

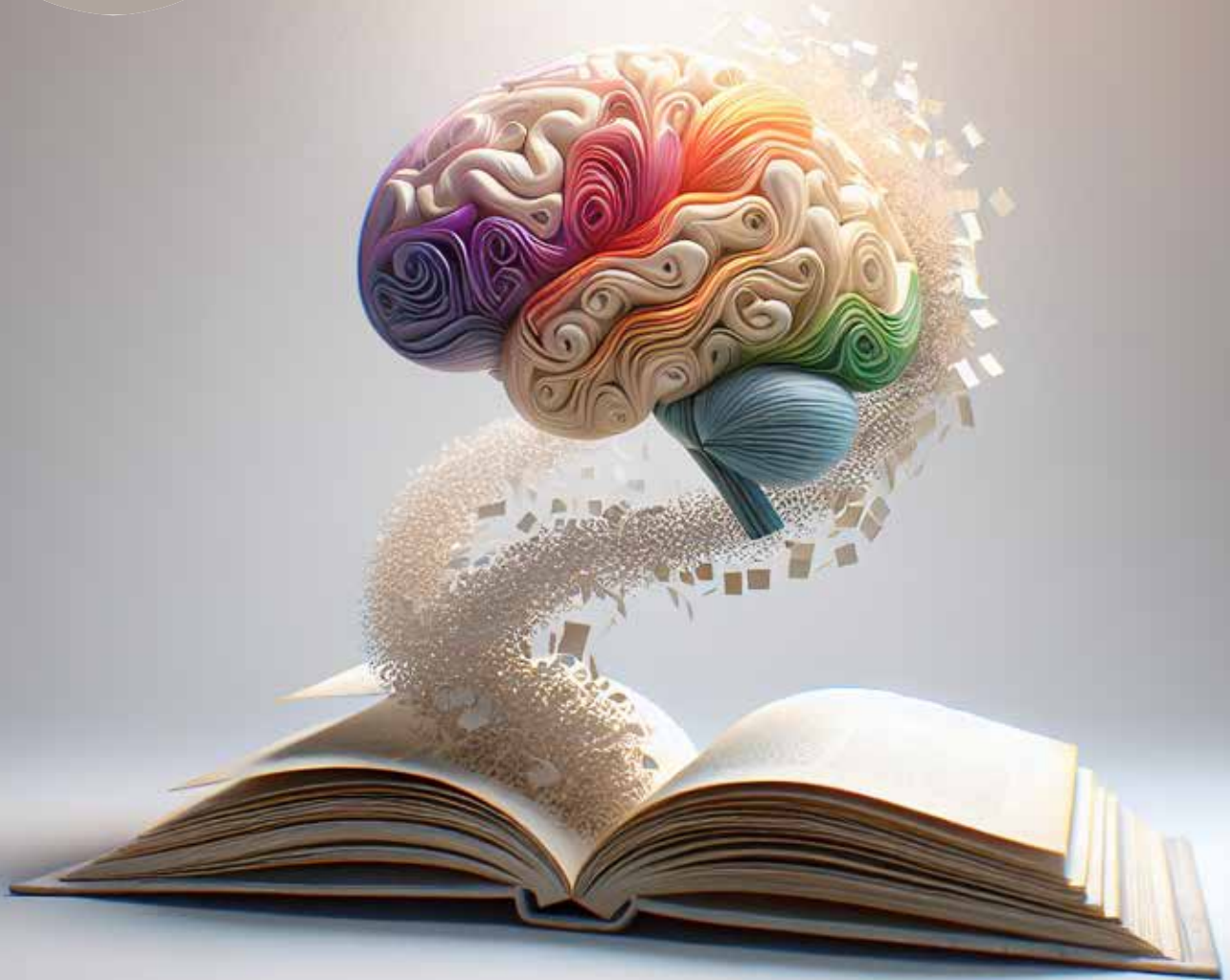


AUTUMN 5785

ב"ה 1, Issue 6, Volume

# EMBRACE

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



## THE LEARNING CURVE

THE PASSION AND MISSION TO  
SPREAD THE MESSAGE OF "CHANA"  
TO EVERY JEWISH WOMAN

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ב"ה



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*Alumnae reflect on the illustrious and diverse characters in Tanach.*

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## FROM HIGH HORSE to HUMBLE PIE

*In the past, I harbored a subconscious judgment that mental illness was synonymous with dysfunction or a personality defect. That is, until my own son landed in the psych ward.*



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*Is it my ego that is making me feel hurt so often? Am I too sensitive? How do I know if it is a “me-problem” or a “her-problem”?*

# *From the* REBBE

נְשִׂיא דוֹרָנוּ

## The Annual “Balance Sheet”

*The Rebbe’s Rosh Hashanah  
Message for 5716*

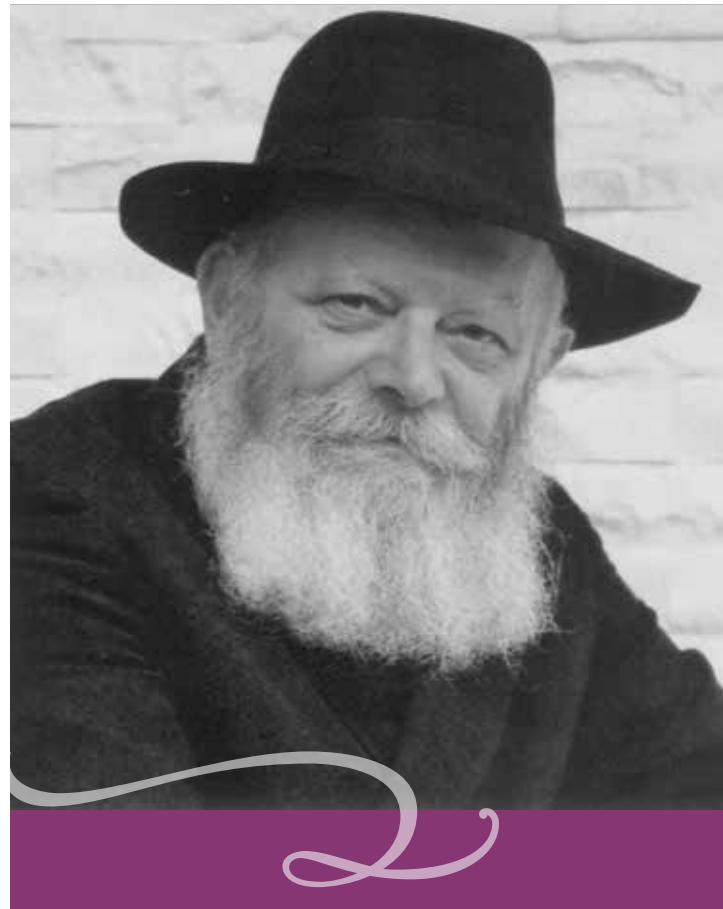
By the Grace of G-d  
In the Days of Selichos 5716  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

To my brethren, everywhere  
G-d bless you

### *Greeting and Blessing:*

**A**s the old year draws to a close and the new year draws near, every person draws up a “balance-sheet” for the year gone by, which guides him in his resolutions for the forthcoming year.

In order that such a “balance-sheet,” and the resolutions based on it, be as close to the truth as possible, one must be wary of overestimating one’s virtues and accomplishments. But neither should one exaggerate one’s deficiencies and failings. For a depressing mood, not to say despondency, G-d forbid, is one of the serious obstacles on the road to self-improvement.



It is possible, however, that even without exaggeration, the “balance-sheet” may reveal that the liabilities’ side is quite substantial, perhaps even outweighing the assets’ side. But even in such a case there should be no room for despondency. For together with the feeling of sincere repentance and a firm resolution to change for the better—which must be the necessary outcome of such self-searching—there is an encouraging feature in the general conduct of man, which should be borne in mind at this time. It is, that every positive and good action—positive and good in accordance with the definitions of our Torah, the Law of Life—is indestructible and eternal, being connected with, and stemming from, the Divine “spark” that is in man, the neshama, which is eternal; while any negative and destructive action, being connected with, and stemming from, the *Nefesh Habemis* and evil inclination in man, which are essentially limited and transient, is likewise of a temporary and transient nature, and can and must be corrected and completely wiped out through sincere and ade-



quate repentance.

Bearing this in mind, everyone, regardless what his personal “balance sheet” reveals, will find encouragement and renewed hope in the future, knowing that his good deeds in the past year are eternal, as is the light and benefit which they have brought into his own life, into his family and all our people, since all Jews are closely related and form one whole.

In light of the above, moreover, this helpful feeling is further enhanced in that it is of a universal nature. All good actions unite to make the world as a whole progressively better. Even when a religious and moral relapse seems very much in evidence, with many yet to become wiser and more religious, the world as a whole is essentially becoming more purified with every passing year, every day and every minute, for no instant passes without many good deeds.

No matter what the state of affairs seems to be at any given moment, eventually the good must triumph and the evil be eradicated, as this is the avowed will of the Creator and Master of the Universe. Eventually everyone must repent, and G-d, “Who forgives abundantly,” will accept repentance, “for none shall be rejected by Him.”

Through sincere repentance for the past and good

*Every positive and good action—positive and good in accordance with the definitions of our Torah, the Law of Life—is indestructible and eternal, being connected with, and stemming from, the Divine “spark” that is in man, the neshama, which is eternal.*

deeds in the present and future, every one has the ability to make the coming year, a year of very great accomplishments indeed, and G-d, “Who desires repentance,” helps to carry out such determined resolutions.

And on the scale of Divine justice on the forthcoming Rosh Hashanah, such determination will ensure still further the repenter’s acquittal and his being inscribed for a happy and pleasant new year.

With the blessing of *כתובה וחתימה טובה*,

Menachem Schneerson ■

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from you!*

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# WHO DOESN'T HAVE A LEARNING CURVE?

---

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



When I issued a call for submissions on the topic of learning curves, I was met with a wealth of thoughtful responses, many of which you'll find featured in this magazine. However, when I specifically asked for submissions about learning curves from the perspective of motherhood, one reply struck me profoundly:

“Find me someone who *didn't* have a learning curve as a mother.”

It's a powerful observation. Every transition in life involves a learning curve, but taking on the responsibility of caring for a tiny, wholly dependent being is an entirely different experience. Show me a mother who didn't face a steep learning curve when she entered this stage.

I remember my own transition vividly. My son was born on Chof Ches Elul, and I came home from the hospital just hours before Rosh Hashana. The contrast between the Rosh Hashana of my single days and that of my moments as a new mother struggling to feed a newborn was stark and jarring.

Rosh Hashana is a day for accepting Hashem as our King—but for me, this acceptance came in an unexpected form. It wasn't about spending hours in shul or poring over a machzor, but about



fully embracing the new mission Hashem had given me. On a day that marks “*Zeh hayom techilas ma’asecha*” - “This day is the beginning of Your works,” I experienced a profound new beginning. It was not just a physical learning curve but a spiritual one as well. What did Hashem require of me now? It seemed it would be vastly different from anything I had done before, and I had to learn to accept it.

Through this new beginning, I came to understand that sometimes, even when we feel as though we’re not accomplishing anything — like when we’re at home with a newborn instead of soaking in the holiness of the Rosh Hashana davening at shul — the avodah is holy if it aligns with what Hashem wants from us in the moment. And I knew that what I was doing certainly did.

Some learning curves are enjoyable—like mastering the art of sourdough bread. Others are more challenging, such as navigating the complexities of life

*It seemed it would be vastly different from anything I had done before, and I had to learn to accept it.*

postpartum. But in each variety that you read, you’ll notice one thing that’s the same: Working through *any* learning curve takes exactly that — lots of hard work.

As we step into the new year, may we find success in navigating our personal learning curves and may we be blessed with the insight to tune into what Hashem desires from us at each moment.

*Sara Blau*

Sara Blau

Wishing the community  
a happy, healthy, &  
sweet New Year!

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# Message *from* *the* Chairman

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov<sup>שיחי</sup>



**E**steemed Alumnae,<sup>תחיינה</sup>

Rosh Hashanah does not merely mark “another” year, but a **new** year<sup>1</sup>. As we approach the new year, it is an opportune time to share some of the Rebbe’s ע”ת teachings regarding new beginnings.



Our *chachamim* have taught us that כל התחלות קשות? — all beginnings are difficult.

Why do our *chachomim* tell us this?

At first glance, it serves to help us not get discouraged by the difficulties experienced when beginning a new project or entering a new stage in our lives. Knowing that things tend to get easier can help us overcome the initial hardships and setbacks, and move forward<sup>3</sup>.

But perhaps there is another lesson here.

One of the ideas that the Rebbe זי"ע asked that each child have embedded in his or her consciousness is the maamar chazal, "יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן" — "[If someone says] 'I have worked hard [in Torah-related matters<sup>5</sup>] and I have found,' believe him." This maamar chazal needs some clarification. When someone works hard at something, they do so in order to achieve their goal. Why then, do our *chachomim* express the result of working hard, as "finding?" Doesn't finding something come about through היסח הדעת<sup>6</sup>, without any premeditation or conscious effort?

The Rebbe provides us with a wonderful and empowering insight into this: When one really exerts him or herself, the outcome is far greater than that which was imagined at the outset<sup>7</sup>. The result is much more comparable to "finding a metziah" than to "reaching a preplanned goal."

This is especially relevant to alumnae in general and to alumnae of Bais Rivkah in particular.

Once you've graduated from the formal education that you received in Bais Rivkah, each of you is empowered and expected to not only begin "another" stage in your life but a **new** stage. Each of us came down into this world with the purpose of initiating something totally new. Whilst all of our missions are based on the same, unchanging Torah, we each have a unique contribution to make in terms of understanding, transmission, and impact. We can therefore expect to have unprecedented challenges. And if it's not difficult, then you can be sure that you are not really at the beginning of something unique and new.

The teaching of "all beginnings are difficult" is not just meant to help make life easier; it is an adage that helps us to determine whether we are doing what we are meant to be doing, and to then empower us to make it happen.

The idea of using our unique talents in order to introduce novelty into our avodah ties into a lesson that the Rebbe זי"ע teaches us about a special characteristic of the outgoing year — being a שנה מעוברת, a leap year<sup>8</sup>.

The leap year in our calendar synchronizes the solar cycle, which determines the seasons, with the lunar cycle, which determines the dates.

The characteristics of both are constantly present in our Avodas Hashem. The sun, whose light is constant and unchanging, represents those aspects in Yiddishkeit that are constant, whereas the moon, whose light waxes and wanes, represents those aspects that are unique and novel.

The leap year teaches us that it is not enough to have both aspects independently; we need to fuse them together. We need to introduce novelty into those aspects that are constants, and we need to be "constantly novel."

Just as the moon illuminates the earth by reflecting

*Whilst all of our missions are based on the same, unchanging Torah, we each have a unique contribution to make in terms of understanding, transmission, and impact.*

the sun's light, so too, the novelties in Yiddishkeit must be based on — and enhance — that which is constant and not subject to change — namely, *halacha*.

The institution in which you were privileged to receive your education — Bais Rivkah — is a shining example of this type of holy "lunisolar" fusion. This privilege can now serve as a source of inspiration and empowerment in your new personal challenges.

In conclusion:

All beginnings are difficult. Knowing this helps us determine what is really needed of us. Knowing this also helps us overcome the difficulties that may come at the outset of each unique personal mission.

With best wishes for each of you for a כתיבה וחתימה

*The idea of using our unique talents in order to introduce novelty into our avodah ties into a lesson that the Rebbe זי"ע teaches us about a special characteristic of the outgoing year — being a **שנה מעוברת**, a leap year .*

2. מכילתא שבת פז

3. שמות יש, ה

4. מגילה ו, ב

5. ראה רש"י שם

6. סנהדרין צו, א

7. ראה מאמר ד"ה עשרה שיושבין, ה'תשמ"ב. יצא לאור בקונטרס חג הגאולה י"ב-י"ג תמוז, ה'תש"נ. וראה גם ד"ה כנשר יעיר קנו, ה'תשמ"ב.

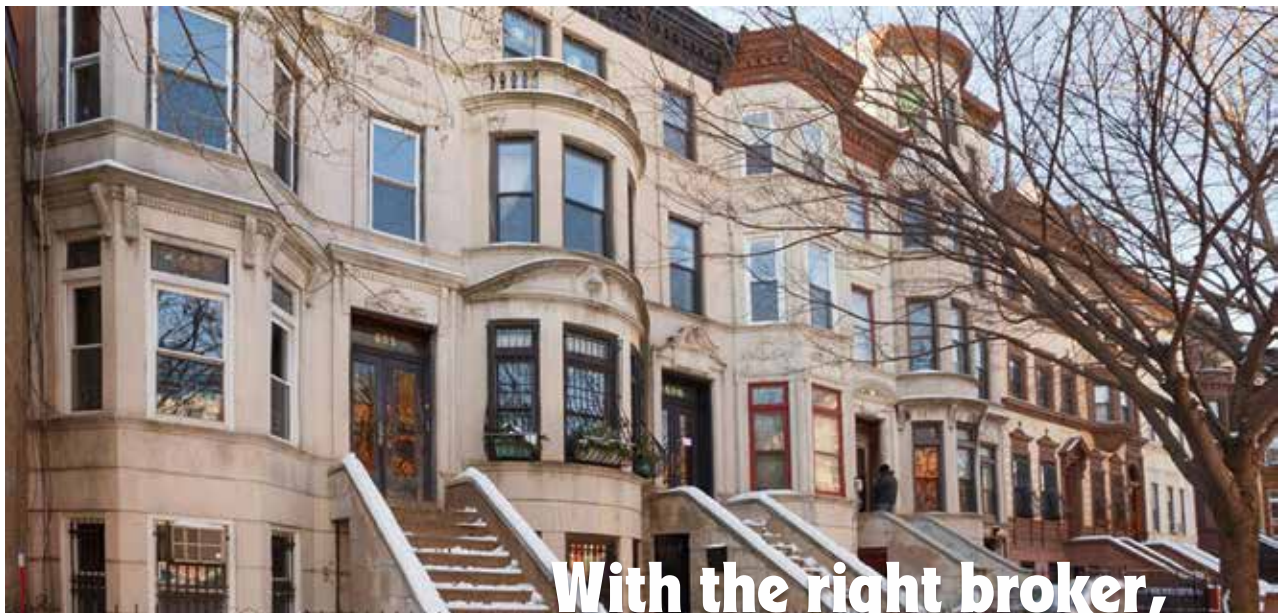
8. ראה מכתבים כלליים ל' תשרי ור"ח ניסן ה'תשד"מ ובארוכה בתורת מנחם (התועדויות) ו' תשרי ה'תשד"מ, אותיות יג-ל.

טובה. May we merit to see the realization of the historic mission initiated and sustained with great effort by the Rebbe, נשיא דורנו — namely, the Geula Ha'amitis Ve'hashleimah, **בקרוב ממש**!

