-

vides childcare, cooks, and maintains the household.

Only around 52% of Americans own life insurance and 41% of adults, insured and uninsured, feel that they don't have an adequate amount of life insurance coverage.

So how much is enough coverage? Let's use the DIME method:

D - Debt: How much debt do you have?

I - Income: What will be your income over the next ten years?

M - Mortgage: How much do you owe in your mortgage?

E - Education: How much are you paying for tuition?

Premiums are based on age and health. The younger you are, the lower the premium.

There are two different types of life insurance. Here are some differences:

Rent:

- More affordable
- Expires after several years

Own:

- Own it for life
- Build equity in your plan

5. Build Wealth

"It's not how much you make, it's how much you get to keep." Understanding how inflation and taxes work can help you plan and prepare for your future so that you don't run out of money in retirement.

Inflation is like a silent money killer. Over time, the value of your money decreases (a dollar today will be worth less than a dollar a year from now). Your investments and savings in the bank need to grow at a rate higher than inflation. Otherwise, you are losing money. (Usually, savings in a bank are making you less than inflation.) It is estimated that due to inflation, you'll need to double your income every twenty years to maintain the same lifestyle and expenses you have today.

When saving, it's vital to know the tax implications. You want to make sure you can keep as much as pos-

sible. We need to save in tax-free vehicles, so we can keep all of it.

When it comes to taxes and inflation, we aren't left with much if we aren't paying attention.

6. Protecting Wealth/ Estate Planning

After working hard on making money, saving money, and growing your money, you want to make sure that your money is protected and will always stay with you and your family. This is what creating a will and putting it into a trust is for. The will will state what your decisions are for your family and possessions. The trust will make sure your family can avoid probate court and taxes — because yes, your money gets taxed even after life, plus it is considered a new income for those who inherit it. This is an important step to help your loved ones and to create generational wealth.

Like a map, these steps will help guide you and your family to your financial goals and dreams. Everyone's financial state is different, so everyone's journey will look different. Education is power and is key to making the right financial decisions that will help you get to your dreams and goals. Get informed about what programs are available. The learning is FREE, but procrastination could cost you your retirement. ■

Like a map, these steps will help guide you and your family to your financial goals and dreams.



Rivky (Berkowitz) Sternberg is a licensed and certified life insurance agent and financial literacy coach. For more information, she can be reached via text at 646 573 2195, email at rivky.berkowitz@ilnagency.com, or Instagram [@rivky_sternberg_berkowitz](https://www.instagram.com/rivky_sternberg_berkowitz)

Yiddishe Gelt

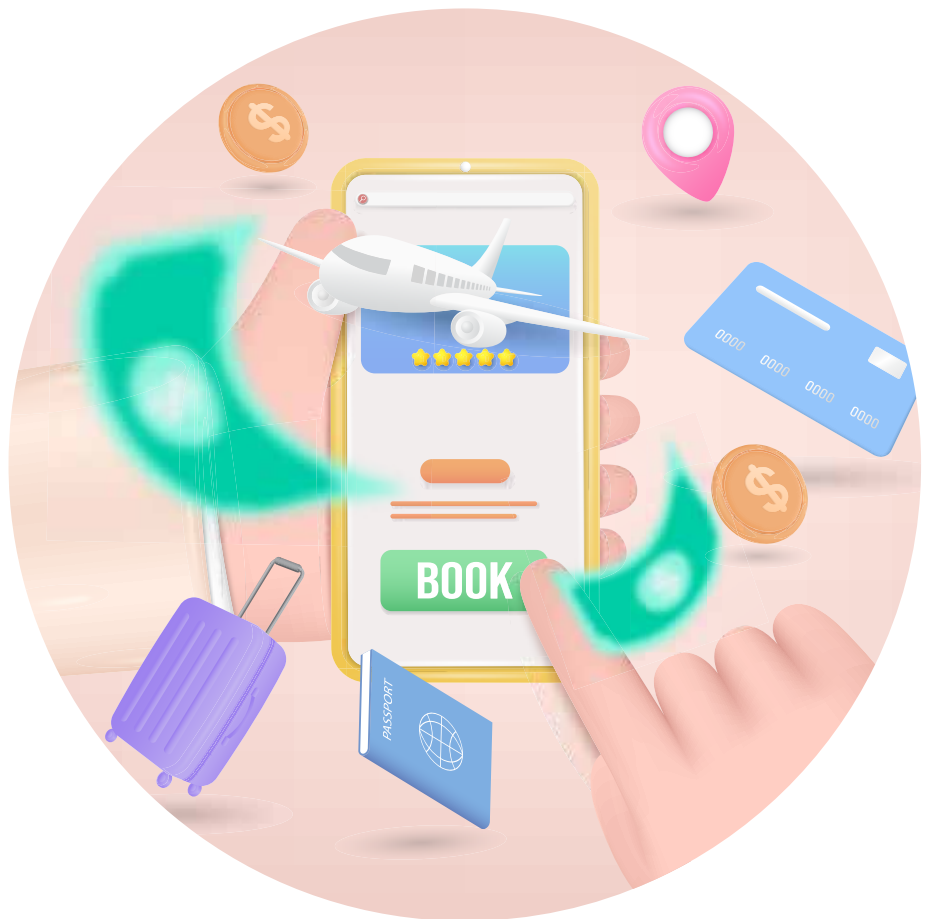
We all know that life, and especially Jewish life, isn't cheap — think of *schar limud*, *kashrus*, *yomim tovim*, etc. The service of Hashem is our purpose in life; everything we do is for that end. We have to provide for ourselves so that we can serve Hashem. Some of my income is for me, yes; and some is for me to distribute on His behalf.

Our Chachomim have been clear on how much Tzedakah we should give and have given us specific amounts to give per our income. After we allocate back to Hashem we can move on to making smart decisions with the 80%-90% that is left.

By giving Tzedakah, one of the greatest mitzvos, we give our earnings an entirely new meaning.

The Two Minutes That Saved Me Hundreds of Dollars

Anonymous



I arrived at the airport four hours before my five o'clock p.m. flight, with plenty of time to get through security and catch up on davening. I was concluding a short, two-day visit to Eretz Yisroel for a special family simcha, where I used every moment to soak in the holy air.

I had woken up at six in the morning and headed to the Kosel. I had so much on my mind, and really wanted to daven there. I managed to say the whole Tehillim, and it felt very powerful and meaningful.

Rivkah, my good friend and hostess in Eretz Yisroel, had a flight at a similar time to mine, so we enjoyed the smooth journey to the airport via public transportation together.

We arrived at the airport and began the process of check-in and security. As I pulled up my itinerary, I was shocked to see that my flight was scheduled for noon! It was my *arrival time* in New York which was five pm, and I had missed my flight!

It took me only a moment to process it. I felt surprisingly calm that everything would work out.

I ran through the possible options in my mind. Either I could catch a flight later today, and arrive in New York just in time for bedikas chametz, or I would need to stay in Eretz Yisroel for the first days of Pesach. I honestly didn't mind the second option, but my sister-in-law was due, and I had planned to return in time to be able to spend Pesach with my brother's family so I could help out.

Then it clicked! It was Liat from Tishrei — I couldn't believe it.

I messaged my travel agent to see if anything could be done. It was still early in New York, so I reminded myself that Hashem is the one Who runs the world, and decided to put everything aside and focus on my trust in Hashem while I waited for a response. I davened with kavana that whatever Hashem had planned, I would be okay with, and davened that the process should be smooth.

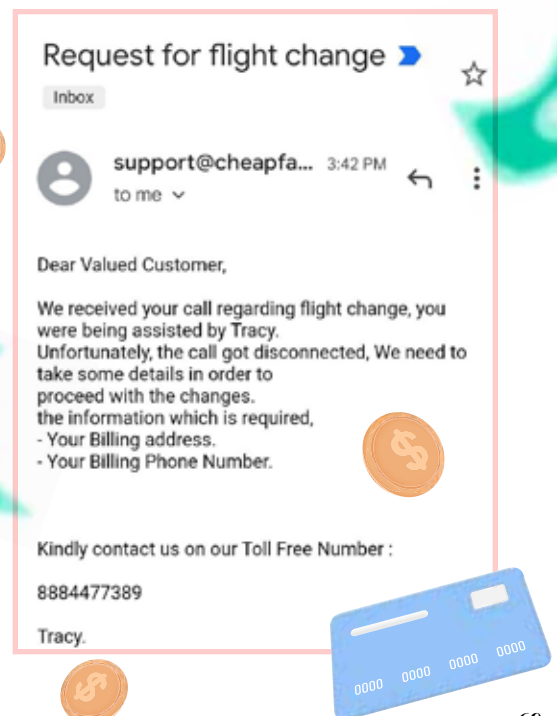
After davening, I approached the information booth to see what I could do. I was directed to desk after desk, with no ideas other than to book a new flight or contact my travel agent. So while I waited for my travel agent to wake up, I decided to call and see what solution United Airlines had to offer.

I asked her for just two more minutes to finish up, but she said she really needed to go. Ugh.

My phone wasn't able to call the airline. I spent a while approaching various security desks and some frum people to see if I could borrow a working phone, to no avail. My exhaustion was kicking in, and it took extra effort to hold myself back from crying.

Suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was a woman in airport uniform, but she looked very familiar to me. Trying to place her, I glanced at her name badge which said "Liat." Then it clicked! It was Liat from Tishrei — I couldn't believe it. When Israelis come to Crown Heights for Tishrei, there are some faces you see over and over again, especially if you daven in 770. We had gotten to know each other superficially, and now she was tapping me to say hi!

"Liat, you're literally an angel!" I said. By then I was overcome with emotion, and the tears just flowed... I told her about my situation, and she said I could use her phone to call the airline.



To fully trust that even though my limited mind might not see the full picture, everything that happens is truly for my best!

Finally, I dialed customer service for United Airlines, only to be told that I would need to spend a large amount of money — that I didn't have — to reschedule my flight. I begged the clerk to help me lower the fees, and after a few minutes on hold, she returned to let me know she was able to lower it by a few hundred dollars.

I thought of the choimesh (twenty percent of income) that I had just recommitted to give to Tzedakah, and I said a kapitel of Tehillim with kavana and told Hashem that He tells us to test him with this mitzvah, and right now I'm testing him!

After waiting on hold again, I was told that the absolute lowest price was a few hundred dollars less, still a large sum. With no choice, I pulled out my credit card to book the ticket.

Just then, Liat told me that she had to go and needed her phone back. I asked her for just two more minutes to finish up, but she said she really needed to go. Ugh. I felt frustrated that I had

gotten this far and had to give up right before I finished.

I thought to myself that it must be for the best, and told the clerk that I had to hang up. She told me that she'd take down my email and use the information I gave her to finish, and then email me back a confirmation. I hung up.

Finally, my travel agent WhatsApped me. He said he would be able to look into it in an hour or two. I told him that I had already given my information to customer service and I was waiting for an email confirmation, but I hadn't received that yet, so I wasn't sure if it went through. He said he would try to see what he could do.