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

*That is why it is referred to as **Rosh** Hashanah (head of the .1 year) rather than **Techilas** Hashanah (beginning of the year).*

*No two bodies are alike and it's the head that vitalizes and controls all its organs and functions. That is why our behavior on Rosh Hashanah determines the course of the new year. By contrast, the beginning point of any line is identical to the beginning of any other line; it does not contain the line that flows from it.*



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**T**hank you so much for a wonderful publication. I enjoy every issue of the Embrace. I wanted to share that I adopted Chava (Sneiderman) Witkis's idea for making Shabbos parties exciting by giving a treat for every one of the 12 Pesukim. I especially liked her creative idea to use a muffin tin and magna-tiles to keep the treats a surprise! We tried this the first Shabbos after I read about it, and we haven't missed a week since. It brought something so special to my family. Thank you for printing such practical and exciting ideas related to chinuch.

-- *Esti (Lustig) Paltiel*

**I** was reading the Embrace magazine and I loved Chava Witkis's articles about motherhood. I especially loved the one about Shabbos parties. We implemented the magna tiles on a muffin pan right away and it was awesome!

-- *Chana Mushka (Alevsky) Mishulovin*

**T**hank you so much for a publication so rich with stories, discussions and insight. I especially appreciate reading about people's personal experiences, like in the article titled "Five Things Anxiety Has Taught Me." I was deeply moved by the author's ability to anchor herself in Chassidus and *bitachon* through the challenges of her daughter struggling with intense, debilitating fears and anxiety. It was an excellent reminder for all of us of how to apply the Rebbe's teachings during real life difficulties.

When I reached the end of the article, as uplifted as I was, I was also deeply pained that her daughter, and entire family, suffered for such a long time. I had experienced a very similar situation with my child and I was truly grateful for the article you had published last year on homeopathy and how effective it is in helping with various mental and emotional challenges. This information really helped me find a way to minimize the pain of my personal situation. When my soft, gentle child was suddenly super anxious (sometimes even violent), afraid of narrow spaces, and absolutely terrified of ever being alone, especially at night, I reached out to the author of your homeopathy article, Shainy Edelman. I was and am so grateful for her recommendation of an affordable ho-



Letters 't', 'o', 'r', 's', 'i', 'd', 'r', 'a', 'e', 'D' are scattered around a stylized illustration of a hand holding a scroll. The scroll is partially unrolled, showing the letters 'E' and 'd'. The background is a soft, light blue and white gradient with a large, stylized leaf in the top right corner.



meopathic doctor who was able to help my child. It took just one appointment, one prescription of Stramonium 200c and boruch Hashem, within a month, my calm, happy daughter was back! It was unreal. The compassionate and knowledgeable homeopath explained to me that a child can go into this state after experiencing a fright, and homeopathy can peel back the emotional layers and provide healing so the child need not suffer helplessly. She mentioned that there are many possible remedies for children experiencing the anxiety we witnessed, but she asked tens of questions to determine the correct one suited to my daughter's situation. After receiving this treatment, our home was transformed! I can't imagine where we would be on this journey had I not read that article you published.

I want to share this for the benefit of any readers going through similar experiences and searching for healing and answers. I hope you'll print many more such articles or even series on homeopathy and alternative healing in line with your goal to support and empower mothers with practical tools and wisdom. Yasher koach for the tremendous impact you have on us and our children through this invaluable publication.

-- A Grateful Embrace Reader

### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

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

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

*A note from the Editors: We profusely apologize for an oversight in our summer issue. Chassidische Chinuch: The Feminine Way, interviewing three esteemed educators, was written by a seasoned Embrace author, Libby (Zuntz) Herz, Crown Heights, Graduating class of 5759 (1999).*

# Learning That Sticks

Sarah (Osdoba) Herson, Rockaway, New Jersey  
*Graduating Class of 5743 (1983)*

As told to Chaya Mushka Spiero



I remember hearing the story of the misnagid who felt that he had reached the pinnacle of spiritual heights. He would often wonder: “Which place in Gan Eden could possibly be great enough for me? Maybe they’ll have to build a new station up there, just for my level of holiness!”

At some point, this misnagid became a chossid, and as he learned more and more Chassidus, his thoughts began to take on a very different tone: “There’s so much more I need to work on! Now I’m not even so confident I’ll be *let* into Gan Eden...”

That’s how I felt sitting in those extra classes – those classes that I didn’t even have to take.

Let me start from the beginning.

I was a regular girl from a very frum Lubavitcher home. I attended Bais Rivkah elementary school where I received a wonderful Bais Rivkah chinuch from great teachers. I felt content about where I was holding, thinking I was doing all the right things. I was learning, I was davening, I was behaving, I was working on my middos. And then came high school. Before I knew it, a whole new world had



opened up before me...

A new program, spearheaded by Mrs. Korf, was rolled out that year. Ninth graders were offered the chance to sign up for the special *Limudei Kodesh* classes that would be replacing two out of the four *Limudei Chol* subjects.

I don't know how she made it happen – I can only imagine the effort it took – but Mrs. Korf's goal was very clear: We should be learning more *Limudei Kodesh* subjects than we were *Limudei Chol* subjects!

It was a new idea – and to me, an exciting one. Iyun b'Chumash, Sichos – the classes sounded interesting. Why not sign up?

So I did. All in all, from the around forty girls in our grade, about thirteen girls joined the “special class.” And with the high quality lineup of teachers, including Morah Devorah Azimov, Morah Sorah Klyne, Morah Sima Bastomski, Rabbi Levi Goldstein and some others, special they definitely were!

I can still remember the pulsing excitement of those classes. We were doing something *new*, something *different*, something good – this was a pivotal moment in Bais Rivkah's history. And as it turns out, it was a pivotal moment in my life too.

Yes, a whole new world had opened up before me. A world of depth, a world of growth – and a world of passion. As I sat through those special *Limudei Kodesh* classes, being taught by exceptional teachers, and being surrounded by classmates who also wanted to be there, who were *interested*, something began to shift inside of me. With the sudden exposure to a deeper, richer Chassidus than I had ever known, I began to realize: “Sarah, you have a long way to go!”

True, I was coming from a Lubavitcher home and a Lubavitcher school – but these classes were making me feel more like a Chossid than I had ever felt before. In those classes – those classes that I chose – I began to feel the thrill of owning my Yiddishkeit, of delving beneath the surface of regular learning. That's where I developed a passion and love for Chassidus, a fire that's still burning in me today.

One day, I was walking home with a friend who wasn't taking the special *Limudei Kodesh* classes. Before we knew it, we were hotly debating. She announced: “I think that someone who wants to go on shlichus needs to learn more *Limudei Chol* subjects. They need to be well-educated in secular studies!”

*This was a pivotal moment in Bais Rivkah's history. And as it turns out, it was a pivotal moment in my life too.*

I disagreed. “Exactly the opposite!” I maintained. “For someone who wants to be a Shlucha of the Rebbe, *Limudei Kodesh* subjects are way more important!”

It's been decades since that innocent conversation. But now, living on shlichus in Rockaway, NJ, I really feel the huge impact that those extra *Limudei Kodesh* classes had on me. And I think of today's students.

In a world bursting with information – knowledge that's accessible at our very  *fingertips* – it's so easy for girls to engage with all kinds of ideas. This is especially relevant to students who value and appreciate learning. The antidote to this is clear: Providing our students with deep, quality *Limudei Kodesh* classes, like the ones I was fortunate to partake in.

There's no doubt in my mind that by introducing more *Limudei Kodesh* subjects to our students – deep, quality classes that challenge the minds of girls who appreciate learning – we can change lives. I know this, because this very experience changed mine.

Thank you, Mrs. Korf, and all of the wonderful, devoted teachers and principals involved in my education, for helping me become a Chossid! ■

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# EMBODYING OUR BELIEFS

Living our Lives with a  
Felt Sense of our Truest Reality

---

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



## Chassidus + Wellness

You know that feeling when your mind believes something but your body is just not on board? When your mind and mouth keep repeating things like, “*Tracht gut, vet zein gut...*” “I have full bitachon in Hashem...” “Hashem loves me like a father loves his child...” “Hashem is taking care of me...” “There is no need for worry or fear...” yet your body doesn’t quite feel calm and trusting? Maybe you feel jittery, nauseous, a tightness in your chest or a pain in your stomach. So while

your mind is trying to communicate healthy messages to your heart and body, your nervous system still feels overwhelmed, stuck, unsafe, full of anxiety and fear.

Why is there this disconnect between what we *believe* in our minds and what our bodies actually *feel* and experience? Shouldn't our minds be able to control our hearts, if we will them to? Is it possible that the 'knowing' of our mind is different than the 'knowing' of our bodies?

Our goal is not just to believe things in our minds, but to *embody* our beliefs so that our bodies get on board and internalize these foundational messages. This harmony is what leads to a more regulated nervous system and a calmer state of being. When we internalize the messages deep inside of us, our bodies *feel* the effects and operate from a healthier place.

So how can we accomplish this? Let's first understand what's going on inside our bodies by discussing the nervous system. Many people these days are operating from a place of overwhelm, also known as nervous system dysregulation. When our nervous system is dysregulated, we have faulty patterns which cause us to overreact, or underreact, due to cues from our internal physiology which are mismatched with external circumstances. We can get stuck in a stress response even when a threat has passed, and we can feel as if we are in danger even when we are safe. There is then a discrepancy between our physiological perception of threat and our actual reality. We feel a sense of complete overwhelm, or a "fight, flight or freeze" response is activated, even when we are, say, sitting on the couch or cooking dinner in the comfort of our own homes.

(When in its healthiest state, the nervous system can experience the normal ups and downs of life and still maintain the ability to keep us in a state of balance. But when the nervous system is dysregulated, feelings of being triggered, overwhelmed, or worried, don't seem to ever quite go away.)

We can try to find logical explanations for these tendencies. Maybe it's because we are the post-holocaust generation. Maybe it's because we are living with so much antisemitism. Maybe it's the post-COVID reality and this is the general state of the world we live in. Maybe it's our phones which overwhelm us with a constant barrage of news and information, making us so distractible, and taking away our rest and relaxation. There are many possible causes for this common phenomena, but ultimately, one thing is for certain: We all crave *menuchas hanefesh u'me-*

*In this way, the body and mind work together in a state of alignment and integration, resulting in a calm state of mind and body.*

*nuchas haguf!*

But when we are in a state of overwhelm, it's extra hard to take the ideas of Chassidus and apply them to our lives. We *know* intellectually what can help us, but the ideas often aren't being embodied in a way that affects how we feel and function. We might repeat the ideas and mantras again and again, but find that the inspiration doesn't hold.

We *know*, "tracht gut vet zein gut." We *know* that the more trust we place in Hashem the more He will show up for us. We know that Hashem is good and He is orchestrating good in our lives. But how can we get ourselves to truly *feel* these things? How can we achieve that deep *knowing* in our gut, that allows us to actually breathe more easily?

There is a difference between knowing a concept, and *internalizing* a message. In Chassidus, this step of internalizing an idea is known as *da'as*. *Da'as* is one of the three intellectual *kochos hanefesh*, and it is the link that connects *sechel* (intellect) and *middos* (emotion).





Our *sechel* and *middos* are essentially independent domains, yet they affect each other. *Da'as* is referred to as the soul of the emotions, and acts as the channel of communication between the two domains. It is the key to opening up our emotions to the power of our *sechel*. In other words, *da'as* is the step in which we take the theoretical- what we know intellectually- and bring it down into a feeling within our bodies, so that the idea is no longer just a thought but a felt sense within us. It's when we connect so intimately with an idea that the idea becomes internalized to the point of embodiment within us. When you achieve this step, your nervous system is able to regulate itself because of the integrated state of your mind and body. That is the power of *da'as*: It brings the body on board with the mind. In this way, the body and mind work together in a state of alignment and integration, resulting in a calm state of mind *and* body.

(Editor's note: A few weeks after sending in this article, the author came across the following, written by Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsburg: "The faculty of *da'as* in the soul corresponds to the nervous system in the body. *Da'as* is understood in Kabbalah to be the seat of all of the soul's sensitivity and feeling. The body's sensors are its nerves." How amazing is this?!)

If *da'as* is what is desperately needed for the ideas of the mind to be internalized within the body, to bring us to a place of integration and harmony between

mind and body, then we need to ensure that our *da'as* is highly developed. The question is: How do we go about developing it?

The Friediker Rebbe said<sup>1</sup>: "Through visualizing, a person can reach lofty levels and feelings, which he could never reach with intellect. While deep thought often causes a disconnect from reality, visualizing brings a person closer to reality, and the matter becomes engraved, not only in his spiritual faculties but also in his physical ones."

You might be wondering what it would feel like if you truly internalized a certain idea and actually lived it as a felt reality. Here is a visualization exercise that I find helps with the process of internalizing and embodying the truths that we know in our minds, that you can try for yourself.

Sit down in a quiet room. Make sure your feet are folded under you or firmly planted on the ground. You can place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Take a few deep breaths, in through your nose and slowly out from the mouth.

As you do this, ask yourself the following:

1. Think of a time in your life where you felt exhausted, overwhelmed or down, and someone stepped in to support you. What did you feel before they stepped in? And then, what did it feel like once they stepped in? Did you feel held, hugged, loved, supported, worthy, relieved, seen? Try to visualize what it felt like in your body to have that relief and support. For example: The ability to relax your muscles, lean into the support, a warm tingling feeling in your body, etc.
2. What are current worries/fears or pain points of yours?
3. Where do you feel them in your body? For example: Is there a lump in your throat, tightness in your chest, discomfort in your stomach, tightness or pain in your neck, back, shoulders, etc.?
4. What beliefs do you know can help you get through this?  
Some examples:

- "Tracht gut, vet zein gut." "I place my full trust in Hashem." "Hashem is taking care of me; there is no need to worry or fear."
- "Hashem is my Father; He loves me fully and accepts me unconditionally. Hashem



created me in His image, exactly as He intended for me to be.”

5. What would it feel like in my body if I truly saw myself as Hashem’s child? Some examples:

- I am loved... I am held... I am worthy! I am worthy of being loved, I am worthy of being seen. Hashem believes in me! Hashem’s light shines within me and warms me. Hashem wants to see me shine my light confidently.
- Hashem is taking care of me! I can feel His warm hug enveloping me and holding me tightly. I can relax all my tense muscles and lean on Him fully, feeling the love and support that He provides. I can breathe slow, easy, relaxed breaths. He is here for me, taking care of me. He has my back.

The goal of this exercise is to give you a felt sense of the warmth and support, the safety and security,

the handholding and hug that we crave from Hashem and that Hashem provides us with. Doing this exercise multiple times a day when we are in a calm state can help to regulate the nervous system, by integrating our beliefs so that we experience our reality differently. Then, in moments of stress, we can have an easier time accessing this healthier and calmer state of mind and body.

The disconnect between our minds and our feelings is natural; it’s our default setting. But we do have the ability to bridge that gap, using the gift of *da’as* to get our bodies on board. The more we develop our *da’as*, the less we are plagued with internal conflict. The integration of our minds and hearts is the pathway to the inner peace that we crave. Let’s embody the beliefs of our minds so that they are no longer a mere intellectual experience, but a *felt* sense of our truest reality! ■

1. *Tanya in a Nutshell*, Chapter 44. (BSD Publishers)

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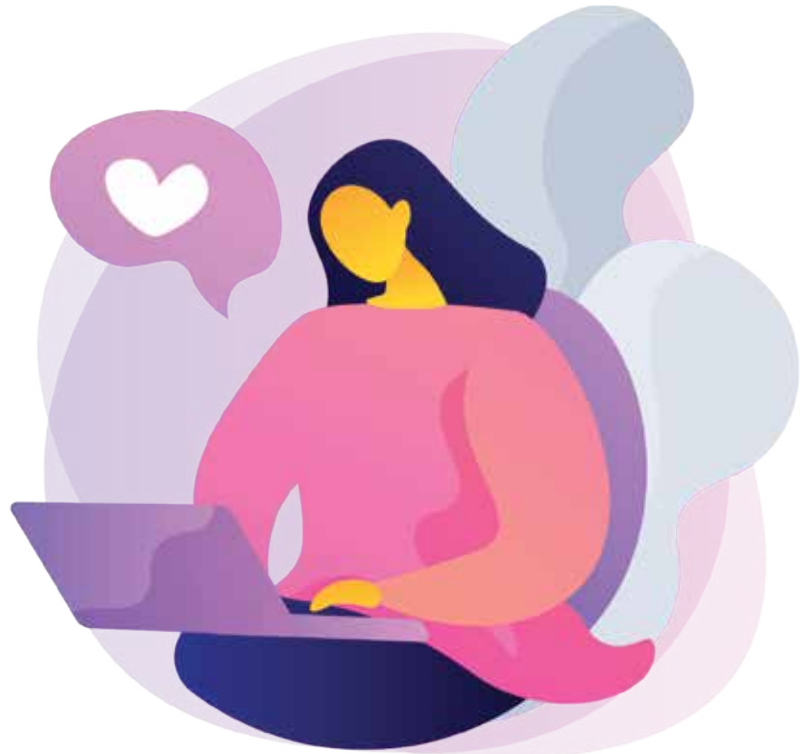
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# ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

## FINDING THE BALANCE



### DEAR CHAYA,

I'm wondering if you can help me out. I work with a talented and wonderful co-teacher who excels in her role. She is fantastic with the children and very successful in her teaching. However, I find it challenging that while she is warm and caring towards the children, she seems critical and possibly even cold towards me.

Is it my ego that is making me feel hurt so often? Am I too sensitive? Should I be openly communicating about every situation, or letting things slide since in the bigger picture we work well together and she means well? How do I know if it is a “me-problem” or a “her-problem”?

Signed,

*Feeling Offended So Often*



## DEAR FEELING OFFENDED.

Personality clashes between coworkers can be a real challenge. I commend you for your honesty in looking to get to the bottom of the issue and to find a way it can be resolved. Even as you feel that it is your co-teacher's negativity causing the issue, you are open to the idea that there may also be something in the way you are taking it.

### *The Root of the Issue*

While your question addresses a specific issue, namely unwarranted criticism, I would like to suggest that perhaps there is something bigger at play for which a shift in perspective can do wonders.

As you described in the scenario, your co-teacher sounds like an ambitious, high performing, type-A style person. (“She is a fantastic teacher and is very successful at what she does.”) You, on the other hand, seem to be more of a peace-loving, sensitive, gentle, type-B personality, who values relationships and experiences more than measurable goals and results. (“Am I too sensitive?”)

Hashem created us with different traits because all of them are needed to create a perfect world. He wanted ambitious perfectionists because they will put in the work to create things in a complete and beautiful way, paying attention to every last detail until they get it just right.

Hashem also created more gentle, relationship-focused people who live more in the present, value the experiences and processes within life and aren't always hyper-focused on the next goal.

A world filled with either of the two types would be majorly problematic. And so, different types were created, each to help the world in the way they know best.