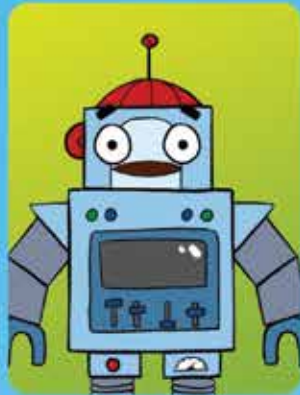
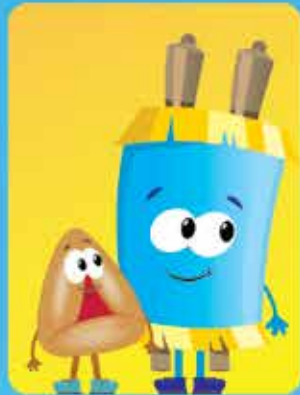
A few minutes later I received an email from the representative telling me that she could not process the order because I hadn't given her the address and zip code for the credit card. I quickly messaged my travel agent and told him that it didn't go through. He got back to me about an hour later, telling me that he rescheduled the flight for no charge! I gladly sent him a small service fee and thanked him for dealing with it.

I sat down to process what had happened and was reminded of an important lesson. The way it seemed was that Liat was being rude by not allowing me just two more minutes to process my ticket with the representative. Only in hindsight, I realized Hashem's hand in Liat rushing me to hang up. If she hadn't, my ticket would have been processed, and I would've paid a large fee! I realized then that all the money I was trying to save was really in the hands of Hashem.

When something difficult happens, we feel disappointed and dejected that our efforts failed. Often when we try to make all sorts of financial chesh-bonos, we forget that Hashem has it all planned out for the best. What I learned today was that "efforts failing" could actually be the biggest gift. Today I was gifted with seeing the good palpably, but usually, I'm not. I felt that this situation was a reminder from Hashem that I don't always see the full picture, and I should work on doing my best and put the results fully in His hands. To fully trust that even though my limited mind might not see the full picture, everything that happens is truly for my best! ■

** Some of the names in this article are changed for privacy reasons.*





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ALUMNAE

Who, What, Where

Alumnae on the Frontlines
Eretz Yisroel. War. Soldiers.



Our hearts are there, but life goes on, rolling along the conveyor belt of “normal.” For some women, however, “normal” is not an option right now.

Here are the accounts of four of our heroic sisters in Eretz Yisroel, Bais Rivkah Alumni who share their recent experiences and perspectives on the front lines.

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



CHOOSING LIFE IN KFAR VRADIM

It was the night of Simchas Torah. Our shul was alive, filled to the brim with an overflow of joyous people. I

looked around at the new families that had joined us, the exuberant children, and the joy and unity of our community — and my heart swelled with satisfaction and pride. All our hard work had borne fruit.

This past summer marked a huge milestone: two decades of living in Kfar Vradim, a picturesque town in Northern Eretz Yisroel. Although it isn’t predominantly religious, there’s something special here with the incredible closeness and interconnectedness among the community, built around our shul.

My husband, aside from his role as the rabbi of the shul, dedicates his time to instructing Bar Mitzvah boys, officiating at significant life events such as funerals and weddings, orchestrating ciruvin, and anything else connected to Yiddishkeit. He’s also a teacher at two seminaries in Tzfas. Our children travel an hour and a half each way daily to go to their Chabad school.

Throughout the week, I help organize and lead a Bas Mitzvah club, host insightful shiurim tailored for women, and extend support to anyone in need of guidance or assistance. On Shabbos, we come together for minyan and a warm, welcoming kiddush — a tradition not often seen in Eretz Yisroel’s non-Lubavitch communities.

Standing there on Simchas Torah night, I saw twenty years of tireless investment and the results they produced. I felt so blessed, proud, and fulfilled.

And then came the next morning.

I arrived at shul, slightly behind schedule, for the seven a.m. davening. Clustered outside was a very worried-looking group of people. A few of them told me that their sons had been drafted early that morning.

I understood that my shlichus, at that moment, was to encourage the spirit of Simchas Torah however I could. I refrained as much as I was able from listening to details because I had to focus on encouraging a positive environment in shul and for the Hakafos.

During Shacharis, a man with critical security responsibilities was swiftly escorted away. He was the first, but not the last to be called. Tensions escalated as passersby confronted us, condemning our singing and dancing in the face of the tragic events. One by one, young boys and married men were called and drafted for service, and the tension in the air grew thicker. One individual asked about the halacha of carrying his Tefillin on Shabbos.

Then, the mayor, accompanied by the head of security, arrived in his pajamas, demanding that my husband disperse the minyan. My husband insisted we would continue our davening. We were told that the shul had to be vacated by eleven a.m., prompting an abbreviated Krias Hatorah and musaf.

The mood was filled with anxiety and unsettled confusion, but with conscious effort, the infectious joy of the celebration persisted. The seventh Hakafah felt never-ending; the men just kept dancing and dancing, singing another song, and then another. The women created a circle in the women's section and danced too. Throughout the davening, I had to send my husband messengers presenting questions and issues that needed to be addressed. My husband told stories emphasizing positivity and happiness, in adherence to the mitzvah of the day.

Throughout the escalating tension, I told myself, "So long as my husband isn't drafted, it's not so bad." But then the officer in charge of drafting soldiers, who lives close to shul, came to tell my husband that they had started drafting his unit.

The planned communal Yom Tov meal after Hakafos transitioned into a hurried take-out arrangement. The people gathered some food and went to their own homes, not knowing what would happen next. For the rest of Yom Tov, my husband was torn. Should he open his phone or not? On the one hand, he felt responsible to step up. On the other hand, it might be *chilul* Shabbos. I kept telling him, "They know your address. If they need you immediately, they'll come and get you."

As Shabbos concluded, my husband checked his phone, confirming the inevitable news of his draft. He put on his uniform, and, along with our boys and guests, danced and sang Napoleon's march. With a heavy heart, he bid us farewell, and I made a resolute decision: I needed to

be strong for my children and our community, and I wouldn't cry. I bit my lip and watched him go.

As we have one day of Yom Tov while New York keeps two, my primary concern was reassuring my family and friends of our safety. I imagined how worried they must be, and I was sure that there were so many rumors going around. I pictured my parents and my two sons who flew to Crown Heights for Sukkos, worried sick, not knowing if we were okay. I even tried to get in touch with my mother's cleaner to send word, unsuccessfully. I reached out to my friends in the South to ensure their safety as well — I couldn't take a full breath until they said they were alive.

I then sent a very sharp message via WhatsApp to caution my family and former classmates against viewing distressing images or videos of the terror attack, as I believed it could deeply affect their neshama and spirits. I perceived that looking at these images would be a secondary terror attack. Later, many expressed gratitude for this advice.

Standing there on Simchas Torah night, I saw twenty years of tireless investment and the results they produced. I felt so blessed, proud, and fulfilled.

And then came the next morning.

Maintaining composure during these trying times is a daily struggle. I'm a deeply emotional person — I cry freely whether I'm happy or sad, touched or frustrated, and keeping a stiff upper lip is never easy. These are challenges I face even on ordinary days, and in times of war, everything intensifies.

My older sons are in Yeshiva, and one is also involved in patrolling the settlement in the Shomron where he is learning. My younger boys initially learned online, as all schools were closed. Now, although schools have resumed, I'm hesitant for them to use public transportation, so we've arranged for a young man to come daily and learn with them.

With my husband away, I've taken on a more active role in addressing halachic and community-related inqui-

ries. I've also been organizing the collection of supplies for soldiers — tents, mattresses, toiletries, energy bars, and much more. One of our community members opened their home for the preparation of kosher meals for soldiers stationed nearby. Volunteers are helping with laundry and offering their homes for soldiers to take showers. It's draining, but I strive to maintain a positive atmosphere in our community, sharing messages of emunah and bitachon, reinforcing the Rebbe's teaching that the strength of our army lies in Torah and mitzvos. Our commitment to positivity endures.

I needed to be strong for my children and our community, and I wouldn't cry. I bit my lip and watched him go.

A heartwarming project our community embraced was arranging the wedding of two soldiers serving in the area. Every person found a way to contribute, whether it was arranging flowers, contributing to a catered meal for hundreds of soldiers, or helping set up tables and chairs. A famous singer came to sing the kallah's favorite song, and the chief cantor of the army sang too. He expressed how after attending so many funerals in recent weeks, it was so special to sing at a wedding. Everyone internalized the message: *uvacharta bachayim*. No matter what happens, we choose life!

My husband, who's both an officer and a rabbi for a battalion, pointed out that the soldiers lacked essential items like tzitzis, mezuzos, and kosher food. I made an appeal on various platforms, and I've been genuinely touched by the generosity of individuals, some of whom I've never even met, to donate to the cause. I want to use this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to everyone who offered their support.

The incredible outpouring of support from Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life is simply unmatched. People are so eager to lend a hand and show their support. I'll highlight a few heartwarming moments, but the list is endless.

There's someone who isn't Jewish, living across the ocean, never met us, and sent money to my husband to buy gifts for me and the children when he visits. Another lovely gesture came from my sister-in-law, who ordered breakfast for me with a touching note.

Every kind act, even if not vitally necessary, warms my heart and reminds me that I'm not alone.

In this area, we haven't experienced any sirens, but we can hear the army launching rockets towards Lebanon. The sound of consecutive booms coincides with news reports of Israeli bombings in Lebanon. Despite the tense atmosphere, we're trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy for our children. We encourage them to spread light, put on tefillin with soldiers, and distribute treats. However, when they hear those loud booms, they quickly head back home, staying close to the bomb shelter as a precaution.

When my husband came home for a short visit, he tested my eight-year-old son on hilchos Chanukah. I had told him that if he knew it well, we'd buy him something special. What did he choose? He turned to my husband and asked him to please make sure to come home on Chanukah to light the menorah. It was a heartbreaking moment but filled with hope.

Today I shed my first tear. A close friend requested to spend Shabbos with us, but I had to decline, as we already have a family staying over. Unfortunately, I must consider the limited space in our bomb shelter in case of rocket threats, prioritizing the safety of everyone in such uncertain times.

Since we can't gather for shiurim like we normally would, I've started sending out a daily halacha about Shabbat. Yesterday, when I visited a woman to give her a birthday gift, she told me that she had started keeping Shabbat. She had been coming to shiurim for years, and she felt it was finally time to make that change.

Another woman I visited had a big Chitas on her coffee table, and to my surprise, all the ribbons were in the right place. She explained that she saw the same Chitas in my house and decided to get one for herself. She's been saying Chitas daily ever since.

A group of women from America donated tambourines and art supplies for all the women in our community. We're getting together in small groups to decorate our tambourines so that we are ready, we are prepared for Moshiach.

This period is a test of resilience and community support, reinforcing the importance of unity among the entire Jewish nation. The uncertainty of the situation has become a new reality, and it's easy to get dragged down by fear, sadness, and anxiety. But here in Kfar Vradim, we remain steadfast; davening and yearning for global peace and the coming of Moshiach.

We're choosing life.

Tzivia (Brook) Pizem
Sderot, Eretz Yisroel
Graduating class of 5755 (1995)



ROCKETS, PEACE, AND FRONT-ROW SEATS

SHLICHUS IN SDEROT

Rockets and missiles aren't a new occurrence in Sderot. We're familiar with them — we've been on shlichus here for twenty-two years. Over that time, our city has lived through a lot; as a result, there's a close feeling, a special unity, that's unique to Sderot.

My husband, children and I work with my brother-in-law and his wife, Zev and Sima Pizem, the head shluchim. When we moved here, it was regular Chabad House work: giving shiurim, facilitating Yomim Tovim, and running a shul and a preschool.