Conveniently, sometimes these traits will naturally divide people into occupations that suit their style better. But life is not always black and white like that, and often you will find both type-A and type-B people working in the same field together - and sometimes even in the same

*Until now, you were okay doing whatever you were told or otherwise expected to do, so there wasn't any conflict.*

classroom. Naturally, this will often lead to conflict as the two types who operate and view the world so differently need to work towards a common goal.

### *Two Sides to the Coin*

There is an important principle explored in Chassidus that can help us to navigate this struggle (which is actually something we all deal with in one way or another): Every trait has a positive and negative side to it. The tricky part is that naturally, due to our inherent self-love, it is easier to see more of the positive side in ourselves and the negative side in others.

For instance, a type-A person will naturally see themselves as someone who takes things seriously and knows how to do things right. They may be so focused on the project they are completing that they don't seem to notice if they come across as harsh or critical of others in their pursuit of doing things properly. Others, however, may only see their critical eye and feel that they are cold and uncaring.

A type-B, on the other hand, may see themselves as a kind, caring, maybe outgoing, warm, or fun person who loves connecting with and caring for others. They are likely to be focused on enjoying and enhancing the present moment for everyone, disregarding details that don't seem important to them at that time. Others may see them as negligent in completing their tasks, perhaps sometimes ‘floating through life’ without caring about the mess they may leave behind.

Both the good side and the bad are necessary parts of these personalities. Getting a lot done requires a strong focus and attention to detail which makes it challenging to have a strong awareness of others' emotions and the complete experience of the present. And focusing



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

*You can remind yourself that your strengths lie elsewhere, and it doesn't make you less worthy if you aren't good at everything.*

on the present experience and noticing others' emotions and nurturing them may make it hard to focus on other details in a precise and careful way.

### *The Relevance*

Understanding this reality can help in a few ways:

1. The Rambam teaches us to always strive for the middle path. Recognizing what your personal style is will also show you where your faults lie and how you can improve.
2. It can also help you see how even a trait that seems negative is also inherently positive, both in yourself and in others. This can help you to forgive your friend for the drawbacks of her personality when they are weighed against the bigger picture of who she is as a whole. And when she criticizes something you did, you can remind yourself that your strengths lie elsewhere, and it doesn't make you less worthy if you aren't good at everything.
3. Finally, it can help you judge her more favorably, and as a result feel less offended by the comments she makes. It's very possible that, to your type-A co-worker, commenting on things that need to be corrected comes as naturally to her as straightening a crooked frame on the wall: She hardly even notices that she's doing it and it's certainly not personal.

In a more extreme case, if it clearly *is* more personal, she may be seeing your faults in isolation, without connecting the dots and realizing that they are part

and parcel of who you are, and that while you will never be a perfectionist, your other virtues more than make up for it.

### *Practical Takeaway*

There is a strategy you can try out to help alleviate the situation.

The next time your co-teacher criticizes you, don't bite your lip and apologize, saving your hurt for when you go home. Tell her this instead: "You know, I appreciate your feedback, because I know you're really good at these things. I'm more of a people person; you know how much I love just chatting with my students." Replace the specifics to be true to your situation, but be sure you acknowledge her strengths while also emphasizing that you have *your* area of specialty too. This will subtly shift both of your perspectives, enabling you both to recognize that everyone is different, and each person brings something else to the table. Chances are she isn't as successful in that area in which you specialize, and she can learn a thing or two from you too. Responding in a friendly manner will also help reduce the tension between the two of you and she may even begin to criticize less.

It is very possible for a type-A and type-B to get along fabulously, if they recognize, respect, and value what they and the other brings to the table. Because ultimately, both types are needed in many situations, and we would all stand to gain from them learning from each other, rather than criticizing and fighting.

### *Final Thoughts*

This mini character analysis is actually extremely relevant for someone who works in chinuch. In *Klalei Ha'Chinuch Ve'Hadracha* by the Frierdiker Rebbe, we are taught that this is the foundation of the work of an educator: A teacher must know herself - what she is and what she isn't, and consciously work on improving herself. Only with this preparation can she begin to educate her students.

In other words, by taking the time and energy to learn to get along better with a co-teacher who is genuinely so different from you, you will be forming yourself into a better educator for your students.

Wishing you much hatzlacha in successfully navigating this challenge, and I hope you'll find the reward well worth the effort.

All the best,

<3 Chaya ■







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# Spreading Chana



## Chana.

A name that couldn't be more fitting for our dear Rebbetzin Chana—mother of royalty; mother of our Rebbe. It's a name packed with meaning—packed with the essence of a Jewish woman. After all, the three Hebrew letters that spell out “Chana” stand for the three special mitzvos of a Jewish woman: Challah, niddah, and hadlokas neiros.

In honor of Rebbetzin Chana's yahrzeit on Vov Tishrei, *EmBRace* sat down with three incredible women: **Ahuva Fogelman**, who is passionate about the meaning of challah; **Rivky Wilanksy**, shlucha in Moscow, Russia, who has inspired many women to keep the mitzvah of Taharas Hamishpacha; and **Morah Esther Sternberg**, the force behind Mivtzah Neshek.

Read on to hear it in their own words – their passion, their stories, and their mission to spread the message of “Chana” to every Jewish woman.

# Challah

Ahuva (Goldstein) Fogelman,  
Crown Heights

*Graduating class of 5751 (1991)*

*Ahuva Fogelman is a proud mother of seven, long-time challah aficionado and lover of all things dough. She has a special place in her heart for the three mitzvos of a woman – after all, she gives classes on the meaning of challah and is a certified kallah teacher.*

*How did her passion for challah start? What is behind all that kneading and flour? Ahuva, please tell us all about it!*

## Learning on the Job

My challah journey began when I was fifteen years old. I was a waitress in Camp Emunah, and aside from, well, waitressing, we all had to run different camp activities. I chose to direct the bake shop. Why? I have no idea. I definitely had no experience with baking. On the first Thursday of camp, I found out an interesting piece of information: The bake shop was responsible for producing challah for the entire camp! *Sure - not a problem.*

Today's generation has no idea what it means to “feed quarters to the payphone,” but that was me, huddled on the phone with my aunt, getting a recipe and step-by-step guide on how to make challah! And it paid off. By the end of that summer, I was pounding out fifty pounds (five-pound batches at a time) of challah every week – *by hand!*

As time went on, I began to feel especially connected to this mitzvah, which is one of the three mitzvos specifically given to women. I was gifted a beautiful book called *The Secrets of Shabbos*, and that's where I read an incredible quote from a great rabbi: “If women would know the blessings that making challah brings to their homes, there would be no more challah in bakeries!” This quote set me off on my quest: To read and learn as much about challah as possible, to gather stories from people of all walks of life about their challah experiences, and most of all, to try and never miss a Shabbos of making challah myself.

The year I went off to seminary, I filled up my parents' freezer with as much challah as it could hold. The Shabbos after Pesach, I made challah in Israel! (Boy, was that an experience...)

*Our physical spaces and actions are the ultimate breeding grounds for deep spiritual and physical connections.*

## Handmade Blessings

When I got married, my aunt told me to choose the mixer I wanted: KitchenAid? Bosch? Magic Mill? Back then, those brands were something only “those” people had, not me, who grew up with a simple Sunbeam mixer. It was like she was asking a cyclist what kind of car they'd want!

She ended up buying me a Magic Mill, saying that her daughter-in-law makes challah, and she had just gotten one. The first week I had the machine, I made challah in it, and, well, let me tell you this – I love my Magic Mill, but for cakes and cookies only! There is *nothing* like handmade challah.

My husband told me the following story shortly after we got married. He was a bochur on shlichus in Florida, and he was invited with some friends to a Friday night meal. After kiddush, everyone washed their hands for *hamotzi* and sat back down at the table, as usual. The man of the house said the brocha, cut up the challah, and as soon as he was able to talk, he turned to his wife and said “I'm sorry!”

Turning to the confused boys watching, he declared: “Never argue with your wife on a Friday! When she's making challah, when she's punching that dough, all she'll be able to think about will be her argument with you...”

Hearing this story, I felt a bit more of the power we have in our minds and how it transfers to our hands. I share this whenever I give a class to women about the power of challah, emphasizing this point: If we have good thoughts while kneading, then our challoos will reflect that, turning out beautifully!

## Challah Secrets

Over the years, I've read and heard many talks about challah, all of which have only made my passion and love for the mitzvah grow stronger.

I once attended a N'shei convention in Morristown

where a shlucha, Mrs. Weinstein, shared fascinating information about the mystical reasons (taught in Kabbalah and Chassidus) behind the challah's seven ingredients, and the thoughts we should be thinking when making our challah. I was so inspired by this that I resolved to be more mindful and present during my challah baking. Now, before I start, I give tzedakah, and while I'm making the challah, I don't talk on the phone or to anyone else around. This has truly helped me tap in to the incredible experience!

I've also learned an unbelievable amount from Rochie Pinson's beautiful cookbook, *Rising*. Truth be told, I didn't really even buy the cookbook for the recipes – it was more for the inspirational part! I always love reading the background story as to why a person wrote her cookbook, and Rochie's story did not disappoint. She did so much research on the meaning and symbolism behind each ingredient, which I'd love to share on these pages.

This is just a snippet of what I speak about when giving a class on challah. And no matter what background or walk of life my audience comes from, this never fails to resonate!

## 1. WATER

**Water** signifies a few things: Its life-giving qualities are representative of Torah, our life force; its ability to flow in abundance represents chessed, the act of giving. Water is also a unifier, because it helps bind ingredients together. When pouring the water into the



*“Look! You really need a miracle now! The Rebbe taught us that the way to create a miracle is by doing something completely above your nature, something you thought you would never do. For you, going to mikvah will be a miracle, and it will cause G-d to also rise above nature and create a miracle for you!”*

bowl, think about any kindness or unification that you wish for in your life. Ask Hashem to shower it upon you like rain, and in abundance, like a waterfall.

## 2. YEAST

**Yeast's** purpose is growth and expansion. Have in mind that each member of your family should grow and expand their emotional and spiritual well-being. Also, the word for yeast in Hebrew is *shmarim*, which contains the word *shomer*, meaning to watch over. We ask Hashem to watch over our loved ones, especially our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel.

## 3. EGGS

**Eggs** symbolize the renewal of a lifecycle. This includes renewed friendships, renewed achievements – anything that brings one into the next cycle. You can daven for shidduchim, children, health – anything you are hoping will “hatch.”

## 4. OIL

**Oil** was used to anoint kohanim and kings in the times of the Bais Hamikdash. When pouring in the oil, ask Hashem to anoint each member of your family, in the way each person needs it!

## 5. SUGAR

**Sugar** symbolizes sweetness and goodness. I was once at a talk where a woman said, “Always put in a little extra sugar!” In other words, show Hashem that



it's okay to give us a little *more* brocha and goodness for our families. I have been doing that ever since! Sugar also represents emunah; with emunah, everything becomes sweeter, and life's challenges don't seem as hard.

## 6. SALT

**Salt** represents criticism or discipline – both salt and discipline are so important, but in small measures. The same woman who said to put in extra sweetness also said to take a pinch of salt *out* of your measuring spoon. Ask Hashem to judge us with rachmanus! Salt also has an interesting property to it – a purifying quality, which is demonstrated in its usage in kashering meat. As you add the salt, you can have in mind that all the negative toxins surrounding you should be released!

## 7. FLOUR

**Flour** represents sustenance. When pouring the flour, it's a good time to daven for things in abundance. Flour also represents the body. Although flour without water is just a bunch of particles, flour combined with water can create something. Both are needed: Body and soul!

Our homes are our personal Batei Mikdash. Our physical spaces and actions are the ultimate breeding grounds for deep spiritual and physical connections. As women, we have the special power to nurture and connect through our actions – one of them being challah-making! It is the gateway to awareness, and this is accomplished by connecting the physical act of feeding to our source, Hashem.

## The Gift of Challah

So there you have it – a glimpse of my challah journey, beginning when I was a waitress in Camp Emunah and energizing me to this very day. I have been privileged to share these challah gems with so many women, and I hope that as you read this you will be inspired to try, at least *once*, to make challah in this way.

It doesn't even have to be a long, drawn-out process. From pouring the first ingredient until the last knead, my challah takes me under fifteen minutes! And for all those who say it's such a mess, such a patchke – don't let those concerns stand in your way of the brochos that making challah will surely bring into your life. Give yourself and your home the gift of challah!



And put a clear tablecloth under your bowl for easy clean up. :)

*Niddah*

Rivky (Elishevitz) Wilansky,  
Moscow, Russia

*Graduating class of 2005*

*Rivky Wilansky is a Shlucha of the Rebbe in Moscow, Russia for the past twelve years. She and her husband, along with their six children boruch Hashem, have a warm, open home. The focus of their shlichus is young Jewish students. As a certified life coach and Mikvah.org kallah teacher, one of her greatest passions and hobbies is teaching Taharas Hamishpacha and bringing women to the mikvah.*

*Here are some of her stories!*

*\*All names have been changed to protect privacy.*

## Irina's Story

The mikvah panel and tour was over, but one woman lingered behind the excited crowd. I had never met her before, but she looked like she wanted to talk – and so we did. Irina, as she introduced herself, shared that she and her husband were both Jewish, but they'd only had a Reform chuppah, and so she'd never been to the mikvah. When she saw the flyer for this event, she wanted to attend and learn more about this mitzvah.

Irina and her husband had been married for four years already, and still hadn't been blessed with a child. She'd had multiple miscarriages, and they were under the impression that her body was incapable of holding a pregnancy to term.

"Irina!" I told her, "I would be so happy to learn with you, and I'm already so excited! I'm sure that you're going to become a mother very soon!" Irina was interested in mikvah, but skeptical about my words. After all, her past experience had shown that she wouldn't be able to have a child...

Shortly after, she and her husband came over for a few classes, and I could see that they were both extremely serious and committed to keeping Taharas Hamishpacha fully. They kept it for one month, they kept it a second month, they kept it a third month – and soon after, they were blessed with her first healthy baby boy! Irina had no doubt that this little miracle was her mikvah baby.

## Yana's Story

It was on Simchas Torah, in the middle of hakafos, that Yana came over to ask me if I was expecting. I wasn't "official" yet, but apparently I was showing, and so I said, "Yes, thank G-d! And do you want to know how? It's because of Family Purity! Remember I told you about those classes I organized after almost two years of waiting before I got pregnant with my first? Well, not too long ago, I organized a Family

*"But I don't think it was a mistake," she declared, "I believe it was a miracle, shown to me because of the merit of Shabbos candles, and the prayers."*

Purity class again – and I was blessed once again!"

I knew that Yana really wanted to be blessed with a second child, (her first was also a mikvah miracle!) and I really wanted to help her, but she wasn't sounding encouraged. "I already gave up," she told me. "We already tried a few cycles of IVF, and I don't have the strength to try anymore! And anyway... I already keep mikvah!"

When I boruch Hashem finally convinced Yana to "review" the laws with me, I discovered, as I'd suspected, that although she did immerse from time to time, she had not been keeping the days of separation.

With some encouragement, Yana agreed to try keeping it correctly, but the first month was unsuccessful. She tried again, and the second month was unsuccessful too. On the third try, she really pushed herself to carry through till the end... but after, instead of feeling good about it, she called me to say that it had been a really bad experience. Too long, too much, and too hard on their relationship – and she wasn't planning on ever doing it again.

I didn't know what to answer. What could I say?

Turns out, I didn't need to say anything. On the morning of my son's bris, Yana showed up and excitedly shared the fantastic news with me: She'd become pregnant right after that mikvah!

## Evgenia's Story

I'd had what to do with Evgenia in the past – she even joined one of our New York trips to the Rebbe – but she had a very hard time with Yiddishkeit, and over the years, we slowly lost touch.

That is, until she was hit by a horrible nightmare. One night, this mother of a small child was suddenly arrested on the charge of being an accomplice to a terrible bank robbery she had witnessed.

Evgenia was released to house arrest the next day because of her child, but there are no words to de-



scribe the *Gehinnom* she went through at that time. She suffered from extreme anxiety, couldn't eat, sleep or function, and she desperately needed help! She turned to Rabbi Lazar, who gave her the contact of an amazing lawyer. Evgenia reached out to the lawyer, begging her to take on her case as a kindness, because her price was completely unaffordable. Weeks passed, and this lawyer was not getting back to her.

When she got permission to leave her house for a few hours a day because of her child, I tried to convince her to use this opportunity to go to the mikvah. She and her husband had only been married civilly, and had never kept Taharas Hamishpacha before.

After being turned down several times, I pleaded with them: "Look! You really need a miracle now! The Rebbe taught us that the way to create a miracle is by doing something completely above your nature, something you thought you would never do. For you, going to mikvah will be a miracle, and it will cause G-d to also rise above nature and create a miracle for you!" Boruch Hashem, this convinced them, and for the first time ever, Evgenia and her husband kept everything properly.

As soon as I got into their car to go to the mikvah with them, Evgenia had amazing news to share: After a week of completely ignoring them, this top lawyer suddenly called them that morning, agreeing to take on their case! This was an open miracle, unfolding right before our eyes! On the way, we talked about the special opportunity to daven after mikvah, and they both said they wanted to daven for another baby. I couldn't grasp how they could even think of asking for anything else besides for getting out of their terrifying situation! But apparently, they had even more bitachon than I did.

Evgenia found the mikvah experience to be special and meaningful, but her trip home was extremely stressful because there was heavy traffic and she had a bracelet on her ankle. If she wasn't home in time, she could lose her "privilege" of leaving the house for those few hours, or even worse. By miracle, she made it back home just in time. And as it turned out, she didn't need to go back to mikvah for a long time after that, because boruch Hashem she was blessed with another healthy child!

After having her baby, Evgenia went to the mikvah once, but she kept pushing off her next visit. Meanwhile, her court case dragged on for a long time, and the excellent lawyer assigned a lower-level employee to be in touch with Evgenia. Things were looking very



hopeful, but close to the date of her final trial, Evgenia called me in a panic, saying that for a week already, this new lawyer had been ignoring her urgent questions! I reminded her that last time this happened, she received her answer on mikvah day...

Right then and there, she promised to go to mikvah on time, even though it would be a very difficult night for her to go. And the next morning, boruch Hashem, she messaged me to say that the lawyer had just responded!

The trial turned out amazingly well – and Evgenia knew that her commitment to go to the mikvah had once again drawn down her miracle.

## Anna's Story

Anna's family was only in Moscow temporarily. Although I'm not usually afraid to talk to women about mikvah, for various reasons I just couldn't bring myself to ask Anna. Realistically, there was almost no chance that she would agree to go to the mikvah, and I was worried that asking her could even turn her off from Yiddishkeit altogether.

Right before the family left, I realized it was my last chance to try and ask them. And so I did – but not before writing a letter to the Rebbe. I included the full names of Anna and her husband, asking specifically for Anna to agree to go to mikvah at least this one time.

Then, I had a conversation with her. It had never felt so hard for me to ask a woman about this, but boruch Hashem, she said yes! I was overwhelmed with joy! I know with complete confidence that it was one hundred percent thanks to the Rebbe's brocha!

After her immersion, Anna was extremely emotional.



She expressed so much gratitude for enabling her to have this meaningful experience – and I was left mind boggled. I couldn't believe that I had almost denied her of this priceless gift, just out of my own fears and lack of faith in her!

This left me with the greatest reminder that there is no Jewish couple in the world that this mitzvah does not belong to. It's only up to us to speak with words that come from the heart... and to never give up on anyone!

## Hadlakas Neiros

Mrs. Esther Sternberg, Crown Heights  
*Esteemed Teacher at  
Bais Rivkah High School*

*Thousands of Bais Rivkah High School students feel privileged to call Morah Esther Sternberg their beloved teacher. Morah Sternberg is the director of the Mitzvah Neshek campaign, which has resulted in millions of Shabbos candles being given out, and countless miracle stories.*

*Mrs. Sternberg's stories can fill this entire magazine and then some, but below are just a few she graciously shared with Embrace.*

*In her own words:*

### Just One Candle

Five years ago, I went on a trip to Kazakhstan for the 75<sup>th</sup> yahrzeit of the father of our Rebbe, Reb Levi Yizchak. On the way there, I missed the connecting flight and got stuck in Kiev. Sitting in the airport, I was not in a great mood – I was tired, frustrated and not sure if we would make it to Kazakhstan in time for the festivities. When I got a phone call, I picked up, not checking to see who was calling. But I'm glad I picked up! It was my friend Sara Lieberman, who excitedly declared that she had a story to tell me!

Her son, who is a shliach in Long Island, had gone to pay a *shivah* call. As he was sitting and chatting with the men, a woman from the other side of the room said very loudly: "It's thanks to one candle that our whole family became frum!"

The room grew silent. Everyone wanted to hear the



story of this special candle! The woman explained that she and her mom were walking down the street one day, when a girl stopped them to offer them Shabbos candles. They were in a hurry, so they just took the packet without any comment. They started lighting candles every week, and, well, one thing led to the next. The entire family was transformed, and this girl ended up going to a Jewish school, marrying a Jewish man and is now a completely frum lady.

As Mrs. Lieberman was talking, I remembered my end of the story. I had a lot to do with it!

Here's what happened: When the mom came home with the packet, she started reading the pamphlet inside. She wondered, "Why would people care enough to hand out candles to strangers?" Interested in finding out more, she called the number listed, which connected her straight to my office. The first question she asked me was, "Are you the same people who came by to check our mezuzah?" I told her that we were a sister organization.

As we continued our conversation, the woman shared that she had never lit Shabbos candles before, though she remembered her grandmother doing so. I suggested, "Why not light them this week?" Since it was the beginning of summer, I asked about her children's summer plans. She mentioned that they lived in a seedy neighborhood and expressed concern that her three kids—two boys and a girl—might fall in with the wrong crowd.

"Would you be willing to send your kids to a Jewish

overnight camp?” I asked. She agreed and then shared that her son was turning thirteen in the middle of August. Although she never mentioned the words ‘Bar Mitzvah’, I approached Rabbi Shemtov to see if he could arrange a Bar Mitzvah celebration for the boy at camp, which he agreed to do.

I noted their ages, we ended the call, and I got to work. Rabbi Shemtov agreed to admit the oldest boy for free into Gan Yisroel, and I helped the younger two get into a day camp.

At the end of the summer, the mother called me up, saying that her children loved the Jewish environment so much that they didn’t want to go back to public school! The challenge was, there were no Jewish schools where she lived. Of course, that wouldn’t stop us! We helped them find a new apartment near a Jewish school, and the rest is history. They are now a completely frum family.

And that girl who gave them their first Shabbos candle on mitzvaim? She would never even know.

## The Rebbe’s Design

The Rebbe was very involved in every detail of the Shabbos Candle Campaign, even down to the design of the candlesticks given out! After nixing the first product we came up with because it wasn’t stable enough, the Rebbe pointed to different parts from a few of the five design options he was given by the manufacturer, creating the candle sticks we use until today.

A woman from Florida reached out many years later, asking if I had more of the same gold candlesticks she received years ago, when she was a kid. She wanted to gift them to her granddaughter! Another woman once wrote to me, saying that her daughter received the candlesticks when she was a young girl, and has cherished them tremendously. “Even though she is currently married, and her husband bought her beautiful candlesticks, she still uses those gold candlesticks she received as a child!”

A year later, she wrote another letter to me, saying that while her daughter was fleeing her house from a hurricane, she managed to grab a couple of precious items, including the original gold candlesticks.

Because they meant *that* much to her.

## Resolution at the Candles

After the Rebbe spoke about Mitzvah Neshek but before our official campaign was launched, my mother

was at a well-known clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, called the Mayo Clinic. She was part of a group that would go there every two years for a full-body checkup. This meant spending a week at the clinic, undergoing various tests, and waiting for the results at the hotel next door.

On Friday afternoon, in the hotel, my mother noticed a woman crying bitterly. Being the caring person that she was, my mother went over to the woman, asking what was going on. The woman, whose name sounded very Jewish, said she had just received a terrible diagnosis from the doctor, which didn’t leave her with much time left to live. My mother was devastated – the woman didn’t look very old nor very sick!

My mother suggested that they go downstairs to the hotel’s store, where they sold Shabbos candles. She helped the woman buy the candles, and taught her how to say the brocha in English. “Light Shabbos candles this evening,” my mother instructed the woman, “and pour your heart out to G-d!”

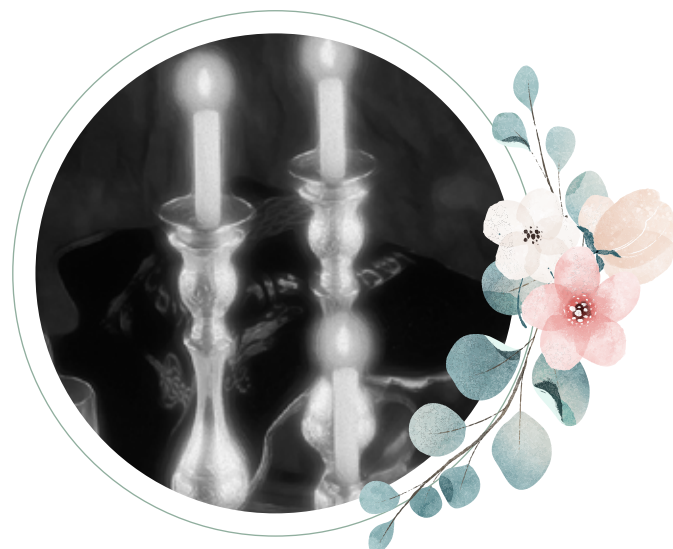
And so that’s what the woman did.

On Shabbos afternoon, my mother was sitting in the hotel lobby when the woman came running over to her excitedly. “A miracle happened, and it’s all because of the Shabbos candles!”

Here’s what happened: The evening before, this woman had poured her heart out, promising to be a better Jew if she got her life back. On Shabbos morning, she got a call from the doctor, saying that they had made a huge mistake with the results, and that she was actually completely healthy.

“But I don’t think it was a mistake,” she declared, “I

*Continued on page 55*



**WHO** is your favorite character from Tanach and why?

**Who inspires you the most?**



*The Power of*  
**CHOICE**

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

Chava, the first woman in the Torah, is the character in Tanach who resonates with me most right now-- in my life as a mother, an educator and a parenting coach.

Chava's narrative is filled with lessons about responsibility, curiosity, and the power of choices.

Her choice to eat from the Eitz Hada'as highlights the weight of personal responsibility and the far-reach-



*Her choice to eat from the Eitz Hada'as highlights the weight of personal responsibility and the far-reaching consequences of our decisions and actions.*

ing consequences of our decisions and actions.

As a mother, I am aware of the impact my choices have on my family, and I strive to make decisions that reflect wisdom and foresight. As a parenting coach, I guide parents to understand the importance of their choices and the example they set for their children. Teaching children about responsibility and the consequences of their actions is a crucial part of their development into conscientious adults.

Chava's story is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the intricacies of human nature and relationships. Her narrative teaches us that making mistakes is part of the human experience, and it is through these experiences that we learn and grow.



## *Rochel Imeinu's* **SELFLESSNESS**

Sara (Levertov) Adelist, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5760 (2000)*

Rochel Imeinu was Yaakov Avinu's true zivug. She gave the signs to her sister Leah to save her from embarrassment. This allowed Leah to go through with her marriage to Yaakov, and resulted in Rochel having to share her husband with her sister.

Rochel Imeinu's self-sacrifice translated to her relationship with her husband and children too. She gave up her burial near Yaakov Avinu, to instead be buried alone near Beis Lechem. She did this for her children. When they would be sent into Golus they would be able to stop and daven at her kever. Rochel Imeinu, in turn, would cry to Hashem on their behalf, and Hashem would promise her that her children will return to their land.

May Hashem hear our tefillos, and in turn Rochel Imeinu's tefillos, and return us to Eretz Yisroel with the coming of Moshiach, speedily.

*She did this for her children.*

*Esav was actually born with a holier neshama than his twin, charged with extra powers to help him overcome his inclination for sin.*

## *The Esav That COULDN'T BEEN*

Musia (Gurevitch) Kaplan, Crown Heights  
*Graduating class of 5776 (2016)*

I spent countless hours in high school doodling on my desk. (My sincerest apologies to the students, staff, and cleaning crew of Bais Rivkah.) One day, I was scribbling away while half-listening to my teacher discuss Yaakov and Esav. Then something piqued my interest. I dropped my pencil and looked up.

My teacher was saying that Esav was meant to be a tzaddik. He was destined to marry Leah, or later Dina, and harness all his fiery passion for G-dliness. Esav was actually born with a holier neshama than his twin, charged with extra powers to help him overcome his inclination for sin. He was going to be a heroic symbol for every Jew engaged in the physical world, as someone who was down-to-earth (in contrast to Yaakov's asceticism) but stayed true to a Torah lifestyle. Tragically, he failed at this existential mission.

Something about Esav's downfall touched me deeply. Of course, I know the guy was a womanizing, idol-serving, murderer. I understand that he was no hero. I do not care for the Esav that was, but I can't help but feel for the Esav that could've been.

Because ultimately, Esav and Yaakov symbolize dueling forces within each one of us. Yaakov was a goody-two-shoes. He liked following rules! The Torah tells us, "Yaakov was an innocent man, dwelling in tents [i.e. learning Torah]." We all have an innocent part of ourselves, a soulful self that simply wants to connect with Hashem. I imagine Yaakov being gentle and soft spoken, just like the quiet voice of my conscience that whispers to me to do the right thing.

Esav was born red, hairy, and hungry. In fact, while still in the womb, he already had an inclination for idolatry. We all have a part of ourselves that is innately physical, animalistic, and pleasure-seeking. I imagine Esav had a booming loud voice, just like the micro-Esav in me that aggressively urges me to follow what feels best in the moment.

In the story of Yaakov and Esav, my admiration goes to Yaakov but my empathy to Esav. Because ultimately, I relate to him. I too lack impulse control. I too enjoy spending time outdoors instead of studying inside. I too am drawn to what I shouldn't be.

So we can't just ignore our inner Esav. We can't just indulge him either. But perhaps, we can do what he couldn't do in his lifetime, and redeem him. By using our natural strengths and physical talents to serve Hashem in this very earthly Earth, we can rewrite Esav's story.

This time, I want a happy ending. ■



# Learning Curve



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# Finding the Words

Dina (Herman) Rosenfeld, Crown Heights  
Bais Rivkah Seminary Graduating class of 5741 (1981)

Interviewed by Shaina (Blau) Glick, Crown Heights  
*Graduating BR Seminary class of 5781 (2021)*



*When I was asked to interview Mrs. Dina Rosenfeld about her journey from preschool teacher to creative director and editor-in-chief of Hachai Publishing, I was immediately excited about the opportunity. Some of my favorite childhood books, which I love to read to my children today, were written by Dina and published by Hachai. As a writer myself, I was also thrilled to gain some insight into Dina's thoughts and ideas.*

*In our conversation, I was not just fascinated by the behind-the-scenes view of Hachai; I was so inspired by the strong Yiddishe and Chassidishe values that dictate Dina's work and the mission of Hachai Publishing. Closing out the interview, I felt like I had come away from a farbrengen about chinuch that offered practical takeaways for parents and teachers. I know you will come away feeling more informed and inspired too!*

**Shaina:** Hi Dina! Thanks for joining us today for this interview.

**Dina:** My pleasure!

**Shaina:** You are an accomplished author of many children's books, and the editor-in-chief and creative director at Hachai. Whenever I read a book to my children, I check to see who the author is, and often I find that my favorite books are written by you! How many books have you written over the years? And how did you come to write your first book?

**Dina:** Over the years, I have written over twenty books of my own. Now, as the editor-in-chief and creative director at Hachai, I have helped publish well over one hundred titles.

How did I get started? In 1982, I was teaching three-year-olds, which is an age I love. It's incredible to meet these little babies at the beginning of the year and then see them develop in their language and understanding as the months progress. By the end of a school year, I had seen more growth than I'd ever witnessed in a high school or postgraduate class. It is truly remarkable.

As a nineteen-year-old first-year teacher, I was not very experienced, and one day, I ran out of lesson plan before we ran out of time! I had to come up with something to do with the children for twenty minutes before we went out to the bus. So, I told a story to entertain my students: A story about a penny that wanted to go into the pushka. I later shared the story with my mother, who suggested that it would make a great children's book. And that's how my first book, ***The Very Best Place for a Penny***, illustrated by Eliyahu Meshchaninov and published by Kehos, came to be.

As I continued my teaching career and looked to incorporate storybooks in my lessons, I started noticing a huge gap in frum literature. I was jealous of the English teacher I worked with, who had a new book to bring in every week, while I could only choose from a mere handful of Jewish books that were appropriate for three-year-olds. If I wanted a book that would help me teach about Ahavas Yisrael, my best bet was to go to the public library and find a book about an elephant making friends with a mouse. I found myself working hard to select the most age-appropriate books I could find and drawing yarmulkas on the boys' heads or filling in clothing to make the girls tznius'dik. I wanted more for these children who deserved to have beauti-

*Jewish books and stories serve our families far better. Not everyone can be the prettiest girl at the ball, but everyone can aspire to be like the kindest girl at the well.*

fully illustrated books with Torah values, and so I got to work writing my own books, inspired by the material I was teaching in the classroom.

My second book was ***A Tree Full of Mitzvos***, illustrated by Yoel Kenny. That book was then followed by "The Little Greats Series," such as ***Kind Little Rivka*** and ***A Little Boy Named Avram***, illustrated by Ilene Lederman, which featured stories from Tanach.

**Shaina:** It's fascinating to hear how your book journey unfolded. The theme of this Embrace issue is "Kol Haschalos Kashos" and the many different learning curves people experience in their lives. Did you have any learning curves on your journey?

**Dina:** I definitely encountered challenges as a pre-school teacher, and later as editor-in-chief at Hachai. The first challenge I encountered as a teacher was, of course, teaching Parsha. Not all the stories in the parsha are so easy to teach to a three-year-old. Topics like Hashem's creation of the world, Noach's teivah, and Avraham's welcoming tent were lots of fun and were easy to teach. But then came the story of Akeidas Yitzchok, and as a young morah, I wasn't sure what to say.





change the reality of the story, but also explained it in the right words so that it wouldn't scare these young children or bring out a harsh message. From then on, my goal became to find the right words for everything that I transmitted in my classroom, and later, in my books. I never wanted to lie to the children or change the truth; I wanted to present it in a way that was best for them.

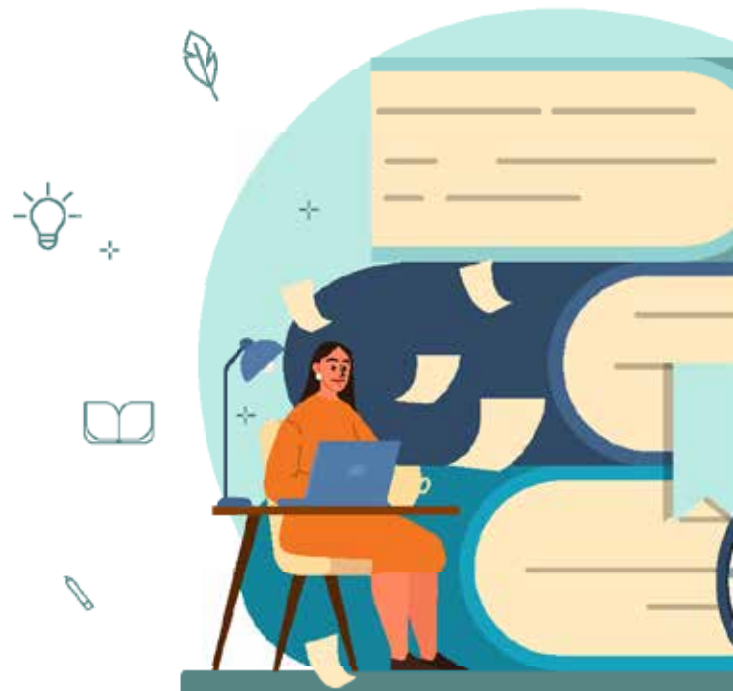
Occasionally, when my grandchildren come over during the week of Parshas Vayera, I ask them what they learned. Very often, they tell me, "Hashem told Avraham to kill Yitzchak." Ouch. I wish more teachers would take the time to find the words to distill the message of the parsha down to its essence, not changing the truth of the story, but teaching it in an age-appropriate way.

**Shaina:** That is powerful! Can you tell us more about how you went from author to editor-in-chief on Hachai's publishing team? What does your job entail?

**Dina:** I started out as an author writing my own books and having publishers publish them. At one point, when I was publishing the Yossi and Laibel series with Hachai, Meir Bendet, who was my editor at the time, was leaving Hachai to do other projects. I was offered his position and that's when I became editor-in-chief. It was then

I knew that the akeida was a foundational event in Jewish history. We talk about it every day in davening -- how could I skip it? Yet when I pictured teaching the akeida to wide-eyed three-year-olds, I was at a loss. I reached out to my mentor at the time, Blumie (Deren) Rosenfeld, who is now my sister-in-law. She had been teaching preschool for many years, so I asked her how she approached this part of the parsha.

She explained to me that before she teaches the story, she brings in a beautifully wrapped gift, and she asks the students: "How do you feel when you get a gift?" The students are excited to share about their love of gifts. Then she asks them: "How would you feel if a gift was taken away from you?" I was blown away by her explanation. *That* is the story of the akeida. Hashem gave Avraham the gift of Yitzchak and then asked him to give the gift back. Blumie managed to simplify the key idea of the akeida, down to the kernel of truth that we want to give over to the children. She did it in a way that didn't





that I was able to make a set of guidelines for Hachai that we constantly continue to develop. Every company needs a mission statement, a reminder of what they are doing and why they are doing it. Being a publisher might sound glamorous, but it is very clear to me that first and foremost, we are a Chinuch organization.