About eight years ago, my husband started working with the kibbutzim surrounding Sderot: Nir Am, Nachal Oz, Kfar Aza, among others; places that everyone is familiar with now, for the worst of reasons.

It's a one-on-one, quiet shlichus — mezuzah, tefillin, and in big part, just sitting and listening to the people. For Yom Tov, we bring down bochurim and divide them among the ten kibbutzim surrounding Sderot. They go around to every single door in "their" kibbutz.

On Purim, for example, the bochurim deliver Mishloach Manos and ask if the family wants to hear megillah. If there is one megillah reading in a kibbutz, it's considered a huge success — That's the kind of kibbutzim we're talking about.

My shlichus also expanded into teaching English at

the Sha'ar Hanegev high school. Just my presence there shows staff and students of the school that from people are normal, as opposed to how the media portrays us. I talk about Yiddishkeit as much as I can, and whenever someone has a question or a need, they know who to ask.

SOMETHING IS DIFFERENT

When my family and I heard missiles at 6:30 a.m. on Simchas Torah, it wasn't abnormal. We decided to all go to shul — because of the missiles, fewer people were likely to show up, and they'd undoubtedly need help making a minyan. We walked over to the Chabad House, not knowing that terrorists were actually tearing through our city and killing people.

When we got to the Chabad House, we were quickly made aware of the situation. Needless to say, we stayed there for the rest of Yom Tov, and even after it was over, we only went home with the help of the army.

As we started hearing more and more, the tragic news hit home very hard. These were people we knew; we worked with these kibbutzim, and I worked in their school. We decided to stay at my parents' house — they live right next door to us.

On Sunday, we stayed barricaded at home, with no electricity. We were told to keep everything closed because there were still terrorists on the streets.

STAY OR GO?

By Monday morning, many people in our city were leaving. My mother suggested that maybe it was time for us to leave too.

*We remain steadfast; davening
and yearning for global peace
and the coming of Moshiach.*

Right away, I remembered what had happened eighteen years before. There had been a lot of missiles falling, and most of the city was temporarily evacuated. Being that we are shluchim, and we don't just pick up and go, we wrote to the Rebbe. The answer my husband read when he opened an Igros Kodesh was: "*Hinei lo yanum v'lo yishan shomer Yisroel.*"

We walked over to the Chabad House, not knowing that terrorists were actually tearing through our city and killing people.

We stayed.

Through that time, and ever since then, we've walked around with that assurance, with the Rebbe's bracha.

But this was different; this wasn't just that a lot of rockets were falling. Circumstances had changed entirely, and my husband decided to write to the Rebbe again.

The answer he read in the Igros Kodesh said to ask a Rov. My husband asked his brother, who told us that the women and children should leave and the men should stay.

By that night, my mother, myself, and my kids were packed up to go. My father and husband stayed on in Sderot to help with whatever needed to be done: they delivered food to people stuck in their houses, including baby food, and equipment for the army.

Tuesday morning, at 9:15 a.m., my house was directly hit by a missile. An empty house — empty because of the Rebbe's letter...

My husband was at my father's house at the time, getting ready to go help soldiers put on Tefillin. When they heard the noise, they ran outside, saw the destruction... and then went to help soldiers put on Tefillin.

COMING TOGETHER

We've settled into somewhat of a routine. My husband spends his week helping out those who are still in Sderot, getting food, equipment, and medicine for those who need it, as everything is still closed. For Shabbos, he comes up to Yerushalayim, where I am now with the children.

We're taking it one day at a time; right now, I have no idea when we'll be able to go back. Nothing is functioning in our city, and even when it does reopen, we don't have a house to go back to.

But a house can be fixed, and we're grateful to be alive, safe, and to have personally experienced the overflowing love of Am Yisroel. From the second we

left our house, people have just wanted to give in any way that they could. Someone gave us a house in Yerushalayim to live in, people brought us food and clothes, and people helped us get the children into the schools here — it's really been non-stop, and it's incredible to see what Am Yisroel can do.

It got me thinking about us Lubavitchers. How we specifically can contribute.

Around the world, Yidden are adding in their mitzvah observance, but we Lubavitchers, we light our Shabbos candles already. We eat kosher; we do the Rebbe's mitvzoim. What can we do?

In this time, when total strangers are rallying together to help fellow Yidden that they've never met, think about that one person you have a hard time feeling positively towards.

Our differences are real. But maybe now is the time to focus on what unites us.

Can you make peace with them? Can you get along with them? For your brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel?

When they heard the noise, they ran outside, saw the destruction... and then went to help soldiers put on Tefillin.

I believe with all my heart that if we, as Lubavitchers, focus not only on outreach but also on our own Ahavas Yisroel, then the Rebbe will come and take us all straight to Yerushalayim.

My house is there now; overlooking those holy walls.

So I'll have front-row seats.



Miriam (Eber) Sebbag,
Be'er Sheva, Eretz Yisroel
Graduating class of 5762 (2002)



PERSPECTIVE TO PRACTICALITY

ERETZ YISROEL'S AMERICAN CHABAD

Making Aliyah is beautiful. And hard. So hard, in fact, that there's a big percentage among families who make Aliyah that end up moving back – either because of parnassah difficulties or because they simply couldn't acclimate to the land and its culture.

That's where Chabad Anglo of Be'er Sheva usually fits in. We know the challenges that come along with making Aliyah – we did it ourselves four years ago when we moved here. At our Chabad House, we aim to create an atmosphere and programs with an American feel to it.

From bringing dinner over to warmly welcome to families who've just arrived, all the way to our youth library full of English books, we mainly cater to English speakers who have made Aliyah. We help elderly olim figure out the healthcare system, have regular Shabbos minyanim for Anglos, teach classes to men and women, and hold farbrengens and events, all with a typical American flavor.

Take Chanukah, for example. Most Chabad Houses in Eretz Yisroel arrange beautiful menorah lightings. But our program was Chanukah On Ice; skating isn't much of a thing here, but, boy did the Americans enjoy that! We had a great attendance because this wasn't something ever done before in Be'er Sheva.

In our community, we also have many couples with

one Israeli and one American spouse. They don't go to other Chabad Houses because they don't appreciate the Israeli mentality, but when they hear there's one that's American style, they'll come. At first, they come just for the culture and socialization with English speakers, but we're able to reach them with toichen as well, because we speak the same language.

One of our biggest *peulos* is our Chai Tots Preschool. It's Montessori-inspired, and it brings so many families together. Interestingly enough, the majority of children in our school are actually Israelis: children of chayalim, doctors, lawyers, community workers, and police officers. Their parents value American culture and our style of managing children. They trust us very much and appreciate that it's a private school.

So that's how our shlichus has been. This Tishrei was no different. Until Simchas Torah, of course...

SIMCHAS TORAH IN THE SAFE ROOM

Simchas Torah began beautifully. The night of hakafos was child-friendly, well-attended, and so, so joyous. We got home really late that night, with big plans for the next day.

Early the next morning, we heard rockets. My husband took the kids down to our safe room, while I stayed in bed and went back to sleep – in the later stage of pregnancy BH, I was still so tired from the night before. I kept hearing rockets, but there were so many that I thought it was just my dream. Then, suddenly, five of my kids came knocking on my door, begging me to come down to the basement. We realized that something was different here.

*Our differences are real. But
maybe now is the time to focus
on what unites us.*

Can you make peace with them?

After a while, the rocket barrage began to slow down, so my husband decided to venture out with two of my kids, figuring it was safe to go to shul by now — and after all, it was Simchas Torah. As they started walking, they watched the Iron Dome intercept a rocket in the sky, right above them. They came straight back home,

As they started walking, they watched the Iron Dome intercept a rocket in the sky, right above them. They came straight back home, badly frightened.

badly frightened.

The rest of the day was kind of quiet; my husband went to Mincha alone. On the way, he heard terrible things, mixed messages about terrorists and war. No one really knew what they were talking about, and it was only after Yom Tov that we heard the horrible news.

We were all completely in shock, numb and terrified — our brains couldn't grasp what really happened.

That night, we all bunked out in the *mamad*, the safe room. It's nice sized, but between my nine kids, a friend who had stayed over for Simchas Torah, and all of our heightened emotions, it was a lot. Obviously, my husband and I tried to keep up the positivity, but there was a lot of crying and frozen terror. For the first few nights in the *mamad*, my young daughter sat for hours and hours with her flashlight, just saying Tehillim.

“EIN K'MO CHABAD!”

Amidst all the chaos, we realized that there was an enormous amount of work to be done. Collecting and delivering supplies to soldiers was something we all became busy with, including the kids.

I know a lot of women who have sons serving in the army. People are so brave and, understandably, terrified as well. Many women I know haven't been sleeping at night, hearing all the news about what's going on in Gaza and not actually knowing where their son is. The amount of emunah these women have is absolutely incredible.

One woman came crying to me, saying that she has four sons in the army, and she's going out of her mind with worry. As I spoke with her, I mentioned the power of having a Chitas on you. She replied that her boys were often in combat, and that she doubted they'd agree to shlep an entire book along. Then I remembered those little cards that have the entire Chitas on them in microfilm. We got a bunch of them, and this mother was so thrilled to give them to her sons. When

I speak to her now, she really feels like this extra level of protection is helping them get by.

Our Chai Tots Preschool has also played a major role in the situation we're dealing with now. Right after the attack, parents who needed to serve in the army were either sending their kids to grandparents, or to random babysitters that their kids were really miserable with. We had doctors, chayalim, and police officers begging us to open our preschool just so that they would be able to go work. Understandably, these parents felt so guilty going to work, especially the families where both parents are chayalim.

Knowing this, as soon as Home Command gave us permission to open up our preschool, we opened. We were one of the first preschools to do so, and orientation was an incredibly special event. The parents couldn't stop thanking us, saying, “Ein k'mo Chabad! You guys understand what it means to be protecting the country. Now that you're taking care of our kids, we can fight in the war properly.”

The parents feel good knowing that while there are

My instant response, of course, is “No way! Eretz Yisroel is the safest place!”

sirens and rockets, their children are in a loving, warm preschool. And the safe room we have here is really cozy and comfortable; when there's a siren, we bring their cribs in there, we sing a song, and they can sleep through the rockets.

Something really special we were able to do for the parents of our preschool was to give them all gift bags. My sister-in-law, Devorah Bukiet from New York, has a line of beautiful vintage clothing. She donated a bunch of it — good clothes that she could have sold — to us, so that we could give gifts to the mothers of Chai Tots, many of whom are the wives of chayalim.

One of our teachers' husband is in the army. His phone was taken away, and she hasn't seen or spoken to him for almost a month. She doesn't know where he is. When she got one of our gifts, she burst into tears. She said she hadn't had self-care in so long, and this meant so much to her.

FROM THEORIES TO REAL-LIFE

If I could only count how many people have asked me if we wanted to go back to America to be safe.

My instant response, of course, is “No way! Eretz Yisroel is the safest place!”

But I understand the question. Because after such a crazy massacre, it's so hard to believe, to trust people, and to not be anxious.

But here's where it's time to take everything learned and put it into practice, and if that's not enough, to keep learning, whether it's Sha'ar Habitachon, Tanya, or other Chassidus.

With any challenge in life, with anything that's mind-blowing or hard to comprehend, we always need to go to the Rebbe's teachings.

Eretz Yisroel is the safest place for a Yid. Hashem is watching it constantly. There's no need to fear.

It sounds wild. It IS wild.

But it's truth, and we have it all. We just need to tap into it, to learn a little.

That's what comforts me and makes me feel grounded. That's what helps me see the bigger picture in my small little efforts to help out.

Because when it's time to put all the nice concepts we've always learned into practical action, that's when we need to learn the most.



Mushka Greene

Yerushalayim/Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5770 (2010)



THIS IS AM YISROEL

“Get on a flight.” “Leave.” “RUN.” I had WhatsApp groups topping a thousand messages as people frantically buzzed, “When is the next Ben Gurion flight?” “Where could we fly to?” “How could we get out?”

My friend Estee Mansourri and I, planning to stay in Eretz Yisroel for a few months, hadn't been expecting a war, to say the least. We were pretty scared — as American visitors fled back home on the first available flights after Yom Tov, we strongly considered the same. The fear was real; for the first week we slept with a knife and Chitas at our side in the bomb shelter with the door and window shut.

After such a huge attack, there was positivity here; there was a yearning for connection.

Then the videos started going around, reminding us: the Rebbe said that Eretz Yisroel is the safest place. And we knew that despite the horrific attack that had caused this war, the Rebbe's words are timeless. Stay. So we stayed.

But what kind of stay would this be? We couldn't just stay locked up, hiding in our bomb shelter. We started looking for opportunities to get out, to volun-

We wouldn't be able to do it without each other.

teer, to help out. We heard that people were cooking and packing food for soldiers. We drove there. Blood donors were needed. We drove there. Another place was packing up gear, socks, sweatshirts. We drove there. We were committed to contribute, to really show up for what was needed.

Shabbos was coming up, and we decided to spend it in Tzfas. On the way up, I remembered — Rabbi Hertzell! He was our teacher in seminary, and he runs Chabad of the Golan Heights. Maybe he would have something for us to do. We called, and he most certainly did.

Rabbi Hertzell said that he has a food and coffee truck parked on one of the biggest bases in the north. Could we come and man it? We drove up there, very close to the Lebanese border, and jumped into action.

We stood there, handing out slushies and snacks, but more importantly, soaking in the palpable energy in the air. After such a huge attack, there was positivity here; there was a yearning for connection — the food was free, but soldiers gladly agreed to make brachos.

It wasn't even a question if we would be back the next day. We also started raising money, and it came pouring in. We bought hundreds of sandwiches and bourekas, and gave them out at the army base — they were so excited to get a change from army food!

Two weeks later, we were back with more. Each box of bourekas had written on it the name of the donors — people who had gotten so inspired and energized by what was going on.

This time, we also got over one hundred soldiers to sign up for a letter in a Sefer Torah. Try to imagine those soldiers, some who knew they were going into Lebanon the next day, really acknowledging that this would be their real protection. We couldn't get enough of the energy, of the open curiosity and interest towards the good and holy! Men excited to put on a yarmulka, girls excited to make a bracha. Music playing in the background, proudly proclaiming: “*Mi shema'amin lo mefached.*” We also had all the names we collected brought to the Ohel by my aunt in Crown Heights.

On a different front, there was an army wedding we helped fundraise and participate in. The dichotomy of it hit me hard: Horrific sadness, unmeasurable destruction — and right in the epicenter of all that, the

true simcha of a new Jewish home being built.

And I saw that everywhere I went — an entire nation, holding hands tightly, shedding heartrending tears at a levaya, and then dancing those same hearts out at a wedding, proclaiming that “*beyachad nenatze'ach* — together we will win!”

At one point, I was in Be'er Sheva, and went to visit a hospital there. I was one of many visitors, streaming in with gifts and boxes of chocolates and hope, and I had two incredible encounters.

The mother of one nineteen-year-old soldier told me how her son had taken a bullet to his leg. The doctors had managed to save his foot, and they discovered a coin in his boot... a coin the soldier had gotten as shliach mitzvah.

Another soldier lay in that hospital. This man didn't have a leg anymore, r”l; it had been blown off. But the man radiated with positivity, with energy to live, and he proudly showed us the remains of a Tanach that had survived the flames of war...

We went to a memorial for the victims of October 7 the other night. Everyone was crying, and it hit me. I didn't know if they were crying for their parents, their child who was killed, their niece or nephew who was being held hostage, or if it was just a random Jew, feeling the pain. The sadness is so real and thick, words can't even explain it.

And at the same time, there's such an energy of hope. People are struggling with raw pain and trauma, and in the same breath, celebrating life and growing stronger.

You can't take more than five steps here without encountering a huge banner with a message of strength or a positive slogan. It's everywhere; on billboards, on the radio, even on the tissue boxes.

It's huge; it's being able to hold two opposites in our lives, constantly battling between them. It's about learning to acknowledge the horrors right alongside the beauty, and to be able hold both.

We wouldn't be able to do it without each other.

This is Am Yisroel. ■



I WORK 9 TO 5 AND I'M A DSP

Although my job is fast-paced and stimulating, my evenings are pretty quiet. And I figured, why not use the spare time to do something meaningful?

When I heard that the Liebers were going through a hard time, I offered to help. I step in whenever needed - with homework, suppertime, helping them into pajamas ...

As I struggle the kids for bedtime stories and Shema, my heart melts at their sweet, grateful smiles.

Miriam Rotstein, DSP



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Never Again

IN REAL TIME

Leah (Olidort) Brook, Shelton, Connecticut
Graduating class of 5774 (2014)



This summer, I was blessed to make a special trip with my family to visit my ninety-one-year-old grandmother, may she live and be well, in Eretz Yisroel.

My dear grandmother, Savta, is a Holocaust survivor. As a young girl, she lived in a large apartment complex with her aunts and uncles, cousins, and grandparents in Odesa, Ukraine. She studied piano. Her father would sing traditional melodies on Friday night. And then one day, when she was nine years old, her father, together with all her uncles and male relatives, was rounded up and shot. It was the day, she says, that her life ended.

As a child, I got to spend summers at my grandparents' home, where I'd hear stories from Savta about the war, the pain, and the survival. Each time, she'd suddenly stop the con-

versation, take a deep breath and say, “I can’t talk anymore about this; it’s too much.”

After the war, Savta studied economics, married my grandfather in 5716 (1956), and settled in a small town outside of Moscow, where my father was born a year later. Living under Communist rule was living in fear. As a young mother myself, I wondered how Savta experienced young motherhood, and I asked Savta about what was going through her mind during those years. Her response reminded me of the luxury I have to spend time tuning into the feelings and emotions of my experience. “Leah, I never had time to think and ponder. I was preoccupied with worrying about what I would feed my kids next.”

In 5727 (1967), after many attempts to emigrate, my grandparents were finally able to leave Russia. Their arrival in Eretz Yisroel, free from Communist persecution, was a relief, but with no money or means, their move was fraught with new, different, and very difficult challenges. They arrived in Eretz Yisroel with nowhere to go, quite literally. A cousin warmly welcomed them into their three-bedroom home, which was also housing two other recently immigrated families — one with ten children and another with five children. Three months after their move, the Six-Day War broke out. My grandmother, still suffering the trauma of WWII, told my grandfather that she abso-

“I can’t talk anymore about this; it’s too much.”

lutely would not manage to survive another war.

Somehow, some way, they pulled through.

It hasn’t been three months since we returned home after this precious, meaningful trip. It’s our fifth year on Shlichus, and although previously we treated ourselves to the sweet pleasure of spending the second days of Sukkos with our extended family, this year we decided to stay in Shelton and create a Simchas Torah experience for our community for the first time. Most of our community members were completely unaffiliated with anything Jewish until they met Chabad, so most of them had never heard about Simchas Torah, let alone knew what the day was all about. It was going to be their first impression, and our goal was to make it as joyful and uplifting as we could. Our spirits

I so badly wanted to be there, to be in Eretz Yisroel.

were high, and we were excited to kick off a first-ever Simchas Torah celebration in Shelton. But, one by one, as people entered Chabad, we received frightening reports about a war in Eretz Yisroel. The Israelis in our community didn’t show up, and we began to understand that something serious had happened, as much as we preferred to believe that it wasn’t true. On Motzei Yom Tov, together with tens of thousands of people around the world, we confirmed the worst. The rest is history... or, not really.

The rest is currently unfolding.

Suddenly, the horrible stories that I had spent hours hearing from Savta were happening in real time. Another Holocaust was taking place; the only difference this time was that the Jewish nation had a government and that news spread much faster, so defense measures were able to be taken quickly and with strength. Baruch Hashem, this Holocaust didn’t drag on for years.

I, together with millions of Yidden around the world, struggled with the pull to watch the news, to follow the tweets, to repost the posts, while simultaneously wanting to shut off all my devices because it was all too much to bear. How can we stand by and choose not to watch the horror and testimony to the brutality that the terrorists dealt on our brothers and sisters, because of our discomfort? But, on the other hand, how *can* we watch these videos, which are likely going to pull our morale down even further?



I want my kids to know that we come from a chain of people who fought hard just to survive, and now we need to thrive, for them.

I so badly wanted to be there, to be in Eretz Yisroel, and to fight for our country, our nation, and our existence. But, for a multitude of reasons I was unable to do that. Blessed with crystal clear directives from the Rebbe from previous wars in Eretz Yisroel, we felt some direction at this confusing time. At Chabad, we encouraged more and more people in our community to light Shabbos candles, put on tefillin, give extra tzedakah, join a Torah class, and say Tehillim. While we felt guided and glad to be taking productive measures in whatever areas we could, inside we were still broken. And, to be honest, I didn't want to stop feeling that heartbreak. I didn't want to just feel calm and happy; I didn't want to reach complacency, far away from the war, in my comfortable bubble.

Something special about the Jewish calendar is its recognition of the human condition of fluctuating emotions. There are months when we celebrate joy. Months we celebrate liberation. Months associated with forgiveness and reflection. And months when we allow ourselves to feel pain.

But why, why focus on the pain? Why every year do we need to feel the tragedy of the Churban once again, and read the heart-wrenching words of the Book of Eicha which describe the condition of the Yidden in Yerushalayim during the time of the Churban?

Why do I keep asking my grandmother to share more and more when it's so hard to hold tears back?

Why do I want to listen to the unbearable stories of survivors from Be'eri, from Kfar Aza, from the music festival at Re'im?

I'm not sure. There's a part of me that feels that we owe it to those who suffered at the hands of antisemitism, to not allow all that they went through to just be forgotten. But there must be more.

In the Tanya, the Alter Rebbe speaks about two types of sadness. One is a sadness that pulls a person down, and another is a bitterness that motivates a person to do more and do better.

The pain we feel during these days has proven to be a sadness that motivates us. A sadness that unites our nation in a way that nothing else has in many, many

years. A pain that has now centered Jewish identity for many people whose Jewish roots used to be a secondary part of their lives. And it reminds us of a time we are yearning for, to return to the days as they were when the Bais Hamikdash stood — a time when there will be true peace in the world, and when everyone will recognize Hashem. This yearning pushes us to increase in acts of kindness and acts of connection with our fellow and with Hashem, not only in the ways that make us feel good but in ways that are truly good.

As for my Savta, I want to hear the stories because I know that I am where I am today because of all she went through. I want to live the life she was never able to live, but so deeply wanted to. I want my kids to know that we come from a chain of people who fought hard just to survive, and now we need to thrive, for them. We owe it to them to build upon the bricks that they have laid in a world that no longer exists. Her resilience in the toughest of times inspires us to keep going and growing. It's hard to hear it all, but it motivates me to be the best I can, for Savta.