I have very little interest in publishing for the sake of publishing. People ask me why I don't branch out and publish or write for the secular world. The answer is: I have no interest in that. I was once talking to an editor working for a very large publisher who told me about a series of books she was working on, all about mean girls behaving badly. I went home and realized I would not be able to look at myself in the mirror if I promoted a project like that. Books for the sake of literacy are only a means to an end. My passion is using the picture book art form as a conduit for real toichen... even deep concepts, like ideas in Chassidus.

Picture books are powerful, and children tend to memorize the books they love. If you try to skip some pages of your child's favorite book to shorten bedtime, your child will call you out! They know these books well and these books become an important part of their lives. I always say, I may not write the great American novel, but my readers know my books by heart. That's something not many authors can say!



*Picture books are more than a way to keep kids busy; preschool is more than a babysitting place, and childhood is not just a time to get through until kids grow up.*

Just because a book has bright colorful pictures and looks cute, it doesn't mean it's a book you want your kids to read. I advise parents to read every book carefully before introducing it, and if they can, give their kids books that are completely *al taharas hakodesh* for as long as possible. Children are a blank slate, and everyone involved in their chinuch needs to be a gatekeeper and take great care to only give them access to books that have content they want them to absorb.

**Shaina:** This is all so important. It's amazing how far Jewish literature has come since you wrote your first book in 1982! Have you ever taken inspiration from secular books?

**Dina:** That's a great question. Every creative project has been inspired by another creative project. If I didn't know that rhyming books were a thing, I might have never thought to write one of my own. I have gotten creative inspiration from classic secular books in terms of structure, language, and the way a plot unfolds. But I want to stress that we don't publish spin-offs or parodies of secular material. (No Goldie and the Three Bagels.) Over the years, we have created classics of our own that every frum child is familiar with, like *Is It Shabbos Yet?* by Ellen Emerman, illustrated by Tova Leff. Jewish books and stories serve our families far better. Not everyone can be the prettiest girl at the ball, but everyone can aspire to be like the kindest girl at the well. It's a profound difference in outlook.

**Shaina:** What are some of the challenges or learning curves you encountered as a Jewish publishing company?

**Dina:** Following the Rebbe's ho'raos for chinuch is always a priority for us. The Rebbe, unlike any other Jewish world leader, spoke publicly about not using animals that are not kosher as a tool for chinuch, or even for decoration. This is an important challenge



for a children's book creator. In the secular market, animals are a substitute for children as the main character in so many books. Children easily identify with the animals and learn from them. We don't do this at Hachai. My artists are often frustrated with this as they love drawing adorable animals whenever they can. What I've learned as a creative director is that artists are often more skilled at drawing adorable animals than they are at drawing adorable children!

In general, we have decided at Hachai to prioritize chinuch over cuteness, if the two ever conflict. This is something I've learned to navigate over the years, and I have become more and more unapologetic about it. With each book, we have a strong mission of what we want to convey and represent.

None of this would be possible without Hachai's managing editor of over three decades, Yossi Leverton. He critiques and contributes to every book project, in addition to dealing with all the practical arrangements, contracts, printing, schedules, release dates, reprints, and of course, together with Moshe Zaetz, packing, shipping, and impeccable customer service.

**Shaina:** What other sources of inspiration guide your mission at Hachai?

**Dina:** We take guidance from several sources: Initially, a lot of the guidelines came from Rabbi Dovid Shalom Pape, the editor-in-chief of *The Moshiach Times*. He would submit illustrations to the Rebbe and receive the Rebbe's feedback directly. He was kind enough to share with us what he had learned. A more recent source we look to is the book ***Teachings of the Rebbe on Chinuch***. In it, there is a chapter on the Rebbe's ideas for illustrations in children's books. You'd be surprised to learn that the Rebbe has many guidelines for children's illustrations. The Rebbe discusses the importance of drawing characters to look as normal as possible, and not to make characters that have odd-looking features, like caricature style.

We also make sure to feature elements of a frum child's world: A mezuzah on every doorway, tzitzis showing, covered heads on all male characters, tznius for women and girls, and all other halachic aspects of life. I once had to stop the presses because the rooftop in a scene on a book cover didn't have a high enough fence! We corrected it digitally right before printing, boruch Hashem.

When we hire a new artist, we always hand them a list of our guidelines. Besides chinuch guidelines, we aspire to safety measures, too. If a child is riding a bike in a Hachai book, they'll be wearing a helmet. This list has grown over the years as new things came up.

***Some of the guidelines on the list:***

***Non-kosher Animals:*** We don't put any gratuitous non-kosher animals in the books, unless the animal is part of the story, like Rivkah Imeinu and the camels, or in the story of Creation. We take great care to portray only kosher creatures.

***Boys and Girls:*** We know, for example, that the Rebbe wanted girls to be represented in print media. Rabbi Pape once made a cover for *The Moshiach Times*, and there was only a boy and not a girl. By the Rebbe's instruction, he had the whole illustration redone so there'd be a girl on one side and a boy on the other.

At Hachai, we make sure to represent boys and girls, keeping them separate, unless it's a family story about brothers and sisters. For this reason, we feature lots of families in our stories so girls can be well represented.

***Menorah and Luchos:*** Another thing the Rebbe was very particular about was that children see

the menorah according to the Rambam's description. As well, the actual Luchos were not rounded on top. Children need to see these holy images in their authentic form. Not only do we ensure the correct shape when we need to include images of the Luchos and menorah, but as per Rabbi Pape's advice, we also go out of our way to add Luchos into our books wherever we can. For example, if there is a Sefer Torah in a book, we add a Luchos on the mantle, using the opportunity to show children the true shape of the Luchos.

This is a ho'ra'ah that the Rebbe shared for everyone. We have the *zechus* of fulfilling the Rebbe's directive in a way that many don't have, because these images are seen by children all around the world, including in non-Chabad communities like Boro Park and Lakewood, and everywhere else where our books are sold. At this point, most children are already accustomed to the idea of straight Luchos and the Rambam's menorah because they have seen it often in our books.

*The Symbol of Shabbos:* Another important aspect is the symbol of Shabbos worldwide. The Rebbe wanted three Shabbos candles to be depicted in a Shabbos scene to represent the fact that young girls light a candle of their own.

*Behavior:* Another thing we added to the list is ensuring that we don't generally show examples of children acting inappropriately throughout a story, and then only at the end, learning their lesson. Very

often when the negative behavior is strong, the positive doesn't make as much of an impact. Whether the behavior is lying or talking back to parents, this "negative-to-positive" kind of plot is something we try to stay away from.

*Positive Language:* Inspired by the Rebbe, we've always turned any negative phrase in our books to a positive one, even in *Nine Spoons*, a Holocaust story by Marci Stillerman, illustrated by Pesach Gerber. When a character in the book says, "Never forget," a common Holocaust phrase, we changed it to "Always remember."

Recently, I've been personally inspired by *Positivity Bias* by Mendel Kalmenson. It not only explains the Rebbe's view on having a positive outlook in general, but on using positive language in particular. Finding the words to use in children's books includes finding words that we would want to hear children saying -- especially when it comes to a phrase we repeat over and over again in a story.

*Children as the Main Characters:* We have chosen to only use children as our main characters, as opposed to using animals (even kosher ones) as the protagonists. This is because Chassidus teaches us that animals do not have *bechira chofshis*. Animals cannot choose to do mitzvos and using them to teach about making moral choices lacks that kernel of truth. We later added this to our list of guidelines at Hachai.



**Shaina:** I see. Can you tell us more about the creative and hashkafic processes that went into the creation of specific books?

**Dina:** All of our books are a blend of some kind of curriculum topic with a Jewish outlook.

I'll start with one of the books I wrote, ***We Can Find a Way***, illustrated by Amy Wummer. It is a book about Hachnosas Orchim, but it's also a story about the lengths we need to go to include others with different needs. The frum world has made tremendous strides to include those with disabilities, allowing people to access every part of Jewish life. There are ramps for Chabad houses, lifts in mikvaos, and so on. I wanted to write a book to bring out this idea in a way that applies to young children.

The story is about a family that is hosting a party for their grandmother, and they want to find a way that everyone in the family can attend. They encounter three challenges along the way. With the first challenge, I wanted to use something very common that children can relate to and doesn't have a visual component, so I chose food allergies. In the story, they were able to overcome that obstacle by simply changing the menu.

The next challenge was that they had a family member who was a wheelchair user. They solved that dilemma by setting up the party in a room that was accessible from the garage. The third challenge was a child with anxiety who got overwhelmed by loud experiences, like a party. That presented as the ultimate challenge, and they thought they had to give up. How can you have a party that isn't noisy? The answer was: They just needed to ask. Spoiler alert... they found a way! They created a quiet corner where the children could go whenever they wanted some quiet. Nowadays, a lot of schools actually have a "quiet corner" for that reason.

This book was groundbreaking at the time of its inception, and I had a lot of assistance with it. I did research by talking to Sara Kranz-Ciment from the Ruderman Foundation Inclusion Initiative, an organization that specializes in inclusion. When we write a book that talks about a special topic like this, we don't guess, we do the proper research.

We do our research on both the book's general topic as well as the Jewish perspective that we are trying to convey. I often call a Rov to clarify halachic questions that arise or ask a mashpia for guidance. Sometimes I go to a sofer to inquire about where a mezuzah belongs in a particular illustration. Pre-readers learn by study-

ing the illustrations, and proper research is part of how we make our books truly *al taharas hakodesh*.

You'd be surprised by how many emails we get from people asking questions or pointing out something not accurate, despite all the research we do. I've learned so much. We read and respond to every email, and we have made changes when changes needed to be made. We are always looking for ways to improve.

**Shaina:** Would you give some examples of how you choose which topics to address?

**Dina:** Here's a good example: A children's library is not complete without a book about going to the doctor. It prepares children for a universal experience. When we considered the topic ***I Go to the Doctor*** written and illustrated by Rikki Benefeld, we first took a look at secular books on this subject to see if a Jewish approach was even necessary. What crystalized it for me was reading an explanation about how the medicine the doctor gives you makes you better. That was the moment I realized that Yidden don't go to the doctor like everyone else. Here is the line in Rikki Benefeld's book that drives this message home:

*Hashem helps doctors, nurses too,  
So they can take good care of you.  
Take your medicine and then,  
Hashem will make you well again.*





We don't put our faith in doctors, nurses or medicine. None of those truly makes you better. We follow medical professionals' instructions to open the channel for Hashem to heal us. It's a great book for kids, but most importantly, it conveys an important aspect of bitachon.

Here's another example of where ideas come from. When I wanted to expand the Toddler Experience Series, I asked my son, "We already have *I Go to School*, to Shul, to a Wedding, to a Farm, to the Dentist... Where else do you want your children to go?" He thought for a minute and then said, "Ma, I just want them to go to sleep!" I couldn't stop laughing, but in the end, we went with that idea because there is a Jewish way to go to sleep, and the process drives the action in *I Go To Sleep* by Rikki Benefeld.

**Shaina:** What would you say is the main impact of children's books in general, and can you share feedback you've received from readers of Hachai books?

**Dina:** A good Jewish picture book is not just a fun activity to do with your child. It's not even just an educational activity. It's a profound conversation between the adult reader and the child who's listening about an aspect of Yiddishkeit that will influence behavior. Incidentally, that is why Hachai has never sold recordings of a narrator who could read the book to your child while you make supper. The power lies in the beautiful



partnership of adult-reader/child-listener tuning out the world and tuning in to each other.

By the way, the process of writing *The Very Best Place for a Penny* actually influenced my own behavior! Now, even as a Bubby, when I find pennies on the sidewalk, I always stop to pick them up and put them into the pushka. I hope that a child who reads that book and later finds a penny, will know exactly where is the very best place for a penny and put it there!

Here's another example of a child internalizing a book's message and changing behavior: Someone once called Hachai to tell us about their five-year-old son. He was planning a birthday party at school. When picking out the snacks for the party, the boy told his mother that he wanted to buy snacks that his friend who has lots of allergies would be able to eat. I thought that was the sweetest thing! But it didn't end there. When they called the friend's mother asking what snacks her son could have, she said her son was so allergic and they shouldn't bother, and that she would send a treat from home for him instead. The

birthday boy wasn't satisfied with this answer. He said to his mother, exactly as the refrain in the book, "Mommy, we can find a way!" This is why I do what I do. My goal is that the children internalize the messages in the books and implement a value in their lives.

One more story, shared with me by my neighbor: It was Erev Sukkos and her six-year-old daughter was watching her father struggle to put up the Sukkah. As he worked to get it right, he grew increasingly frustrated. This six-year-old looked up at her father and said, "Tatty, you'll only succeed if you're willing to try!" Jewish books help adults find the words, and help children find the words, too!

**Shaina:** Can you elaborate more on the idea of helping parents find the words?

**Dina:** Sure! One of the lines in my book, *It's Called Kibbud Av Va'em*, illustrated by Len Ebert is, "When our parents say let's go, we say yes, we don't say no." These words are written alongside a picture of children leaving the park. My hope is that instead of parents getting annoyed at their children, they can simply recite the line from the book, and the familiarity and cadence of the rhyme will engage their children's cooperation more quickly and pleasantly. Okay, they *may* have to say it more than once!

**Shaina:** Have you found that the skills you used in the classroom and later in your books helped you in

other areas of life as well?

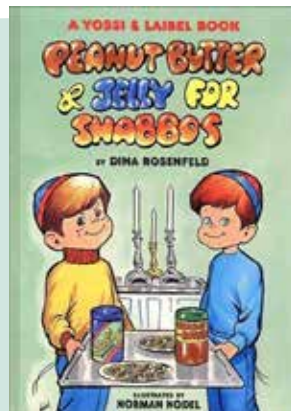
**Dina:** Absolutely. One of my other passion projects for mitzvot is giving mikvah tours, which is a basic summary of Taharas Hamishpacha in forty minutes. The first group I ever took to the mikvah was a group of Reform teenagers, which I was not prepared for — I thought I would be teaching only married women. What I realized is that when you are teaching a group of secular teenagers about Taharas Hamishpacha, you need to prepare it like a preschool lesson: Distill the main idea down to its essence. I came up with a framework: What is mikvah? Who uses it? When? How? Why? And I stuck to that structure for over thirty-five years of tours. The mikvah tours are very similar to what I do with children's books: Lots of content in a short format.

**Shaina:** Parenting techniques - and so much about education - have changed over the years. Do you have any books that you look back on that you would make changes to?

**Dina:** Yes! In one of the Yossi and Laibel books, *Peanut Butter and Jelly for Shabbos*, the boys welcome a new baby sister. At the end of the book they have the following dialogue:

*Yossi says, "This is the best baby I've ever seen,"*  
*"Pretty cute," agreed Laibel, "For a girl, I mean."*





Well, twenty-five years after this book was originally printed, I got an email from a parent whose little daughter was indignant that this line made it sound like girls weren't as good as boys. She insisted her father write to us! When I originally wrote the book, it was meant to sound like the kind of thing big brothers would say tongue-in-cheek about their little sister, whom they adore. This is how boys can be sometimes, and I have of boys, so I know! When I got this feedback from a parent, we decided that the world is different today, and if that little girl took the line offensively, we should change it for the next printing.

I hope that little girl feels empowered; we took her ideas seriously.

**Shaina:** What are some of the books that contain the biggest concepts for young minds?

**Dina:** Hachai has many titles that deal with Jewish philosophy and Chassidus, with a great deal of *toichen* built in. We have a book by Chanie Altein called ***Hashem is Truly Everywhere***, illustrated by Marc Lumer, that includes aspects of the Yud Gimmel Ikrei Ha'Emunah. The book explains Hashem's presence with lines like, "*Yes Hashem is on this spot, there is no place where He is not.*" Knowing that there is no place devoid of Hashem's presence is also part of believing that Hashem is everywhere. The book contains a key idea – a kernel of profound truth.

***I Love You, My Dear***, by Chaya Baron, illustrated by Nancy Munger, gives adults beautiful words to promote true self-esteem in children. They are loved, not for what they achieve, but for who they are in their essence: A neshama sent by Hashem to join their family.

Another example of a big idea book is ***The Invisi-***

***ble Book*** by Bracha Goetz, illustrated by Patti Argoff. It teaches children the concept that underpins every aspect of our faith. A person cannot have any faith unless they believe that invisible, i.e. spiritual, intangible things, are real. Brocha Goetz brings relatable examples of things that are invisible, like air, which you don't see until you puff up your cheeks with it. The same goes for electricity: You don't see it, but you can see that it lights things up. You don't see wind but you can see the items that blow in the wind. And then she draws a parallel to Hashem. You don't see Hashem, but you can see what Hashem does. Similarly, you can't see your neshama, but that feeling that you get telling you to do a mitzvah comes *from* your neshama. Children grasp huge concepts from this book. Not only are they gaining this powerful spiritual understanding, but they are also learning about important scientific ideas and a big new vocabulary word: Invisible.

Hachai also published a beautiful ***Creation Book*** by Chani Gansburg, illustrated by Dena Ackerman. The text is a joy to read aloud, and the artist used papercuts to create beautiful collages, photographing them for a three-dimensional effect. What's interesting about this book is that just like the actual act of creation, the book begins with illustrations that look chaotic and busy, and words that are different sizes and fonts and aren't aligned. As you work your way through the book, the words become more orderly, much like the process of Hashem's creation. The words on the last page are all the same size, except the words One and Hashem. This final page symbolizes a complete world where we now must search for the One Hashem within Creation. Anyone who studies Tanya is familiar with this concept.

Another great example of a big idea in a little book





is *Oh How I Wish* by Sara Blau. She was inspired by the parsha that talks about the women who would weave wool on the backs of live animals to use for the Mishkan. They had an incredible talent that they used for Hashem. In her book, she writes about different children who have a love for various activities, and how they each use what they love to do for Hashem. The little girl who loves to dance, dances with a kallah. The little boy who loves to bake, whips together a cake for Shabbos. This is really what we all should be doing every day, using our personal talents and interests for mitzvos.

These books are all based on concepts in Chassidus and mysticism. Another good example is a book I wrote many years ago called *All About Us*, illustrated by Patti Argoff. It is based on the idea that “*Istakla b’oraisa u’bara alma*” – Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. Therefore, Hashem gave people precisely what they need to perform mitzvos: Hands to give tzedakah,

feet for dancing on Simchas Torah, etc.

There is no preschool on earth that doesn’t teach a unit about parts of the body. In this book, children are learning the same information, with a uniquely Jewish twist. If a child grabs a toy from a friend, the teacher can remind him, “That’s not why Hashem gave you hands; what mitzvos can you think of to do with your hands?”