I am so deeply grateful to Hashem that I had the tremendous merit of bringing my dear children to meet and bond with my grandmother — I wasn't sure if that would ever happen. I hope Hashem blesses her with continued health, happiness, and nachas from her family!

May we all together merit a time of true joy and peace, and may the pain and sadness that we are collectively experiencing these days continue bringing out the best in the Jewish nation, bringing us to the ultimate goal of revealing Elokus and truth — ומלאה 'הארץ דעה את ה' ■



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Divinity in The Divine Land

Zeesy Gurevitch, Yerushalayim
Graduating class of 5774 (2014)



This land has my heart, she pulses inside of me.

Eretz Yisroel is ours because Hashem gave it to us. Full stop. Yes, the UN treaties and the fact that we are indigenous to the land, or that we have nowhere else to call ours, are all beneficial factors to make our case. But the real reason is: נתאווה הקדוש — Hashem wanted a home down here. A dwelling place in this physical world, a Beis Hamikdash. He chose Eretz Yisroel as that special land, where His light will be extra revealed. Of course, Hashem is everywhere, but in Eretz Yisroel, I see

His hand more clearly and visibly than anywhere else on the planet.

Eretz Yisroel is where the physical and spiritual intertwine. A whirlwind of memories: Dancing to rhythmic Hallel on a Moshav. Watching a goat give birth on a farm while volunteering there. Farbrenging on the beach until morning. Davening Selichos at one a.m. with thousands of other Yidden demanding Moshiach — each of us looking so different and living life in our own unique ways yet sharing so much in common.

I should have gotten a hint of how Divinely orchestrated life is here when the day before I arrived, the person from whom I was going to sublet my apartment canceled with zero warning. I landed in Ben Gurion without knowing where I would be sleeping that night. It turned out to be clear Hashgacha Pratis because I worked for Birthright those first few months, staying at different hotels each night, working crazy hours, and always with a different group. Hashem had my back the entire time and saved me from paying rent on an apartment that I wouldn't spend time in.

While on the search for an apartment for me to share with some Israeli friends, I first had to try out some places that just didn't make sense. Like that apartment with cat hair everywhere, or the one with a moldy kitchen, or the one in a very far location and just not the vibe but I was starting to feel desperate...

After two months of using my car as my office to be mobile around town, I had to give back the rental. It was after an event and I would've taken a ride with a Birthright group bus but it "happened to be" that my bags were in the garage and I didn't want to make the bus wait... Let's just say, the chances of me taking public transportation were so low, and yet, there I was, sitting down on the train seat, about to put in my headphones for the ride to Yerushalayim. A woman sat down across from me, and I remember consciously debating, "Listen to good music or talk to this random Israeli?" I chose to talk to her. Ten minutes later, I had gained a new friend, and it "happened to be" that her best friend was looking for someone to sublet an excellent apartment. This train conversation led to me renting a great apartment; anyone who visited loved it and couldn't get over the find. It was a clean, new complex with wifi and nice showers and three rooms and a perfect location, fairly priced and gorgeous. My new friend and I went straight from Tachana Merkazit to a fast food restaurant to celebrate this apartment-shidduch, and we stayed up laughing

Of course, Hashem is everywhere, but in Eretz Yisroel, I see His hand more clearly and visibly than anywhere else on the planet.

and connecting for hours after!

We are partners with Hashem in co-creating what our lives look like — what a gift, to be a *Tzelem Elokim*, a form of G-d! We get to play a role in this nonstop creation of our lives that keeps recurring again and again. That means knowing that Hashem does all with my best intentions in mind, and also, I can work on getting myself in and out of situations that feel right for me. I personally try to be an active participant in my life, while also working on surrendering and knowing that ultimately, Hashem's in charge.

I often visualize a little three-year-old on her father's lap, getting to drive a golf cart. The child has a sense of control and can affect which direction the cart goes. When she moves the wheel right, the cart goes right, and when she reverses, it goes backward. Yet ultimately, she's sitting on her father's lap and he's got his foot on the gas pedal and brakes. This helps me keep in mind that Hashem is in charge and has my



We each have a part of Eretz Yisroel inside each of us. When we reveal the light within our environment, do an act of goodness and kindness, and elevate something seemingly mundane, we create our own Mikdash Me'at. We make Eretz Yisroel alive inside and have our very own dwelling place in this world.

back, but I still can't fall asleep at the wheel. I need to actively choose my life and make decisions that work and help me grow as a person, that feels aligned and true to myself, keeping Hashem, Torah, and family as my center. I choose my experiences and put in the effort to make educated decisions and figure things out and be responsible, and — and this is the really important part that I constantly need to remind myself — Hashem decides the rest. Not always are the divinely orchestrated aspects so apparent — I still don't know why I had to miss out on a camping weekend with friends in the Negev for a prior commitment that ended up falling through at the last minute. But that's the tricky balance of surrendering and also holding the wheel — a lifelong goal I strive for but can find difficult to fully embody.

When describing Bikkurim, the Torah says “to offer the first fruits of your crops in the place that Hashem will choose.” The Rebbe discusses how it's interesting that the Torah wouldn't straight out say “Yerushalayim” or “the Bais Hamikdash.” “The place Hashem will choose” seems vague, and we know every tiny detail in the Torah is specific and can teach us a lesson. The Rebbe shares how the Tzemach Tzedek had a Chossid who wanted to go to Eretz Yisroel, but the Rebbe told him, “*Mach duh Eretz Yisroel.*” We each have a part of Eretz Yisroel inside each of us. When we reveal the light within our environment, do an act of goodness and kindness, and elevate something seemingly mundane, we create our own *Mikdash Me'at*. We make Eretz Yisroel alive inside and have our very own dwelling place in this world. How amazing that we have this ability to bring the holy land HERE, wherever we are at the moment?

Living here feels incredible and fun, yet exhausting, busy, and hard. It's magical and meaningful, and often complicated, heavy, and expensive. I have spiritual, joyous, deep, and freeing moments, and then it gets intense and physical. I get epic, flow, and light, and then hard emotions, rawness, chaos, and complexity. I'm on my own yet I'm not lonely. I have had times where I felt like I was practically surrounded by clouds, receiving a giant hug from Hashem and being held. I have also had some of my hardest moments here, like when my grandmother passed away or when I was attacked by a wild ibex in a crater. Eretz Yisroel is so much. She is fantastic, she is painful, she is home.

The goal is that the Zeesy I am here in Eretz Yisroel doesn't only remain in the holy land; rather I somehow bring the spiritual sparks and energy to wherever I find myself next. Please, Hashem, show me that this entire world is truly Eretz Yisroel and that wherever we are, we can tap into that genuine freedom and beautiful light from Above. I'm ready for an Eagle

And until then, let's keep “Maching Duh Eretz Yisroel.”

Airlines straight to the Kosel; please let it be now. And until then, let's keep “*Maching Duh Eretz Yisroel.*” ▀



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Connection Point

*Double Reunion in the
Holy City of Chevron*

Malka Forshner, Estero, Florida

Bais Rivkah Mechina in 5739-40 (1979-80)



What equation do we use for calculating the nachas of teaching a second generation? Nachas times two? Nachas squared? Well, since I'm an English Language Arts teacher, we can skip that math question for now. And as an ELA teacher, I could only begin to share with you the innumerable adjectives I could use to describe this rich experience!

Teaching in Bais Rivkah after being a Bais Rivkah mechina student felt like a huge "graduation" of sorts, but the moment of teaching a student's daughter was beyond comparison. This second-generation student was not in Bais Rivkah, but a student in

the Jewish Online School General Studies Program. As I had predicted way back then to my seventh graders at 470 Lefferts Ave., most of my Bais Rivkah students would soon be married, with children, and on shlichus, and hence so was Cheyenna (Nene) (Avtzon) Schmukler, (class of 5765-2005) with her children enrolled in Shluchim Online School.

When I met this “Generation #2” student, I was teaching the fifth and seventh grades. Still, when I had a chance to help out a fellow Limmudei Chol teacher and sub for her second-grade class, I was more than happy to accept the challenge. After looking at the class list, I saw an extra special treat, a daughter of one of my Bais Rivkah girls... and I just couldn't wait to tell this sweet second grader that I had been her mommy's English teacher in Bais Rivkah. True to form, Cherna whipped off her headphones and ran off-screen, and as I confirmed later, she was yelling, “Mommy, Mommy, my morah today was your morah in seventh grade!!”

Nene Schmukler had been one of those Bais Rivkah girls with whom I had kept in touch, which made this online mini-reunion all the more touching... but there is more to the story.

I have a son who is a Shliach in Chevron, and part of his duties include giving tours of Chevron and Me'aras Ha'Machpela. Right before my visit last summer, we were going over some family outing plans, which are always intertwined with those Chevron tour responsibilities. “Mommy, isn't Schmukler from Texas a student of yours from back in the day? They asked me to schedule a tour!” Well, I always say that Hashem is the best party planner, and between all of our schedules, it worked out to have the sweetest meet-up of all, at the foot of Ma'aras Ha'machpela, right there with our collective Avos and Imahos!

Here I must add a timely note about the war that is currently raging in our homeland, Eretz Yisroel (Im yirtzeh Hashem, way before you sit down to read this issue of EMBrace, that situation will be finished, in a most Jewishly victorious way!). I sit here trying to tell you all a nice story of a lovely meet-up with a Bais Rivkah student and her daughter, also a student, and I'm wondering if there's another point that needs to be made — and indeed there is.

The word “Chevron” has the same root as the word “chibur,” to connect!! We can go to Me'aras Ha'machpela to connect with our Avos and Imahos, our spiritual mothers and fathers. In that special and holy place, we have a tangible opportunity to daven

“Mommy, Mommy, my morah today was your morah in seventh grade!!”

by their kevorim, beseeching them for whatever is on our minds, and in our hearts (and Mama Rochel is just up the road a bit...). That very same son, the Shliach in Chevron who gave my student's family their tour, is now wearing green and protecting that holy place.

There is certainly a significance in having this very special "second generation" meet-up at Ma'aras Ha'Machpela. After all these years of not seeing this Bais Rivkah student, and getting to meet generation number two in person, meeting up at this holy site emphasizes that aspect of connection, our connection with where we come from, and where we are headed as well. [Am Yisroel Chai!](#) ■



ARMED

Chana Esther (McKenzie) Gillard, Crown Heights
Teacher, Bais Rivkah High School



In the moment, some things are so beautiful that it's apparent to everyone who witnesses it. For example, the moment the pinteleYid comes out. It may look like a stranger crying at the opportunity to do a mitzvah. Perhaps it's when a middle-aged woman who, after weeks of refusing to be reminded of her Jewishness, suddenly does take the candles — albeit begrudgingly. It's beautiful because if you would ask her, she has no intelligible reason for doing so.

By default, we gravitate toward things that are pleasurable in the moment, shining

with the glitz and glam of the world. There are usually many internal and external obstacles that block us from freely experiencing real goodness, Torah goodness. We often sit with our mental arms crossed, waiting for Hashem to prove His goodness to us by sweeping us off our feet with the beauty and enjoyment of the Torah. In truth, doing what the Torah says is where we want to be, but because it's not always flashing in front of us, we have to allow ourselves to lean into that belief and let ourselves experience the Torah for what it is.

The Rebbe's campaigns are precious gifts, shining a light into the depth of what Hashem offers us with His Torah. As Chassidim, we know this, but sometimes the feeling and action do not follow. We don't feel the urgency to keep up with each precious opportunity that stands in front of us. It takes a combination of proper chinuch and personal avodah until our inspiration and reality align.

Sometimes the Rebbe thrusts us into roles and situations where the experience itself is transformative. When we receive such attention from the Rebbe, there ends up being no room for contrary opinions. The truth becomes so overwhelmingly obvious that we can only feel deep appreciation for the zechus to participate in the Rebbe's vision. This is a Geula moment — when we experience that the Torah is the only true reality and the mission itself becomes the reward.

I had such an experience at Bais Rivkah Seminary Beis. As part of a *Hachana* for Yud Alef Nisan, I arranged a *Yom Iyun* focusing on mivtzoim where Rabbi M. Wolf spoke. The whole room was on fire; as a seminary, we took on a brand new approach to mivtzoim. We formed committees, initiatives, and a group chat to find ways to vamp up our *Mivtza Neshek* efforts. I was lucky to be the one spearheading this project where so many girls were ready to conquer the streets with the Rebbe's *Mivtza Neshek*.

I was out on mivtzoim with a friend on Friday afternoon when Morah Gorowitz called me. She saw the enthusiasm bursting in the hallways and wanted me to do something to channel it toward *Mivtza Matzah*. I was hesitant, knowing that *Mivtza Matzah* is expensive — I was just one person, how was I to fundraise for it? Besides, seminary was just getting into *Mivtza Neshek*, how would I redirect everyone toward *Mivtza Matzah*? I wasn't sure how I could pull it off.

That's when she reminded me that this is what we

Eventually, the slogan became “\$10. One box of Matzah. One Seder Table. One Jewish Family Affected Forever,” and the donations started to flow in.

do — the Rebbe wants *Mivtza Matzah* before Pesach, we have to find a way to make it happen. And that message is what gave me the focus to lean into the Rebbe's *inyan*, make it happen, and trust that it is good and therefore it will work out. For that, I am forever grateful. Not only did I have the zechus of coordinating this project, but I got a front-row seat to see how beautiful the Rebbe's *inyonim* are in a tangible way.

That day I posted on my WhatsApp status something along the lines of, "To contribute to Sem Beis Mivtza Matzah, Zelle..." Eventually, the slogan became "\$10. One box of Matzah. One Seder Table. One Jewish Family Affected Forever," and the donations started to flow in. Pause. I'll hold off on the ending for now, but it seems that the Rebbe was waiting to give me a beautiful present and was just waiting for



my willingness to try.

After Pesach, we started brainstorming for a new project. The first and foremost agenda was that Moshiach should come. The secondary goals of this specific program, however, are twofold:

Bais Rivkah, in particular, has boldly committed to giving out ten thousand Neshek, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to the Rebbe's call of the hour.

1. Engage high school and seminary girls in mitzvot by giving them a sense of responsibility to model to younger girls that mitzvot is something done as a normal part of life.
2. Ingrain in the hearts and minds of elementary-aged girls a sense of appreciation, pride, and responsibility to make mitzvot a part of their lives.

To kick off the program, a pre-Gimmel Tammuz campaign was introduced where older girls would take younger girls out on *Mivtza Neshek*. The Canva read, “Sem Beis is Going from being by the Rebbe to being with the Rebbe.” The message: We are Lubavitch girls. We are lucky to live in the Rebbe’s *daled amos*. Now it’s time to take it to the next level and shift towards being more “with the Rebbe” — making the Rebbe’s perspective more of our own and experiencing the pure pleasure that it is to be engaged in the Rebbe’s vision. Long story short, again it seemed like the Rebbe wanted me to try so that he could give me the biggest present.

The “ending” to the *Mivtza Matzah* and *Mivtza Neshek* story tells itself:

Before that first Pesach, two buses full of high school and seminary girls distributed five hundred boxes of matzah. Eventually, we expanded to girls as young as third grade going out before Sukkos, and Pesach, distributing hundreds of neshek and matzos and helping Yidden do thousands of mitzvos. Last Pesach we distributed seven hundred and fifty boxes of matzah! Now, every week, one hundred and fifty girls go on mitzvot consistently with our program.

It goes without saying that behind the numbers are

countless stories of spreading Chassidus both internally and to the outside. These stories include girls fired up with the Rebbe’s vision — girls who are running for the opportunity to find a fellow Jew, girls who cannot wait to go on mitzvot, and girls who come back understanding the value of a mitzvah after spending time trying to find one Yid to do one mitzvah. Behind the numbers are also countless stories of Yidden from various backgrounds being connected with their rich heritage.

Take the Trader Joe’s employee, for example. On Sukkos, a group of girls on mitzvot asked their chaperones if they could stop for a post-mitvot snack. When they went to check out, the employee asked them what type of plant they were carrying, and as they explained, her face lit up as she exclaimed that she a Jew and would love to do a mitzvah.

Or the older Russian immigrant, who was initially resistant when our girls asked if she was Jewish. Overtaken by curiosity, she asked the girls why they wanted to know, and broke down in tears, welcoming the opportunity to light Shabbos candles with joy and appreciation. She shared that she hadn’t seen her family in a while and this made her feel like she was back at home with them.

There were the Israeli tourists who were so excited to do something Jewish in New York. The young professionals who asked for help to connect to the shliach in



the neighborhood. The Yidden who, after a few questions, learned that they were Jewish. The elderly individuals living alone who cried and lovingly accepted matzos for Pesach.

Mitzvoim is real. It's not just a nice idea that we "have to do" because we're Lubavitchers. It's a real thing that makes a tangible mark on the world.

The Rebbe teaches us time and time again that he is not just expecting us to act on what he teaches us, but he wants us to make it our own.¹ The Rebbe wants our perspective to become ever more in line with the truth. That's Moshiach — experiencing the true sweetness of what it means to live as a Yid, and not how our Yetzer Hara wants us to live.

Furthermore, not only are the Rebbe's inyonim beautiful gifts that we get to participate in, but more than that, the Rebbe's inyonim are powerful. The Rebbe gives us tools to make the world truly G-dly. We must remember this, especially during the current situation in Eretz Yisroel; the Rebbe's inyonim and especially mitzvaim are tools that will reveal the truth to the world. In this way, all will see and experience that this is Hashem's world and must behave as such. ■

1. See the sichos of תשמ"ט, פרשת שלח תשי"י, תשמ"ט for more



A Call To Arms

Anonymous

Teacher, Bais Rivkah High School

The acronym "Neshek" — which means weapon in Hebrew — stands for Neiros Shabbos Kodesh, encompassing both the mitzvah of illuminating Shabbos and the power of a ruchnius-dike weapon. It is a reminder that our spiritual arsenal, as Chassidim, lies in inspiring Jewish women and girls to kindle this timeless mitzvah.

Amidst the ongoing challenges faced by Eretz Yisroel, a remarkable initiative has emerged, uniting high school girls across the country under the banner of ARMED. This campaign has galvanized these young women to collectively achieve the ambitious goal of distributing eighteen thousand Neshek kits, our part in safeguarding the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel.

The launch of ARMED has ignited an unprecedented surge of enthusiasm among high school girls nationwide. Every school has wholeheartedly embraced the challenge, setting specific quotas for Neshek distribution. Bais Rivkah, in particular, has boldly committed to giving out ten thousand Neshek, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to the Rebbe's call of the hour.

To date, over fourteen thousand Neshek have already been distributed by our girls to Yidden on the streets.

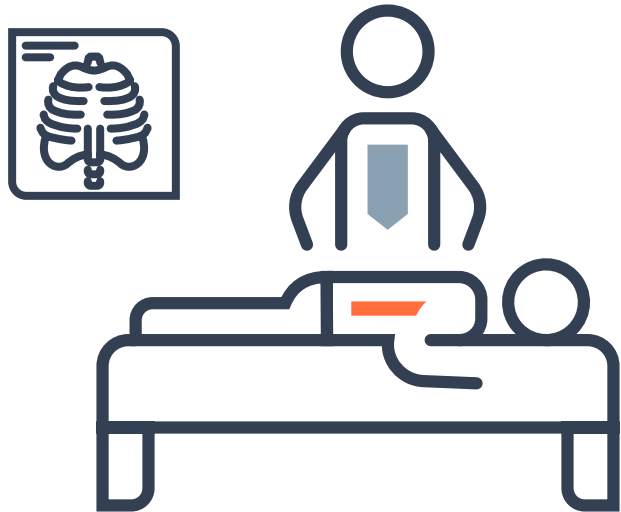
ARMED has instilled a renewed sense of excitement and purpose in their mitzvaim. The campaign has become embedded into their daily lives, inspiring them to take neshek wherever they go. Whether they're strolling with friends, shopping, or out on mitzvaim, the girls recognize that every moment can be transformed into a mitzvaim moment, a chance to make a positive impact.

Our girls of Bais Rivkah are focused on their mission. The Rebbe teaches us that our method of fighting darkness is with light. That's exactly what they are doing.

Movement With Intention

Chaya Mushka (Mushkie Lipskier) Silberberg, Crown Heights
Graduating class of 5754 (1994)

As told to
Shaina (Blau) Glick, Crown Heights
Graduating seminary class of 5771 (2011)



One of the magical parts of motherhood is watching your little baby grow and mature, and discover the world through each stage of development. It was fun to do it all over again with my second child, Mussia, as I approached each stage with experience. I knew to ensure she got enough tummy time, and I was careful to avoid using any swing or bouncer for more than a few minutes a day.

While I knew that each baby has their own journey, I didn't expect my daughter's delays to be a problem. She approached eight months and then nine months of age and still showed no signs of learning how to crawl. I told myself it was fine; "every child at her own pace." But as the months went by, it was clear that she was struggling and needed some intervention to help her along. I knew she was okay, and I was okay. Still, I wondered how my perfectly adorable, adventurous, and BH bright little girl could be so physically behind. That's when I met Chaya Mushka Silberberg and discovered the Anat Baniel Neuromovement Method (an offshoot of the Feldenkrais Method), also known as ABM.

Chaya Mushka, I'm excited to be interviewing you for Embrace Magazine. I feel that you might be Crown Heights' best-kept secret! Can you share with us in a nutshell, what is the Anat Baniel Neuromovement Method, and how it works?

Aren't we all Crown Heights' best-kept secret? There are various ways to answer this question. I'll start with what it's not: it's not yoga, physical therapy, massage, or craniosacral. It's slow, gentle movement with intention, generated by either the practitioner or the student, mimicking the random movements that a typical baby makes through the first few years of their development.

Many people didn't understand why Mussia needed ABM. Why isn't physical therapy enough?

This is an excellent question that comes up all the time. The drawback of the approach of physical therapy is that it isolates an issue and tries to fix it. For example, if someone breaks an arm or leg and goes for physical therapy, the therapist will work on strengthening the muscles of that particular limb, working on getting that leg or arm to work as a leg or arm should work. This sounds like a logical method, but the problem is that our anatomy is an organized system that is controlled by the brain. If you isolate one body part without addressing the whole system, especially the brain, your work is limited. It can even be harmful to the brain or the entire body system when you do that.

Still, I wondered how my perfectly adorable, adventurous, and BH bright little girl could be so physically behind.

So what is ABM and how does it work with the brain and entire system?