**Shaina:** Truly incredible. So, what’s next on the horizon for Hachai?

**Dina:** We have a new book by Sara Maddali that is scheduled to be released in September. It’s called *The One and Only*. It gives children the words “*Ein od milvado*” and introduces the concept of there being no other entity but Hashem:

*From the most distant sky to the depths of the sea,  
Hashem is, always was, and always will be.  
There is one Hashem only, I’m sure that you know,  
There is nothing besides Him, ein od milvado.*

It’s a large book with gorgeous illustrations and something to look forward to right before Yom Tov! To keep up with new releases and make sure your children have all the classics as well as the new Hachai books, readers can visit [hachai.com](http://hachai.com).

**Shaina:** You have so much to offer here for everyday interactions with children. What is your closing message to parents and teachers everywhere?

**Dina:** My real message to parents and teachers is that picture books are more than a way to keep kids busy, preschool is more than a babysitting place, and childhood is not just a time to get through until kids grow up. These are priceless opportunities to give our children a lifelong love for Hashem, for Torah, and for mitzvos. ■





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# Welcome to Postpartum Heaven

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

**This baby, I was  
determined to beat  
postpartum depression—  
starting with a trip to Monroe.**



**A**fter a three hour ride from Crown Heights, my two-day-old baby and I pull up in front of a massive mansion in upstate New York. We are greeted by a fancy script sign: “Eishes Chayil D’Kiryas Yoel,” also known as the *kimpeturin heim*.

A whirlwind labor followed by two sleepy and peaceful days reclining in my hospital bed had come to an end, and now my *kimpeturin* journey could begin. After having postpartum depression with all four of my previous children, I was hoping this time might be different. Time to find out.

“Mazal tov! Let me give you a tour.” I’m greeted by a peppy bubby with a little hat perched on top of her perfectly combed wig. She gives me a hot pink bracelet with the Eishes Chayil logo on it—“This is your key”—and tags my bags with more Eishes Chayil logos—“They’ll take your bags up to your room for you.”

Time for the grand tour. I park my Doona, pick up my baby and head to our first stop: The gift shop in the lobby, full of onesies equivalent in price to at least a month of diapers. We take the elevator up to the old wing with shiny marble floors, then to the new wing with even shinier marble floors. The name of this place, “Eishes Chayil,” sums up exactly how you imagine it to look: Lots of dainty velvet couches in pastel colors and huge framed paintings of landscapes.

After checking out the upstairs lounge, the downstairs lounge, the 24/7 tea room stocked with ice cream, and an extensive library (all Yiddish), we end up at the nursery. My baby is changed into a fluffy blue outfit with the Eishes Chayil logo embroidered on the front. It’s the baby uniform here—pink for girls and blue for boys.

The nurse sets my precious three-day-old baby down in a bassinet while I stand at the nursery window. I watch him sleeping soundly for a few minutes before I realize that I’m free to go. It’s Friday afternoon and the Yiddish schedule posted on the bulletin board announces that it’s “*to’ame’ha*” time in the buffet room.

\* \* \*

Postpartum depression was always something that happened to other people, until I found myself at the doctor’s office for strep. It was a year after my third child, Tzelya, was born, and I’d been having painful canker sores and a sore throat on and off for months. It’s my signature style of reacting to stress, so I didn’t pay too much attention. I had no appetite, but pregnancy had already gotten me used to being grossed out by food. I couldn’t sleep either, but between my baby waking up to nurse every few hours and my two toddlers in different phases of sleep regression and potty training, the insomnia just seemed like the occupational hazard of every new mom.

## *And it’s even harder to draw the line between regular overwhelm and a mental-health crisis.*

My doctor thought differently. “You’re losing too much weight. You’ve been sick for months. You say you haven’t been sleeping. Is everything okay?”

I started crying. Just hormones, though—right?

A prescription for SSRIs came home with me when I left the doctor’s office, and a few weeks later, when I started feeling a lot better, that’s when I realized that I’d had postpartum depression with my first two babies as well—I just had no idea what it felt like.

Newborns are hard for me. I’m not the kind of person who coos over tiny fingers and asks to hold everyone’s brand-new babies. But I also thought newborns were hard for everyone. And it’s even harder to draw the line between regular overwhelm and a mental-health crisis. But by the time I gave birth to my fourth child, Mila, I quickly caught on that the hopelessness and lack of energy wasn’t just regular postpartum hormones. So I got myself to a doctor and got medication.

With a fifth baby on the way, I wanted things to be different. Just because I had my history of PPD, that didn’t mean I had to sit back and let nature take its course. With my fifth birth, I had more resources, more experiences, and more willpower. I was going to fight postpartum depression.

\* \* \*

So there I was looking out over the landscaped gardens of Eishes Chayil with my plate of cholent and kokosh on a Friday afternoon, while my husband was busy back at home arranging a *shalom zochor* while keeping four kids entertained.

“Did you just arrive?”

“Where are you from?”

“The first day is always hard, don’t worry, I was hiding in my room the whole time.”

“You look confident; I think you’ll have a good time here.”

“I was also crying in my room the first day!”

*Over the next three days, I went from my cozy bed to the tea room to the nursery to the dining room and back to bed.*

It's the equivalent of sleepaway camp for mommies as I jump into an involved conversation with ladies from Williamsburg, Boro Park, and even Tosh, Canada, a five hour drive away. There are ladies in their twenties and ladies in their forties; women having their first kid and women having their seventh. And the way it works at *kimpeturin heim* is that you never introduce yourself, you just start asking if they were early or late, how long did they push for, and did they like their doctor.

Ironically, not a single baby was to be seen.

Because the babies are all in the nursery, of course. Attached to the nursery is a massive ballroom with two hundred recliners arranged in a circle formation, under twenty-foot ceilings and chandeliers the size of dining room tables. An entire wall is just windows, looking out to fountains and flowers and a hundred outdoor rocking chairs set up in a circle. That's "the garden."

But there's only a few ladies in the garden. Most of the action is happening in the feeding room, where there are lots of tiny babies. Everyone is nursing and chatting away. You sit down, someone sits next to you, you start talking. What do you talk about? Your epidural, your stitches, your mother-in-law, your *vach nacht*, which name you gave, how's the nursing going, what schedule is your baby on...

Over the next three days, I went from my cozy bed to the tea room to the nursery to the dining room and back to bed. The biggest decisions I made were between a latte or mochachino at the hot drink machine. I got to tell my birth story five different times, and hear about a dozen others. I discussed baby names, shviggers, *vach nachts*, and epidurals with my new Satmar friends who alternated between Yiddish and English.

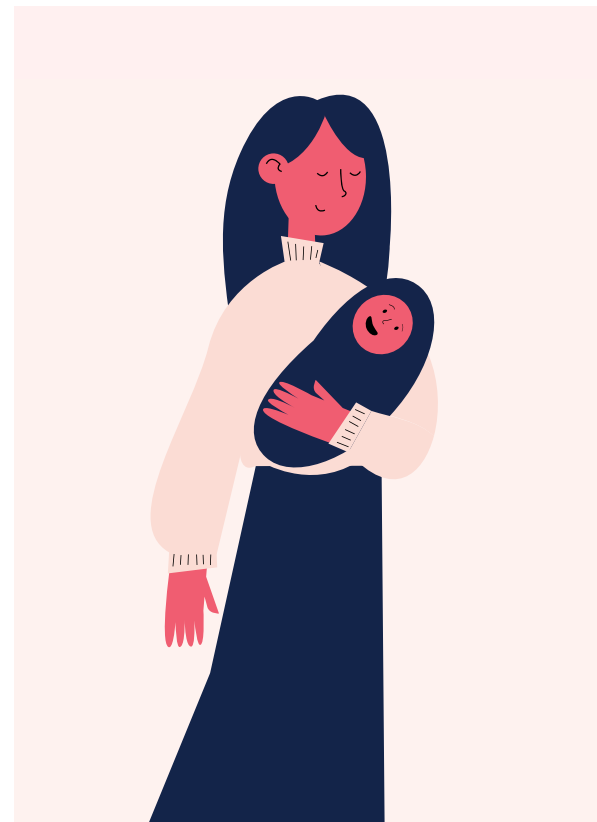
I had brought a book about navigating postpartum, but I soon realized that I'd learn a lot more about life just by listening to everyone talk. When my phone rings, I know it's the nurses paging me to come feed my baby. I grab a *Binah* magazine that one of my new friends gave me, and I settle into a cozy recliner facing the big windows.

In *kimpeturin heim*, I'm always excited to take care of my baby, because I'm always feeling taken care of myself. I don't feel any of that desperation that characterizes my usual postpartum days, where the baby is crying but I don't have an ounce of energy left to help; where the baby is hungry but I'm too sore and tired and dizzy to keep feeding and my husband is just as exhausted as I am so he can't do much either.

\* \* \*

So a thousand dollars and three days later, did all that self care help me beat PPD? I think what I realized from our newest addition is that all this time I've been asking the wrong question. The question is not a "yes or no" one: Will I feel depressed after my birth? The more accurate questions, ones that I needed to learn to accept, are: How long will the depression last, how intense will it feel, and what interventions will I use to cope with it?

I think, for me, depression is likely to be part of every pregnancy and birth, just like contractions and nausea and acid reflux are. But from now on, *kimpeturin heim* will be too. ■







*Continued from page 35*

believe it was a miracle, shown to me because of the merit of Shabbos candles, and the prayers.”

## A Stuttering Solution

A man from Brazil once called my father asking him for a favor. His daughter had a very bad stuttering problem. The doctor had told her to stop talking completely for six months, and hopefully, when she’d start talking again, her stutter would be gone. The man wanted to know if my father could ask the Rebbe for a brocha for his daughter.

My father went to the Rebbe, and explained the situation. The Rebbe said that he agreed with the doctor that she should stop talking, with one exception: This girl should start lighting Shabbos candles every week, and she should say the brocha out loud. My father relayed the Rebbe’s instructions, and the girl from Brazil followed them. For the next few weeks, she didn’t utter a word, besides for the brocha on the candles.

One day, my father got a message from the Rebbe, instructing him to contact the family in Brazil. The

Rebbe said that the girl could start talking regularly again, and that her stutter would be gone. Sure enough, the girl’s speech was now completely clear.

## The Hospital Visit

A woman contacted me a couple of years ago. She said that many, many years earlier, when she was a teenager, she had been in a hospital in Manhattan. On one random Friday, two Bais Rivkah girls visited her, asking her if she wanted to light Shabbos candles. Having grown up Reform, she didn’t know what they were talking about!

But she agreed, and the Bais Rivkah girls taught her how to light and what to say. She lit candles that week and got very emotional. Inspired, she made a promise that if she recovered, she would seek out a rabbi to teach her more about Yiddishkeit.

And she kept that promise. When she returned home, she found a Chabad rabbi and learned with him for a full year, growing in her knowledge of Yiddishkeit. She is now the proud mother and grandmother of a Lubavitcher family. ▀

# DISCOVERING *Life* ABOVE CHALLENGE

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Anonymous



## ***Life is a funny thing.***

As children, we are innocent, carefree beings with wishes, dreams, and desires.

Nothing is too big or farfetched. Absolutely anything is possible. As we get older, we begin to realize how complex and multi-layered life can be. How not in control we are. How it was

designed to be a journey-- a journey of self-discovery, non-linear growth, ups and downs, trials and tribulations.

“Hashem guides the steps of man.” “Hashem directs you where you are supposed to go.” These are concepts we are taught multiple times all through school. Yet, they are just abstract ideas that get stored in the back of our minds, until life gets real.

It wasn't until I got married that I truly began applying the concept that Hashem is the One in control. What I have found quite fascinating is that when one is given a challenge, multiple areas of growth can materialize from it. A challenge can really highlight a person's rough spots and areas that can use improvement.

Take infertility, for example.

Within a very short time after we got married, my husband and I realized that we would have to go through quite the journey to build our family. While we knew about infertility, we did not yet realize that Hashem was waiting for us to rise to its challenges and fight our natural inclinations. We would soon be forced to use every ounce of strength and every resource we had to grow, discover and better ourselves in ways we never thought possible. For instance, I am a doer by nature, and I soon came to discover that my determined character was essential for becoming my own advocate throughout this process.

Here is the thing about infertility. It's a private and sensitive subject, and the struggles and challenges that come along with it are not discussed often enough. To say the last few years have been a journey is an understatement. I cannot begin to describe the pain, anguish, anger, resentment, grief, feelings of jealousy, low self-esteem, and all the other messy emotions that I've experienced with infertility. These emotions not only put me in an unpleasant headspace, but also affected me physically.

However, along the way, through the heartache, I came to recognize a few crucial life lessons.

For starters, I became very aware that the only One Who *truly* has our backs is Hashem. We started out charting our own path through a deep, dark forest with little to no guidance. But on many occasions throughout our journey I

have felt Hashem right next to me. Take the time a mentor told me about a rav who specializes in infertility. She suggested we reach out to him, and he has been our source of halachic guidance ever since. Or take the time when, after a few years, we were finally connected with an organization that fully covered the thousands of dollars of treatment costs, for which we had been paying out of pocket until that point. At some point, to my great fortune, I stumbled upon an Instagram account called “I was supposed to have a baby” (iwassupposedtohaveababy), run by Aimee Baron. She started a nonprofit organization that aims to support those trying to build a family. Her Instagram page, podcast, and monthly support groups offer emotional support to anyone in the Jewish community who is dealing with infertility, pregnancy loss, or any other struggles related

*“Hashem tailor-makes every challenge for each individual in order to push them to reach their fullest potential.”*

to family-building. She also aims to educate the community, bringing awareness of infertility, grief, pregnancy loss and so on. Aimee and all of the other incredible people I have been fortunate to meet and form relationships with, have been incredible sources of support, love and encouragement for me during the highs and lows of our infertility journey. This amazing support system is what keeps me going on harder days.

I have also come to recognize how Hashem specifically orchestrated this particular challenge as the means for my self-growth. I once heard something really powerful that has stayed with me: “Hashem tailor-makes every challenge for each individual in order to push them to reach their fullest potential.” (See sidebar.) Looking back at the last few years, I simply must laugh because of

how true this has proven to be over the course of our infertility journey.

The process of IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) in par-



ticular, felt like it was almost *made* to provoke all my weak points. As a type-A personality, I crave stability and like having all my ducks lined up in a row, so this journey really had me drowning.

Control. Perfectionism. Having everything scheduled and lined up neatly. Knowing my plans -- the “where,” “what,” “how,” and “when” of it all-- IVF took all of this away from me. It brought me to new feelings and experiences that I’d tried to avoid in the past: Being vulnerable; surrendering all my plans; accepting the process; giving up control and the ability to do things the way I wanted to. I now had to face the unknown of side effects and how I would react to the many injections. The illusion that I have control over what life would look like, was shattered. My weak spots have had to really stretch and grow simply due to circumstance. I have learned to let go and surrender to the process and to what Hashem has in store.

I had to grapple with feelings of anxiety that came along with not knowing. I also worried: “Am I doing everything right? Did I mess up and ruin my chances?”

This process has taught me that I can turn the world over trying to search for techniques for ending our journey, but ultimately, Hashem decides when our journey ends. It has taught me how to be my own advocate, and, through a little experimenting, how to figure out what works best for us and discard the ideas that don’t work.

I have come to recognize that Hashem truly gives people the strength and abilities to deal with their challenges, and I have found that I am much stronger than I ever believed I was. I have discovered how to balance the paradox of doing all I can but also accepting that I am not in control and Hashem is in charge. I have learned that fertility is not something you turn on and off. I have internalized the idea of reaching my potential and doing my best at the stage I am in. I am where I am meant to be.

Grief and its various stages became a familiar tune as I struggled to come to terms with the idea that how I envisioned my life was not how it was going to play out and I had to start realigning my expectations with my new reality.

It was an Erev Yom Kippur when I had the eph-



any that led me to write this journal entry. I have finally made peace with my reality. It has taken a few years to get here, but here I am, accepting; accepting our infertility. I am surrendering; surrendering to Hashem and not fighting His plan anymore. It is extremely difficult giving up that illusion of control. But I'm doing it.

As I fully embrace this acceptance, I feel myself finally relax. I am giving this burden over to Hashem. To me, this acceptance of reality is so much more powerful than any davening I may do over Yom Kippur. Will this acceptance last? I don't know. But I do know that it will be my new focus for the coming months. I will focus on not fighting reality. I will focus on doing what I can but not at the expense of my mental and emotional health, my relationship with my husband or my day-to-day functioning. I will focus on building myself up as well as building my husband up and just enjoying our time together.

This is a constant, daily avodah. It takes a lot of mental work to make my day purposeful, to feel happy and content despite my situation. But when I take it one day at a time, it is doable. Of course, some days are better than others.

Accepting that this is the journey Hashem wanted us to be on, has allowed me to finally admit that yes, we are struggling with infertility. It enabled me to actually start working through the grief of my dreams shattered, my expectations not materializing. I was able to ask myself, "Now what? How can we take this reality and not let it destroy us and our life? How can I live life to the fullest despite not having my dream fulfilled yet, while also trusting that we will soon see revealed good?"

I have been pushed to grow in ways I never anticipated I could or would. I have had to endure things I never envisioned I would, including my biggest nightmare, IVF. There are days when I feel stretched to the max and cannot possibly be pushed any more. There are days when I am so grateful for having a husband who accepts me and loves me through all my moods including those awful, painful ones. Infertility has made me so much more sensitive toward others and has also shown me how society can really take things for granted-- things like getting pregnant easily. So, while I do go through the stages of grief over my dream of building a family the way I always

envisioned, I can also appreciate the time that I have been given to build the foundation on which I want to raise my future family.

I appreciate that I can use this time for enhancing my marriage, and for personal growth in all areas. Not always is it sunshine and roses; not always do I feel optimistic and think that I can do this. There are days when I wish my life looked different, the way I always imagined it would look. But I am slowly learning and accepting that I am not in charge in life.

A wise mentor once told me that changing your thoughts ("Hashem did this to me for a reason, out of love") actually *does* change your feelings toward the situation. When you can see a situation from a new perspective, you can change your emotions. Unfortunately, it can be hard to see life through Hashem's perspective. We just need to try our best.