I like to explain this work by sharing the Hayom Yom of Chof Ches Menachem Av, where the Friediker Rebbe explains that there are two general approaches to healing a bodily illness: "1. To heal the particular limb that has been impacted. 2. To strengthen the healthy organs and faculties so that they may overcome and heal the sick organ or faculty." Doing these movements with the skeletal structure strengthens the connection between the brain and the body. It works with the parts of the person that are already functioning properly and thereby creates a safe body environment, bringing attention and awareness to how the person is moving and using their body now. These lessons invite more and more parts into the picture, improving the body's organization. This results in improved development wherever the body needs it. This is not a linear path or a rushed approach; it's an individual process led by the brain.



It's hard to believe that it's been only five months since we met and you began working with Mussia. You are practically a part of our family at this point! At the time, Mussia was fourteen months old, had recently learned to crawl, and was nowhere near walking. Can you walk us through how you assessed her needs and made a plan for your work with her?

Sure! The first part is creating a personal connection and being a safe person for the child to be around. Mussia had her reservations, so that took some time. This is the most important step because, as we all know, when our brain is preoccupied with something, it is not going to do any learning. And if the practitioner is not a safe person, the client's mind would be preoccupied with that and unable to learn. ABM is actually about learning, which is why we call the sessions "lessons." To make changes in the body's system, the body needs to learn new patterns. With ABM, the client's brain is learning a skill that becomes theirs to keep and build on. In this way, it is different from physical therapy, which is about repetitive movement and isn't retained as a skill.

Also, physical therapy requires a person to do repetitive movements even when those movements are difficult and painful. Because the brain's primary focus is on the person's safety, it can start to make

Before she could learn to do something different, she needed to know what she was already doing.

the muscles around that area tighter, ending up with negative results such as pain elsewhere or a lack of full range of motion. Also, when a therapist attempts to get a patient – for example, someone who suffered a stroke – to do a movement that they are incapable of doing at the moment, the brain gets the message that "it just can't." This message is difficult to unlearn. ABM, on the other hand, never forces a person to override their comfort zone.

Got it. So how did you make a plan to reach the milestones we were hoping for?

Meeting Mussia and starting to work with her while completing my training to work with children was a tremendous gift to me as a person and a practitioner. I'm so grateful that you opened your heart and home to me. As Mussia became more comfortable with me, I observed how she used her body – skeletally and functionally. What stood out to me was her torticollis:



she was dragging her left leg, and her arms were not relaxed and down by her side. Even when she was at rest, her arms were unnecessarily being held up and back. This resulted in her upper back being arched and her sternum sticking out instead of being mobile.

I began by helping Mussia feel what she was already doing by making small movements with her skeleton. The movements I would make were in the directions where she was already going. For example, I'd gently and very slightly arch her upper back even more than it already was, and I would softly and subtly tilt her head in the same direction that it was already leaning. This connected her to herself so that she could attentively feel what she was already doing. Before she could learn to do something different, she needed to know what she was already doing. I like to compare this to the Chassidus explanation of "Ayeka": we have to know where we are in order to make a move to where we want to go. Once I met her where she was at, and I began each lesson this way, I slowly invited movement in the various opposite directions. This is extremely slow and gentle, involving tiny movements that would be difficult for the untrained eye to detect. During this process, Mussia would get very quiet and I was able to sense that she was paying attention.

I thought I was helping my daughter's development by giving her enough tummy time, until I learned that according to ABM this is counter-productive. Can you explain this (controversial!) concept?

Are you sure you want to go down this road? [laughs] Because I want to scream this from the rooftops! When you put a child or an adult into a position they cannot get into or out of on their own, it causes the brain, which is responsible for the person's safety, to send messages to the muscles to stiffen and tighten in order not to fall. You might think this is great, because the baby appears to gain head or stomach control, but in reality, it blocks the brain's access to the parts underneath the tightened muscles. For example, before I met Mussia, she had been put on her tummy and in a sitting position before she could get there on her own. The reason she held her arms up and out and her sternum was sticking out was because if she hadn't learned this position, her head would have banged into the floor. She had to learn to keep her chest tight and jutted upwards. This disrupted the organization of her movement. When a child learns to roll onto their tummy alone, the movement comes from their pelvis while the chest remains soft and mobile, which is necessary for all future milestones such as sitting,

I wish more parents would leave their children alone on their backs to develop and discover the world in a safe way. This is how they map out their skeleton in the most potentiated way.

crawling, standing, and walking. I wish more parents would leave their children alone on their backs to develop and discover the world in a safe way. This is how they map out their skeleton in the most potentiated way.

You are always very specific about how you address areas of growth. Nothing is "a problem," and nothing is ever "wrong" with Mussia. Why is this so important?

I want you to close your eyes and notice how you feel inside yourself when I tell you about all the problems you have that I have noticed, or the things that are wrong with you. Do you feel that you are open to possibilities and learning, or does it make you feel stuck and victimized? Now keep your eyes closed, and feel inside yourself when I tell you that there is nothing wrong with you, and you actually have the most perfect brain that is keeping you safe and healthy for you right now at this moment.

Wow.

Did you feel that? As I am saying it to you even I felt it. When we look at anyone – a friend, child, or spouse – and we see them in a way that we need to fix them, it creates a disconnect and blocks the path for possibilities. Staying connected to Mussia generates enthusiasm for greater growth and possibility. And that's the truth for everyone. It doesn't mean that we don't look to make things better; it means that we change our perspective from fixing to connecting.

Something we've had to practice is not saying "Yay!" when Mussia makes progress. Can you explain the idea behind this?

As you've noticed with Mussia in the video you sent me when she was concentrating on a movement or activity, she was very internal and more aware of her own process. As soon as you called her name or said "yay," she either fell or lost her balance, and sometimes even hurt herself. As mothers, we too often interrupt our children's attention to their own process

by helping out too much with direction or ideas. If we could just be quiet and stand back and observe, we would watch the magic of their self-mastery happen.

You obviously have a special connection with children. I have never seen someone work so well with kids, connecting with them and loving them, all while working towards a goal. But children are only one of the many demographics that you work with. What is your favorite age group and/or diagnosis to work with?

When I first started out doing this work, I imagined I would be working with adults, helping others in the same way ABM helped me to get out of pain and experience less anxiety. Now that I've completed the children's mastery training and practiced with kids, I can't say what my favorite group of clients is. I feel blessed to be able to help people have a better quality of life, and I absolutely love this work.

Over the years when I was growing up, I saw ads for Feldenkrais in various Jewish magazines, but I never imagined that it would be something that could benefit me. When I treated myself to a one-on-one session to address my back pain, a whole new world opened up for me with so many possibilities of how this work could benefit my life. Can you share more everyday reasons people might come to you for a session?

ABM can benefit everyone. Usually people come when they are desperate because they are in pain; that's just how people work. People have come to me for relief from migraines, back pain, pulled muscles, stiff neck, and posture. I've also worked with people

I feel blessed to be able to help people have a better quality of life, and I absolutely love this work.

who have had a stroke, fibromyalgia, Parkinson's, chronic pain, traumatic injury, pregnancy related pain, scoliosis, and more. In truth, however, everyone can benefit from ABM. Among the many benefits: it helps with emotional self-regulation, calms the nervous system, and facilitates clearer cognition.

I found a session with you to feel better than a massage. In what ways is an ABM session similar to a massage and how does it differ?

A massage focuses on muscles and tissue, offering temporary relief and pleasure. ABM focuses on the brain and body connection and resolves muscle stiffness in a more permanent way. This process allows for greater range of motion and more organized mobility, which is why you feel so amazing after a lesson. You also feel more connected to yourself and relaxed because this process calms the nervous system.

There are only a few other ABM/Feldenkrais practitioners in Crown Heights. What got you interested in this work? And what was the process of getting trained like?

This could be a whole other farbrengen! In short, I have a niece and a nephew that were helped tremendously by Anat Baniel. When I saw my newborn niece



who wasn't able to move her arm due to birth complications regaining the use of her arm after a short five-minute lesson with Anat, I was blown away. I was pulled to this work like a magnet even before I realized that it would actually change my life later on.

I experienced its wonders firsthand when I was seeking relief from my chronic stiff neck and shoulder blade pain. I started taking a weekly class by Devorah New. Not only did the work give me relief from physical pain, it also served as my emotional medicine for the week. I knew then that I wanted to be able to share this with as many other people as possible. Getting trained was a journey of its own. I thought I was a self-aware person before I began my training; little did I know how much more I would learn about myself and grow — constantly, every single day! — through this work. I continuously learn so much from my clients as well.

This is all so fascinating! Is there anything else you can share with us that would benefit the BR Alumnae community?

When I began to understand how this work was helping me in my personal life, it opened up so many possibilities that I actually started to learn Chassidus for the first time, integrating it into my life on a practical level. I call this work “Chassidus in the body.” Many of us learn Chassidus on an intellectual level; through this work I've been able to master the concepts for real avodah. This work involves having kavanah or mindfulness in movement. I was now able to understand the concept of learning and doing mitzvos with all of my faculties, not just my intellect. I would love for others to know that this could be a tool to help not only physical and emotional health but also spiritual connection.

You've been doing this work professionally for three years and I had never heard of you. I found out about your work b'hashgacha protis, bumping into you at an event. Why isn't everyone talking about this?

Good question! It takes people time to change. We are used to our routines and go-to solutions for different challenges. We don't run to new things. Once you experience a class or a lesson, I know you will come back and you'll want to shout it out from the rooftops too!

Should we end with an update on how Mussia is doing today?

Yes! After 15+ sessions, Mussia is now walking and getting better balance each day. She has so much

I would love for others to know that this could be a tool to help not only physical and emotional health but also spiritual connection.

more awareness of herself and how she uses her body. Her left foot is no longer dragging and her torticollis is not noticeable anymore. Overall, she has much greater command of herself. Her upper back, chest, and arms are more organized. She is no longer using muscles unnecessarily in the areas she was previously, and they are now free to move around in a more balanced way.

Beyond the physical, she is also more comfortable with strangers, her language is exploding, and she is super communicative for a nineteen-month-old. As mothers, we often suffer from the “missing tile syndrome.” We look for what our kid isn't doing yet. I want to remind you to always look at what your child is doing right and know that he or she is doing okay. In that attitude lies the answer to your child reaching their next milestone.

It's my honor to help spread the word about the treasure we have right here in Crown Heights. Can people follow you on social media, and do you have a website?

New things are hard for me too. Thanks to your assistance, I am working on my social media and website. Thank you! I can be found on Instagram @conciousofmovementnyc and on the web at www.conciousofmovementNYC.com. ■

Shaina Glick is a freelance writer who lives in Crown Heights with her husband and two children. She offers a wide range of writing services including copywriting, creative writing, journalism, poetry, social media, and more. She is passionate about the work that she does for mosdos, businesses and Shluchim, helping to facilitate their success through words. You can enjoy her work at @Shaina_Glick_Writing on Instagram, or shainaglick.journoportfolio.com.

Chaya Mushka Silberberg is an Anat Baniel Neuromovement Practitioner based in Crown Heights. You can join her classes or schedule one-on-one sessions at her newly renovated studio on Carroll Street and Kingston Avenue. You can learn more about her work at @Conciousofmovementnyc on Instagram, or conciousofmovementnyc.com.

A Taste of Bais Rivkah



Date: _____

Chanie (Halberstam)
Apfelbaum
Crown Heights

Graduating class
of 5758 (1998)



FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS, MY FATHER HAD THE ZECHUS TO WORK AS A CARETAKER IN THE HOME OF THE REBBE.

One of my father's responsibilities was preparing homemade gefilte fish, which he had learned to make from Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, or as we affectionately called her, Doda.

This sacred family recipe is one that my parents prepared together every Erev Pesach. It is simple to make, yet it carries the most special and cherished family memories. It is my honor and privilege to share it with you.



REBBETZIN'S GEFILTE FISH

GEFILTE FISH

- 2 large carrots, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 large Spanish onion, quartered
- 2 lbs ground carp
- 1 lb ground pike
- 1 lb ground whitefish*
- 4 extra large eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt
- Whitefish steaks (*optional; see Notes*)

BROTH

- 3 carrots, peeled and sliced into ¼-inch-thick coins
- 2 celery stalks, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1 Spanish onion, halved and sliced into half-moons
- ¼ cup sugar, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 lbs fish heads and bones, thoroughly cleaned (*see Notes*)
- 1 lb carp fish roe (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

1. To make the gefilte fish: In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the S blade, grind the carrots and onion until finely ground, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula as needed.
2. In a large bowl, combine the ground carrots and onion, carp, pike, whitefish, eggs, sugar, and salt; mixing to incorporate. Cover the bowl and refrigerate the gefilte fish mixture while you

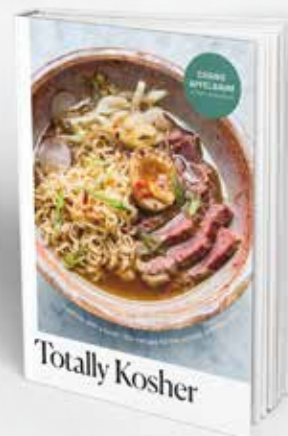
prepare the broth.

3. To make the broth: In a 12-quart pot, place the sliced carrots, celery, and onion. Fill the pot 1/4 full with cold water, add the sugar and salt, and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Add the fish heads and bones and return to a simmer.
4. Gently add the fish roe (if using) to the pot.
5. While the broth is simmering, remove the gefilte fish from the fridge and, using wet hands, portion it out into oval-shaped patties, about 1/3 cup each. Gently add the gefilte fish to the broth, ensuring that it is constantly simmering. Add stuffed whitefish steaks (if using, see note). Gently simmer the patties over low heat, covered, for 3 hours, until the broth is jellied and thickened, adding water as needed to keep the fish mostly covered.
6. When the gefilte fish is finished cooking, remove it from the heat and let it cool completely in the broth. Remove the fish heads and bones with a slotted spoon and discard. Transfer the gefilte fish to a large shallow pan along with the vegetables and as much of the broth as desired. Cover with foil and refrigerate for up to 5 days. Serve cold with chrein (sweet beet horseradish relish).

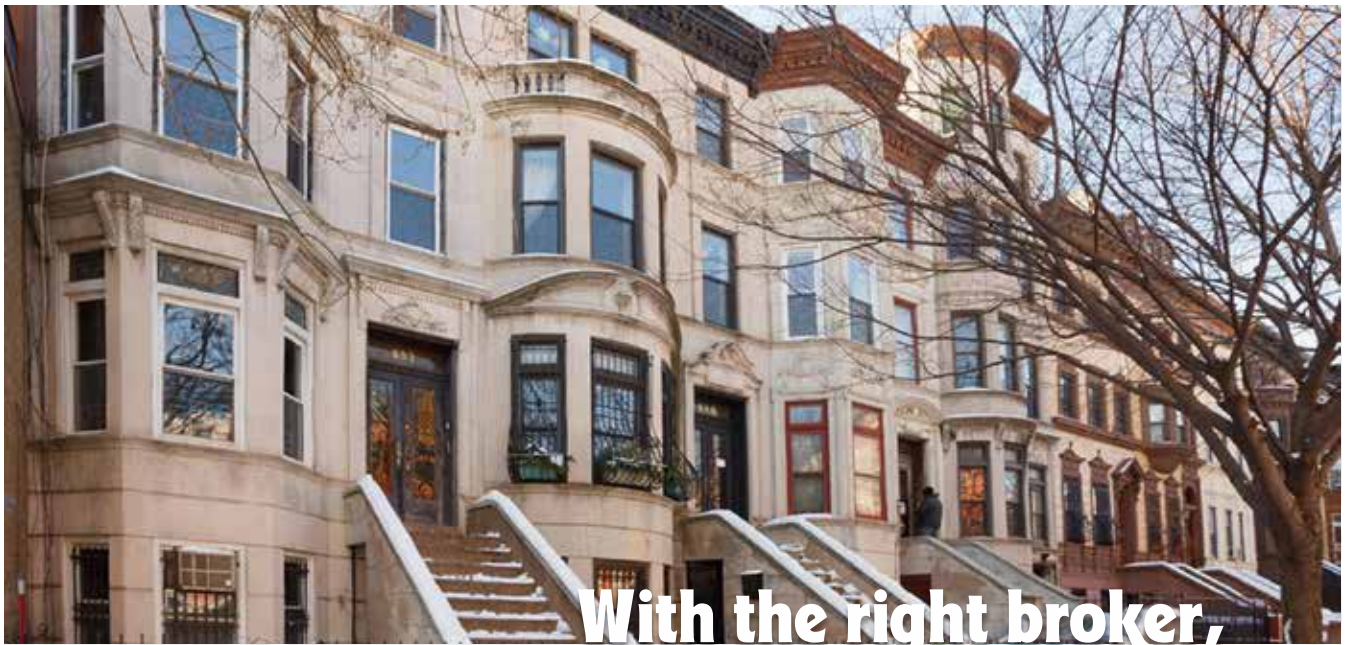
Yields: 30 Gefilte fish patties

Note:

This is a freshwater species called “whitefish,” not a white-fleshed fish like cod or haddock. Found in America or Canada in the Great Lakes, it’s what is used to make gefilte fish.



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*Morah Korf's Korner
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Korf's beloved halacha classes
in high school. Her unique
teaching style has made a
lasting impression on us,
as she used creative hints
and wordplay to help us
understand and remember the
intricate halachos of Shabbos,
Netilas Yadayim, and more.
One memorable feature of
Morah Korf's classes was
her occasional catchy and
entertaining poems, or "raps,"
that she would share with us.*

*We are excited to share another
poem in our column Morah
Korf's Korner, featuring Morah
Korf's unique and inspiring
poetry. We hope that her words
will continue to inspire and
entertain for years to come.*

שמחה פורץ גדר

Two birds flying in the sky
Started pondering as to why

All creations — the worst, the
best
Seem to be depressed

Just give a look at beast or fowl
Their face expression like a
growl

Man of every age and place
With sadness on their face

"Why don't they learn from
us," they claim
"We who have neither wealth
nor fame

With no shelter from cold or
heat
Worms are what we eat...

"Yet from early morning till
late at night
We sing our tune, a song so
bright

true שמחה פורץ גדר
It lasts our whole life through

"Perhaps it's because we fly so
high
And feel so close to שמים, the
sky

Above mundane of come and
go
We look from above to below."

The two birds decided as they
did proclaim, "It's true,
There must be more like me
and you

We must search the whole
world through
And find creations, happy
too."

A happiness so true and bright
That does not fade, with shade
or night

That does not pass with wind
so quick
That takes you through the
thick

And as the birds their search
begin
They hear some music from
within

They enter a hall
With laughter by all
It is a wedding ball

Bride and groom – face
shining bright
All attending could dance all
night

This is truly happiness
And a sign of bliss

But what does happen as the
years roll by
How many wives will shed tears
and cry

At silly things going not their
way
And forget their wedding day

No, this is not what we are out to
seek
We want שמחה not so weak
One full of hope one so secure
That will last forever more

The birds find a mother — with
a smile like a charm
With a newborn baby in her arm
The depth of happiness in her
eyes
Make the birds surprised

This must be our שמחה true
A mother with her baby new
A child gives meaning to her
years ahead
A happiness unsaid

But what will find as the years
give way
If the child doesn't listen to what
mother will say
No mother seems ever satisfied
With her children's lives

No this is not what we're looking
for
The birds decide to look some
more
Till they find successful Joe
Who bought a new house you
know

The house has every gadget
clear
He's rebuilt it — close to a year
And finally it's complete —
without, within
He's ready to move in

Laughter, joy at his accomplish-
ment
Success is something Heaven
sent

It makes you laugh and feel such
glee
You think it's till eternity

But what happens in the years to
come
All the "if"s a reality become
The pipes did break, the roof
did leak
Now things look so bleak

"No, no, no," say the birds once
more
"This is not what we're looking
for
We're looking for happiness
sincere
But — we don't know where."



The birds then find a crowd so
strong
Rushing as they go along
Excitedly down the steps they go
Why? They did not know

Soon a powerful song is heard
Than sung by any bird

The voices of thousands reach-
ing high
Way up to the sky

The birds give a peek inside and
see

Thousands packed impossibly
The room is filled — the width
the breath
And a צדיק sits at their head

The צדיק's eyes give a look so
warm
While injecting a power so
strong

Things will really be okay
חשיח is on his way

"I know," says his eyes, "You
may think how can this be
But your eyes through חסידות as
mine can see

Your mind would then as mine
really know
You can look, from above to
below

"Open up your eyes to see
So you too will perceive as me
It really is as I tell you
It is really true."

But as his חסידים feel dismay
Please, Rebbe, help us feel this
way

The צדיק his hand gives a swing
And joyous song does begin

He uplifts his חסידים with his
hand
Uplifted way above their land
Up above they soar you know
They too now look from above
to below

True שמחה פורץ גדר
The birds begin to sing now too
"We've found at last what we're
looking for!"
A שמחה that must endure

Above mundane of love of want
The שמחה of above ■

Keepsakes

Do you recognize anyone in the photos? Let us know at history@bethrivkah.edu

Have photos of your Bais Rivkah experience? Please let us know.



Top row L-R: Esther Weissler, Chaya (Hodakov) Kramer, Lenore Heilbrun, Sara Schlisselfeld, Alice Sprung, Rita Title, Rochel (Kalmanson) Heber.

Middle row L-R: Millie Angerman, Arlene Ginsberg, Tziporah Lisz, Pearl Shapiro, Phyllis Sternfeld, Yocheved (Gordon) Baitelman, Brina (Branda Grinberg) Berkowitz.

Bottom row students L-R: Reva Weingot, Miriam (Loksen) Cunin

Bottom row staff L-R: Rebbetzin Bracha (Sudak) Bogomilsky, Rebetzen Matlin, L. Simakow, Sharon Bishop



Bais Rivkah Paris, 1951



Top row L-R: Breindy (Zakon) Naparstek, Rivky Yunger, Freida (Jacobson) Hecht, Gutel (Raskin) Edelman, Esti (Parnes) Montal, Sheine (Krinsky) Friedman, Esti (Katzman) Gourevitch, Sara (Groner) Tennenbaum, Feigie (Birenbaum) Siegfried.

Bottom row L-R: Yettie Orzel, Hindy (Shanowitz) Scheiman a"h, Leah (Goldstein) Perl, Chaya (Munitz) Zalmanov, Tila (Alperowitz) Dubrawsky, Feige (Shemtov) Duchman, Feige (Mochkin) Fellig, Mushka (Raskin) Pearson a"h.

Teacher on left: Mrs. Feldman

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