As I am writing this, the perspective is coming to me: I am a Shlucha on my own journey. Just as Shluchim are pioneers in their communities, establishing a foundation for thriving Jewish life wherever they are, I too am a pioneer. I am forging my own path on this journey of infertility, working to establish a stronger foundation in my relationship with Hashem, myself and my marriage, so that, b'ezras Hashem, when we *do* start our family, it will be on solid ground. ■

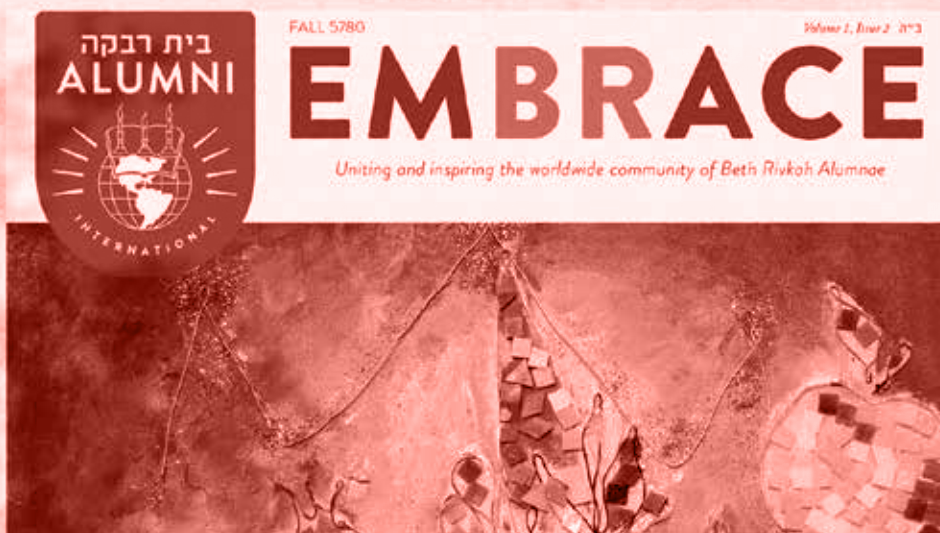
*Continued on page 79*



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# Gardening



Chaya M. (Katzman) Raskin, Ellenville, NY  
*Graduating class of 5768 (2008)*



## *How did you get into gardening?*

I've had a love for nature for as long as I can remember. It wasn't from my upbringing; I grew up in the city and grew up with little opportunity to leave it. And yet my soul always craved trees, water, and the big blue sky. The rare opportunities I had to spend time in the country - or any green park - were a treasure that I relished. But houseplants and gardens were a completely



foreign entity to me.

My first venture into the world of plants was shortly after I got married. I optimistically bought some beautiful house plants for my apartment, only to have them die just a few short months later. Like many people I know, I automatically attributed it to my apparent “black thumb.” I figured plants just weren’t my thing, and resigned myself to artificial versions and paintings on the walls.

In Iyar 5776 (June of 2016) we bought our first house in East Flatbush. It had a small paved backyard which we filled with play equipment for our kids; after my past plant failures, a garden wasn’t even on our radar.

The shift began a couple summers later. A neighbor was giving out some spare plants - basil and some flowers - and I decided it was a no-risk way to give gardening a shot. There was a six inch border of dirt in our yard right near the fence, from which weeds seemed to thrive. The weeds seemed to do so well over there, I figured other plants might too. I picked up a snow shovel we had nearby - the closest thing to a gardening tool we owned - dug out the weeds, and planted our first garden.

My first surprise was at how much I enjoyed the process. The exercise energized me for sure - something I was certainly lacking - but I soon learned that there was more to it. Apparently there are microbes in soil that act to increase serotonin (the happy hormone) on contact, and I really felt it.

Still, I didn’t really expect much from my efforts. It was a little strip of dirt in the middle of a concrete jungle - what could it actually produce? I visited the plants every couple of days and watered them when (if) I remembered. It didn’t take long to see my little garden grow and thrive, to my surprise and delight.

Encouraged by this little win, when the next summer season approached I decided this pursuit was worth a small investment. I purchased some tomato plants, herbs and some flowers, along with some basic gardening tools. Then, I got all my kids involved in pulling all the weeds in the tiny strip along the length of our yard, and we planted our new garden. We also bought a bag or two of garden soil and added it to the existing dirt. When there wasn’t a lot of rain, we watered it with a hose attached to our bathroom sink. And we watched it all grow. We were thrilled when the first tomatoes grew and we couldn’t wait for them to ripen. That’s when I discovered that not only was the process of gardening so enjoyable, but the results

*My first surprise was at how much I enjoyed the process.*

were incredible too: The tomatoes were so much more delicious than anything we could buy in the store! We couldn’t get enough.

My gardening adventure soon took on a life of its own. The next year we took it a step further. We found large planters for free or cheap on Facebook marketplace, bought more bags of soil, and planted a bigger variety of produce: Tomatoes, cucumbers, broccoli, cabbage, basil, dill, peppers, and mint - and some flowers of course. The kids loved finding and picking our own produce, and I experienced a newfound joy in my little hobby.

### What is needed in order to do it?

As I soon discovered, gardening is actually less complicated than many people think. But there are a few rules that will really make or break your attempts to successfully grow plants, and especially food.

**Sunlight:** The first requirement is sunlight. Now, there are a few plants that can thrive in indirect sunlight



*Apparently there are microbes in soil that act to increase serotonin (the happy hormone) on contact, and I really felt it.*

from a north-facing window - but those are actually called “shade plants” and are quite limited. Vegetable plants, most herbs, and flowers require what’s called “direct sunlight” - they need to see the actual sun for at least six hours a day to thrive. In other words, put them in a sunny yard or porch and not by a window that only gets two hours of direct sun a day, nor on a porch that’s normally shaded by the house. (In a case of no access to such a place, it is also possible to purchase grow lights to do the job instead.)

**Water:** The next obvious requirement is water. What I learned in the process of growing our garden is that plants that are in the ground need far less babysitting (particularly watering) than plants in pots. This is because once they are established (usually a couple weeks after they are placed in the ground), the roots have grown and found sources of water from deeper inside the soil, so even when the ground seems dry

superficially, the plants aren’t necessarily thirsty. We often got away with watering as little as once a week (when it was convenient). Plants in pots, however, have no such access, and when the weather is hot, will dry out quickly. Depending on the size of the pot, they may need watering as often as twice a day in a heatwave. (Also, make sure your pots have drainage holes, because plants can also rot in too much water!)

**Good Soil:** The third factor in a successful garden is good soil. It seems to me that this is often over-complicated by gardeners, and can be a big turnoff for beginners. It’s true that there are different types of soil preferred by different plants and many ways to “amend” the soil to correct it when needed. But I think a few basic factors can go a long way in encouraging your plants to grow well. Firstly, make sure you have **enough** soil for the plant you’re trying to grow. A tomato plant can grow to be six feet high, so a four inch pot simply won’t be big enough to grow large enough roots to support that. It’s better off directly in the ground, or at least in a larger planter. Second, you can’t really go wrong if you purchase fresh soil from a gardening center. Make sure to get **potting** soil if you’re planting in pots, and **garden** soil if you’re adding it to the soil already in your yard. Add a fair amount right to the spot where you’re putting your plants, and you should be good to go.



before



after



## A few other tips:

**Seed vs. Starter Plants:** There are two ways to start plants: From seed, and from starter plants bought in a grocery or gardening store. In fact, you can plant a slice of a grocery store tomato and it will likely grow, although for most other plants you're better off buying a pack of one hundred seeds for two dollars. In general, seeds are definitely cheaper than starter plants. However, starting with a seed does add as much as six to eight weeks to your gardening journey, during which your little seedlings will need careful babysitting until they are ready to be transplanted to the garden. They are much more sensitive to temperature, drying out, and sunlight than an established plant. If you buy small starter plants, on the other hand, you can usually plant them straight into your garden and watch them grow fruit within a month or less with minimal care.

**Do Your Research:** A little bit of research can go a long way. Look up the specific plants you are interested in growing and find out a little bit about them before you stick them into your garden. How big do they grow? How much space do you need around them? Are they vines that need support, and if so, how can they be supported? Are they root vegetables that need lots of soft soil? What temperatures do they prefer, and are they better in the sunnier or partly shady part of your garden in the place where you live? You don't need to read everything there is about gardening, but a focused search on the particulars of your situation may give you a few tips that get you that much closer to success.

## What benefit do you get from gardening?

Gardening is an incredible way to get back in touch with nature, with both physical and psychological benefits which I've personally enjoyed from even minimal involvement. Vegetables grown at home are also organic and so much fresher (and tastier!) than you'll ever get in a grocery store. And watching the process of growth from a seed or tiny plant into a full grown plant producing dozens of vegetables is extremely satisfying and enlightening to city natives. It also helps for understanding ideas in Torah in connection to food that grows from the ground.

## What is a common misconception

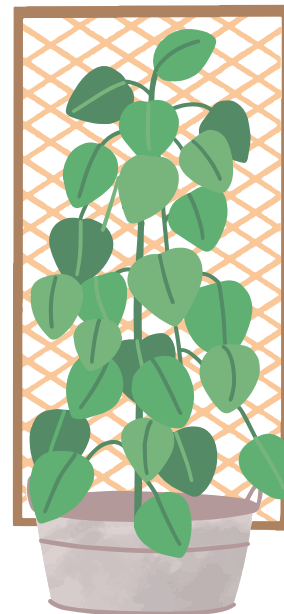


our bounty

## about gardening?

Gardening is a lot more accessible than many of us may think. Even in small apartments with little to no direct sunlight, it is possible to supplement with grow lights and successfully grow delicious food. While it may not be something that comes to us intuitively, most people can develop a green thumb with a bit of research and the willingness to try something new.

Will you give it a shot this year? ■







DIY HOBBY:

# Home Renovation



Shaina (Wolff) Greene, Tarzana, California  
*Graduating class of 5772 (2012)*



*Girl's room where Shaina built the feature wall and double framed the wall paper.*



## How did you get into home renovation?

Growing up in Crown Heights, my father was a real DIY Dad. He would go to Home Depot all the time, and I loved walking down those aisles with him, and watching him work on all sorts of projects.

Looking back, I definitely had some of that in me too – I had a small bedroom with just a bunk bed and dresser, but the bunk bed was on a different wall every week. I was constantly switching up my room, redesigning, and moving the furniture.

But then I got older, and interestingly enough, I chose to study dental hygiene. I had one more year of school to go, but the problem was – I hated it! I wondered if it was just the student part that I didn't like or the whole career, so I decided to take a gap year and work in a dental office to see if this is what I really wanted. The dentist could see from my questions that I was hesitant about the career and not passionate about dental hygiene, and he said something very interesting: "If you take nine steps in the wrong direction, do you take a tenth step in the wrong direction?" That clinched it for me – this wasn't the route that I was going to take! I'm an artist, I needed something with more creativity to fill my day.

That was in the summer, around COVID time. With everyone stuck at home, many people were doing all sorts of home renovation projects. I had a little empty nook underneath my stairs, and my first project was building bookshelves there. I bought myself power tools and got all into it!

The truth is, I was no stranger to projects like this. I'm good with my hands, and I've always dabbled in different things here and there, not as a career, but just to try them out. Up until this point, I'd work at something during the summer but then eventually get over it and move on. It seemed like these projects were passing phases. But this summer project was different – I wasn't getting over it! The more furniture I refurbished, the more I enjoyed it, and every time I completed a project, I was itching for another one!

## Can you walk us through a basic project?

Before trying something like a built-in closet or bookshelf, I'd say a good starter project is refurbishing a piece of furniture. Whether it's something you found off the street or something that's being given away,

*The more furniture I refurbished, the more I enjoyed it, and every time I completed a project, I was itching for another one!*

you can get it to look brand new! A project like this is a pretty good one to start with, because you don't really need more than the basic stuff for it and it can be really helpful in breaking you into using tools.

I'll give you an example so you can get a clearer picture.

Let's say you were refurbishing an old dresser.

If you just wanted to repaint it and change the color, you would start by taking the hinges off, lightly buffing out each of the drawers and then the main piece. Then you would put on primer, and then paint. I recommend sanding in between layers of paint; it gives it that really nice finish. Then, apply a protection coat.

You could also add trim work to your dresser. If you want to try to get more advanced, and you have a saw



*Girls' room designed and built with trim feature wall and different color lighting.*

and are able to cut pieces, you can add dowels, which can make it look like a more modern piece.

You can also skip the painting and go for a natural wood-finish look. Many times when you sand the dresser down, you will find a beautiful wood. After sanding, you'd need to stain it, and seal after that.

Refurbishing was actually one of my first projects: I took a mahogany-looking dining room table, and I sanded it all off, ending up with a beautiful rustic wooden table!

## What are some other things you've built?

I did a couple of girls' rooms, one of which had to be finished in one week! The girl moved out of her room, and when she came back, the change was a total surprise!

I also built a frame for a painting that I made. Paying for a ready-made frame is not cheap! Building a frame is another good basic project to start with. And

the best part was, I was able to match it to my other furniture in that room!

A more advanced project that I worked on was a me-gillah case that I crafted. It was hard to make!

The hardest project I've done so far was actually a deviation from woodwork. It was a pizza oven! Masonry is *totally* different from woodwork and construction. It requires dealing with bricks and cement, and I wouldn't recommend that you try it, especially if you're a beginner. I wouldn't even suggest it to someone who's on an advanced level. That's because even for someone who's used to this stuff, it's hot, back-breaking labor. I felt like I was in Mitzrayim! I'm happy with my pizza oven, but I'm done with masonry for a while!

I tried my hand at tiling too, and that was one of my DIY failures. I tried to retiling the floor, and found out that it's much harder than it looks. In the end, we had to hire someone to do it. By the way, I'm proud to talk about my failures, because failure is part of the process! And I'm definitely going to try tiling again at some point, but when I do it, I'll go into it with a



Table found at Salvation Army for really cheap



Table sanded and made beautiful. Notice the Kosel picture in the background that Shaina painted and built the frame for.

greater awareness of the challenges.

## What obstacles did you face when you were first starting out?

I mostly started off doing things in my own townhouse. That was hard for my husband, because he didn't like coming home to a construction zone every single day. When I started taking my projects outside the house, it was better for both of us.

Another thing that was hard was when I tried to monetize it. I've done a few kids' bedrooms, but it can be very stressful and chaotic. These days, the way I operate is if I get a request for a project, I'll do it if it makes complete sense for my schedule and family. I feel like if I made it into a business or a career, it would take away from the enjoyment of it.

## What benefit do you get from it? Why do you do it?

I love the process, mostly. And I feel so fulfilled when someone comes to my dining room and says, "Wow, that's an incredible Kosel painting!" Knowing that I painted it and crafted the frame adds a very cool dimension to it.

I love how so many things in my house have a story. Instead of telling people where I bought a piece, I can say that I actually *made* it!

## What's a common misconception about home renovation?

That DIYing is cheaper. It's not! People think they'll save a ton of money if they do something themselves, but all the tools and materials needed for building really add up. Maybe for something huge, you'll save a bit of money, but for a smaller item, like a side table, the cost will be pretty much the same whether you buy it on Wayfair or build it yourself. Just do your research first on all the materials you would have to buy and then do a cross comparison to the price of buying the item ready-made. DIY home renovation isn't for people looking to save money; it's for people looking for the experience!

## Can you give us some tips and tricks for DIY home renovation projects?

If



Marquee letters Shaina built for her nephew's upsherinish



you're serious about starting out, don't use ten dollar tools! A hand saw might work for something simple like a frame, but for anything more complex, it'll take you all day to saw.

## Room Transformation

Here are the basic tools needed for transforming a room:

- A **miter saw** - the first power tool you'll need. It cuts pieces of wood very quickly, and at the angle you want. Miter saws aren't crazy expensive, but they can be very dangerous if you don't watch the safety videos! With mindfulness and proper usage, I think anyone can saw.
- A **power drill**.
- A **nail gun**.
- An **orbital sander** - basically, a round, powered sander. Sanding is a huge part of building, a step that I didn't know about before getting into DIYs. For any project I do, be it a dresser, nightstand or a desk, there is always hours of sanding.

## Painting

Thinking of painting something yourself? Before you start, know that painting is time consuming, tedious, and can get very overwhelming. But if you are ready



to try it, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Make sure you have a **clean roller**. You don't want lint and bits to end up on your wall that you're going to have to sand off later.
- Invest in a little bit of a **pricier paint**, because it ends up leveling out and applying much smoother than some of the cheaper paints. It also chips less, so it really ends up being more worth the money in the long run.
- The **prep work** in painting is very time consuming, but it's worth it. Put down plastic or paper, and tape the edges down to the floor. If you're painting walls and not the ceiling, put blue tape on the edge of the ceiling so that you don't paint it when you're doing the top corners.

## Wallpapering

When people ask me about wallpapering, here's what I say: Unless you absolutely love the wallpaper, do not put it up because you're going to get sick of it. If you *do* choose to go with wallpaper, don't use the kind that's a sticker. Use the proper kind that you need to wet and then put on. The sticker is exactly what it sounds like – a sticker that ends up bubbling. It's just not high quality.

I have this mindset in general when it comes to DIY projects: I like the real deal. No sticker floor tiles for me, and I don't try getting away with cheaper products and versions. I like when things last!

## Choosing Wood

I should mention that picking the wood you're going to use for a project is an important process! No piece of lumber is perfect, because it's from a natural tree. So when you go to Home Depot or Lowe's or anywhere else, don't just put a whole bunch of pieces into your cart! You need to take that piece of wood off the shelf, and lie it on the floor-- even if you're taking up the whole aisle! Then, examine and determine: Does it look straight? Does it look bowed? Does it look like something I want to go home and work with? Only when all these things check out, should *you* check out!

## What would you tell someone who has that itch to work on DIY projects?

1. **Do it!**
2. **Be okay with failure**, because you're never going to be perfect, and you won't be a pro right from the beginning. I still cringe from

some of my first projects, but I also have a feeling of pride in them because those are the projects that I started out with. A girl I know was getting into DIY, and I invited her to come to my house and look at stuff that I've done. At first, I told her not to look at the older projects, but then I thought: You know what? That's what I started with! She should see that! Of course those things have their rawness and imperfections. I'm so much better now, but you do have to start off as an amateur, and build up from there!

3. **Be realistic**. Take it from the woman who dabbled in plumbing and electricity because she wanted to renovate a full bathroom: Be realistic about what you're capable of as you are starting out. Then, work your way up from there.

Happy renovating! 🍷

For more construction inspiration, follow Shaina's Instagram [@shaina\\_green1](https://www.instagram.com/shaina_green1).



Pizza oven made from A to Z





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DIY HOBBY:



# Sourdough

Pnina (Levy) Hanoka, Crown Heights  
Graduating Class of 5761 (1991)



*I was always intimidated by the thought of making sourdough, but my friend Pnina Hanoka made it look so easy! I decided to visit her in Mei Menuchos and get a closer look at how she does it. When Pnina broke it down, I started thinking, “Maybe this is something that regular people can do!” And if it’s not, at least we’ll have an embrace interview for all of you to enjoy. :)*

## How did you get into sourdough?

Years ago, I was in the country for the summer. Someone told me that she made sourdough bread, and I was intrigued. But when she told me the process, I thought, “No way! This is way too complex!” I guess it wasn’t the right time for me yet...

A while later, I bought Artisan Bakehouse sourdough bread for Shabbos. I liked it so much that I started buying it more and more, until I realized: I don’t want to just buy this for Shabbos. I want to buy this every day! That’s when I decided to try and see how I could make it myself. My creative side was ready for the challenge.

It’s been seven years, and since then, I’ve been making the exact same recipe twice a week. I make dough #1 on Monday, and the dough stays fresh in the fridge, allowing me to bake a fresh loaf on Tuesday, then on Wednesday, then again on Thursday, and once more on Friday. Dough #2 happens on Thursday, and on Friday, in addition to the loaf I’ve baked from the first dough, I bake two loaves for Shabbos, one for Sunday, and one for Monday from this second batch. In short, I get to eat my sourdough every day! And I love getting other people started with this too.

## What benefit do you get from making sourdough?

I love the sensory experience! Back in elementary school, I was ahead of my time – always playing with Silly Putty. I’m grateful that my parents realized I needed that!

Sourdough also has health benefits – the fermented flour is beneficial for gut bacteria.

## Can you walk us through the process?

Sure! And I’ll be happy to share some tips and hacks along the way. :)

### Step #1: Feed the Starter

To make it from scratch, combine equal grams of water and flour, and feed it equal parts water and flour every day for two weeks, until it starts bubbling and fermenting. Try it as an experiment!

A much easier method I’d recommend is getting some starter from a friend. :) That way, all you need to do is activate it – i.e. feed it equal parts water and

*There's a bit of a learning curve, but once you get it, the process becomes a lot simpler.*

flour. After a few hours, it will double in size and be ready for use.

I should mention that making my sourdough on a schedule makes the process so much easier – I don’t have to feed or baby the starter too much!

### HACK: Here’s my current starter routine:

*Begin with 100 grams of starter.*

*Feed it with 100 grams of flour and 100 grams of water, making 300 grams total.*

*Use 200 grams for my recipe and keep the remaining 100 grams to feed again for the next batch!*



1. Bread Banneton Proofing Basket - Round 9" Inch
2. Jilmo Danish Dough Whisk, 12inch Stainless Steel Bread Whisk
3. Auban 100pcs Disposable Shower Caps, Plastic Clear
4. Hairnet: Disposable Mop Mob Bouffant Caps
5. Pro Dough Pastry Scraper\_Cutter\_Chopper Stainless Steel Mirror Polished with Measuring Scale Multipurpose- Cake, Pizza Cutter - Pastry Bread Separator Scale Knife



## Step #2: Make the Dough

I'll share the recipe I use. It yields four loaves of bread.

- 200 grams starter
- 1500 grams warm water
- 1000 grams bread flour
- 1000 grams whole spelt flour (I like One Degree from Apple Drugs)
- 80 grams honey
- 40 grams salt

**HACK:** See how I'm using weight measurements? It's not so common in American recipes, but I find that it ends up being a lot more accurate than volume measurements!

## Step #3: Mix

Mix the dough, until combined.

**HACK:** There's a special mixing tool I use (see picture) – it has a hole in the spoon, to reduce friction.

## Step #4: Stretch, Fold & Rest

Over the next two hours after your dough is mixed, every thirty minutes is stretch and fold time! In between that, the dough rests. This process helps develop the gluten in the dough. By the end of those two hours, you'll see how the dough becomes a lot more elastic and stretchy.

**HACK:** I actually don't have a hack for this step – it just has to be done! But the good news is that you don't need to stand over the dough. Just set a timer and keep coming back to it, or even better, train someone else in your household in this step so they can help out too!

## Step #5: Bulk Rise

Let the dough rise for 6-8 hours. The dough should approximately double in size.

**HACK:** You can make the dough in the morning and revisit later that day! To have for Shabbos, start making your dough on Thursday morning, and bake on Friday morning.

## Step #6: Shape

Divide the dough into four pieces (when making four loaves) and shape each one tightly, to hold its form.

**HACK:** I use a special tool for this (see scraper on previous page).

## Step #7: Overnight Rise

Place the dough into bannetons (proofing baskets), which let the dough breathe.

Cover the dough and let it rise in the fridge overnight.

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3







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**HACK:** For covering the dough, I use a plastic XL shower cap (the smaller ones won't fit).

**HACK:** Most people put some flour or a towel under the dough, but I line the baskets with hairnets for easier cleanup!

### Step #8: Bake

Take the dough out of the fridge, remove the plastic cover, and place each loaf into a separate cold Dutch oven.

Some people cover their loaves of bread with flour, but I don't do that. It makes a mess!

Score the dough with a kitchen knife – I usually make one or two long lines, but you can get creative with the patterns!

Bake at 475-500°F for one hour in the Dutch oven, covered.

**HACK:** Cover the dough with parchment paper, hold the Dutch oven, and literally flip the dough into the oven. The parchment paper prevents the Dutch oven

from getting dirty, and eliminates the need for extra flour.

**HACK:** Wondering why I didn't write to preheat the oven? Some people do that, but it makes the baking time a lot more complicated – you'll need to bake uncovered, then covered, and so on. Just put it in, cold, for one hour, covered!

And there you have it: Your very own sourdough! Just make sure you set a timer and take it out when it rings!

### What is a common misconception about making sourdough?

Well, this isn't a misconception – it's true: There's a bit of a learning curve, but once you get it, the process becomes a lot simpler. You need to have lots of time and lots of love to make sourdough. If you love doing it and you enjoy sourdough, then it works! I wouldn't have continued doing this for seven years straight, if not for my real passion for it. Try it, and you'll realize how doable it really is, and how gratifying it is to always have fresh bread in the house! ■

# The Hug of Family

Shaindy (Elgarten) Gluck, West Lafayette, Indiana  
*Graduating class of 5774 (2014)*



Standing at the Kosel after too many years away, I finally felt at home and at peace, the cool stone a reminder to me that no matter what the world believes, there is the truth rooted in holiness that will withstand the test of time.

This summer I was privileged to join the Chabad on Campus Kinus hosted in Eretz Yisroel. But allow me to backtrack for a moment.

My husband Avremel and I moved on Shlichus to Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana five years ago. We threw ourselves into creating a warm space for Jewish students on campus and boruch Hashem have seen lots of growth in the community.

Since Simchas Torah this year and the aftermath that followed, our shlichus took a very different turn. On that first Shabbos following the horrific attacks, Avremel and I watched the number of Shabbos RSVPs climb. My husband, typically the calmer one when it comes to these things, was stressed. How would we fit? We don't have enough chairs. Will there be enough food?

That Friday, it dawned on me that what the community needed wasn't the food or a chair to sit on. They needed a hug; they needed to be with family. And that Friday night, two-hundred and twenty students got the hug they needed as they squashed themselves into every corner of my house. Together, we resolved to be prouder and stand stronger as one.

The two semesters that followed were tumultuous, to say the least. Purdue is a highly academic school and rarely political, so this atmosphere was very new and brought on uncertainty for many of our students. Navigating this became our new challenge, but our goal remained the same, always: Do another mitzvah, learn more Torah, and be prouder Jews, especially on campus. The number of kippahs and Jewish stars seen on campus now is a heartwarmer amidst all the encampments, protests, and resolutions.

After an overwhelming year, the trip to Eretz Yisroel, meticulously planned down to the last detail by the incredible team at Chabad on Campus International, could not have come at a more appropriate time. One hundred and fifty Shluchos from campuses across the world were to join the Shluchos on Israeli campuses to offer support to each other, farbreng, and daven at the Kosel & the kevarim of our forefathers and mothers. I couldn't wait!

From the moment I set foot in Eretz Yisroel, I felt at ease. I was home. Where I live, I can't help but feel like an outsider at times, like when I'm in a DMV office in nowhere, Indiana. But in Eretz Yisroel I was in a bubble of familiarity, a warmth that only family can provide. I hadn't realized till that moment how much I needed this hug of my family of Shluchos from across the globe-- together in our land.

Visiting Kever Rochel and Chevron hit me differently on this trip than it did on past trips. Davening to our *mameh Rochel* to bring all her children home, with the sweet sound of children singing in the background, brought tears to my eyes. Having a mother to cry to has never felt more needed than now.

In Chevron, we heard Sara Nachshon's story of

*And that Friday night, two-hundred and twenty students got the hug they needed as they squashed themselves into every corner of my house.*

strength and courage— how she fought to bury her baby boy in the old cemetery in Chevron. The soldiers tried to stop her time and time again but she just kept pushing until finally, permission was granted to her. Sara was able to buy a plot of land to bury her son Avraham, just as our forefather Avraham once bought a plot of land to bury his wife Sara in this same city. As a mother, I can't fathom the strength it took for her to be of the first to settle in Chevron despite all the hardship that came along with it. Standing in the presence of such an incredible woman who fought for Am Yisroel was truly a humbling experience.

Friday night at the Kosel was another soulful experience for me, especially because I got to dance with a student of mine whom I ran into. This brought the experience full circle for me. The holiness in the air was palpable: Yidden gathered together, davening in different tunes that merged together into one voice as they rose above the crowd. It was a reminder of what lies behind all the ugliness we see and hear everywhere: A nation of love and unity with a beating heart and a prayer on its lips to one day be reunited with all our loved ones in our land with Moshiach.

Another big moment for me was visiting the mikvah in Sderot, which is the only mikvah in the world that is a complete bomb shelter. How often do we think twice about mundane tasks like taking a shower, buckling our kids into the car or putting cookies in the oven? In Sderot, with only twelve seconds to get to shelter when a siren goes off, you sure do think twice about getting in the shower, or how long it will take you to unstrap three kids from the back of the car, or if your cookies will even be worth it. Mikvah is another one of those regular tasks that I never thought about too





much. Ever since I moved on shlichus this mitzvah has become harder for me as I have to drive over an hour to get to the nearest mikvah, and since I live right at the end of the timezone, the journey can be really late at night. Visiting the amazing mikvah in Sderot and hearing the stories of the incredible women there, gave me a whole new perspective. Being scared the entire time you're in the mikvah that a siren may go off at any moment and you'll need to run, is an experience that is beyond me. This sacred and private mitzvah should never come with such a challenge! This stunning mikvah was constructed with these women in mind, providing them with a small break from the constant worry and the peace of mind that they so need for this mitzvah. I was in awe.

A visit to Nova was on the itinerary, and it was difficult and emotional. May the neshamos of the kedoshim whose lives were taken there have an aliyah, and may we be reunited with them with the coming of Moshiach.

We heard from Oren Laufer, who together with his father-in-law, Rami Davidian, saved seven-hundred and fifty people from the Nova Festival. A real-life hero who was ready to put his life in danger to save others.

Some other highlights of this incredible trip were: Visiting wounded soldiers in Sheba Medical center, visiting the Tzemach Tzedek Shul in the old city of Yerushalayim, walking around at the shuk, and far-brenging until four a.m. on Friday night.

All of the Shluchos on the trip shared similar challenges on their campuses this year. It was amazing to meet and connect with so many new people and share ideas for combating the antisemitism we encounter daily-- how to help our students walk taller and prouder, do one more mitzvah, come to one more Torah class, invite one new Jewish student.

Every interaction throughout this kinus was so meaningful to me and I came home rejuvenated to continue my shlichus with a fresh resolve and renewed strength. Being in Eretz Yisroel cleared the fog that had formed over me. It gave me a clearer view of the goal. I realized that I have to stop letting the noise get to me and continue to be there for my students during these uncertain times. This trip was a dose of emes and I couldn't be more grateful to the organizers for all the hard work they put in to make it happen.

May we all merit to be back in Eretz Yisroel together with Moshiach NOW! ■





# OVERCOMING *Life's* ADVERSITIES

I am in receipt of your letter in which you write about various recent events in your life — which were not in the category of obvious good — and you ask what your reaction should be.

In general, as you surely know, Jews are guided by the Torah, the “Torah of Life,” which is to say that Torah is the Jew’s true guide in everyday life. The Torah is also called Torah Or, the “Torah of Illumination,” since it illuminates the Jew’s life and its instructions are as clear and lucid as light itself.

One of the best-known portions of the Torah, which Jews recite daily in both morning and evening, is the portion of Shema, in which the Torah tells us to love G-d, “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

The Hebrew word *m’odecha*, generally translated as “your might,” also conveys the meaning of middah — “measure” or “dimension,” as our Sages explain. This means that a Jew has to love G-d regardless of the kind of “deal” he thinks is meted out to him by Divine providence.

...

The question now arises: Is the above something that can really be implemented, and if so, how is one to explain how this can actually be implemented?

To be sure, the human intellect is limited and cannot possibly fathom the Divine wisdom that is in the Torah. On the other hand, the Torah itself describes the Jewish people as a “wise and understanding people,” and it provides at least some explanation that helps us to understand, in however limited a degree, G-d’s ways.

One of the basic teachings of the Torah is that G-d does not expect anything of a human being that is beyond the human capacity to carry out.

This, in fact, is eminently understandable: Even a human being, who is a very long way away from absolute perfection, would not expect a tool that he has fashioned to perform in a capacity greater than its original design. Certainly G-d, the Creator of man, knows man’s capacities.

From this it naturally follows that when a Jew faces any kind of a test of faith, it is certain that he has been given the capacity to overcome it. And the more difficult the test, the greater are the individual’s capacities.

The reason that an individual is tested is not that G-d wants to know how well he will conduct himself, but in order that this person be afforded the opportunity to realize his potential, even that which is unknown to him. And when one’s potential capacities are released and activated, they become part and parcel of his or her arsenal, to be used for personal as well as communal benefit... ■

*(From a letter of the Rebbe. Translation from Healthy in Body, Mind and Spirit - Mental Health. Reprinted with permission from Sichos in English).*

# From High Horse to Humble Pie

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Anonymous



I'm the first to admit it: I used to judge people who struggled with mental health challenges. I "othered" them, I pitied them, and I definitely thought I was in a category above them. In the past, I harbored a subconscious judgment that mental illness was synonymous with dysfunction or a personality defect.

That is, until my own son landed in the psych ward. And while it was an excruciating and painful experience, I am grateful that it opened my eyes and helped me see the world differently.

The first thing I learned was that there is no “us” and “them.” Anyone can lose their mind; but the last people whom I thought it could happen to were my loved ones. I soon realized that the mind is fickle, and that every day that we are in our right minds is a day to be grateful for. And we are no better than someone who struggles in this regard.

Standing in the hospital, at the moment when my son was still in the throes of his mania, I felt fear that I would never get him back. And at that same moment, I felt a deep sense of calm. If that was what Hashem would want for this child, that would be ok. If I would have to care for him as if he were a small child, I would be ok with Hashem’s plan. I realized that I had no control over the outcome; I could not carry out my dreams of a future and a career for my son. With this realization came a sense of freedom. My whole life I had been fighting desperately to be functional and raise functional children. Now, I realized I could let go of trying so hard to control reality. My son’s journey was going to be the journey Hashem wanted him to have. This feeling of being held by Hashem helped protect me from feeling traumatized by the experience.

There was also a sense of freedom in actually facing my biggest fear-- the fear of losing my mind. When it happened to my son, I realized that while it is clearly possible for this to happen to anyone, it is also possible to survive it. Boruch Hashem, medication did wonders for my son, and he is doing really well now. But that “Aha!” moment has not left me. I realized at that moment that I still loved my son fiercely, and that his struggles were out of both his and my control completely. My son’s experience also brought our family closer together, as each of his siblings embraced him with deep love and support.

This experience has made me more compassionate toward those facing challenges in general, and specifically, toward those dealing with mental health challenges. I realized that people are worthy and lovable the way they are. I realized that people cannot be defined by the metrics of success that I had often used in the past, like a certain position, or an external accomplishment.

*Standing in the hospital, at the moment when my son was still in the throes of his mania, I felt fear that I would never get him back. And at that same moment, I felt a deep sense of calm.*

This whole experience has been so humbling for me. When I walk down the street and see someone who is clearly unwell, I smile genuinely at them. I trust that they are on the specific journey Hashem has set out for them, and I know that I am in no better shape or form than they are.

My son is a sensitive soul. After this episode, he struggled with his self-esteem, feeling bad about himself for having gone through this phase in his life. And as I reassure him that he is okay, that he is not “less-than,” that it is more common than he realizes, that some of the greatest roshei yeshiva or rabbis whom he admires also may have struggled with their mental health, I know that I mean every word that I say to him. When my son asks me in a vulnerable moment if he disappointed me or “ruined” my family’s “perfect name,” I can confidently tell him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that what happened to him has only enhanced our family, and that we are not ashamed of him. We are proud of him.

This doesn’t mean that we broadcast his experience to the world. We want to preserve his dignity, and we respect his desire for people not to know. But what I so deeply *do* want the world -- and my son-- to know, is this:

The fact that he struggled, the fact that a Hatzalah van had to bring him, sirens blaring, to the psych ward because of an episode, the fact that he takes medication daily for his mental health, does not take away *at all* from who he is in his essence: a lovable, worthy and beautiful soul, here on this earth, traveling the journey that Hashem set out for him. ■

# Memories of Magic and Mayhem



Mindy Blumenfeld, Boro Park, New York  
*Former Teacher, Bais Rivkah Elementary School*



**I**taught in Bais Rivkah back in the days when school was still on Church Avenue. The windows of the seventh grade classroom faced Erasmus High School. We'd hear loud popping sounds and assume it was shots fired from within Erasmus, or the basketballs pounding the gym walls. It could've been either one, and we probably weren't wrong—about the gunshots, I mean.



I ended up in Bais Rivkah because my best friend, Raiza Silber -- Miss Schonbrun in the old days-- was teaching fourth grade, when one day she told me: "Mindy, they need a substitute." And so, I pretty much came straight off the airplane from Eretz Yisroel-- where I had been living with my little son and tall husband-- straight into Bais Rivkah. I jumped into teaching Math to some seventh graders. Problem was, I don't do math. I had no idea how to teach math, so I'm not quite sure what I did instead, but it was definitely not math.

But Mrs. Reicher (Burg, in those days) hired me for the next year as a seventh grade Language Arts teacher and I was really excited because I loved, loved, *loved* teaching Writing and Literature (not grammar though—that was in the same category as math, if you really want to know), and I had completely fallen in love with Bais Rivkah's girls. The students were fun, refreshing, open, honest, and simply full of personality. What exactly was there not to love? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I loved the girls, my subjects, working for Mrs. Reicher, listening to gunshots (or basketballs) in the yard across my window, and the most amazing thing of all—the Lubavitcher Rebbe!

When I think back and realize that as a teacher, I merited to attend the Lag B'omer parades, and the Rebbe was there, giving us dollars, telling us how important teachers are to the school, to the world, I feel incredibly awestruck that I had this privilege.

Okay, so let me share some memories of my days at Bais Rivkah.

I was a real newbie teacher. Believe it or not, my teacher from high school— who was also my sister's best friend— was going to Columbia University at the time, to become an important something or another in education. And to my luck, she used me and my classroom to do all her papers for college. So I was mentored by a genius of a teacher and without going to college, got a full education on how to teach my students reading, writing, grammar, and spelling.

I'm not going to bore you with the details, but suffice it to say that my class was what you would generously describe as controlled chaos, with girls lying on the floor with their books or writing folders-- with pillows, blankets and whatnot-- looking like they were having a sleepover party. But there was hard work going on. Girls worked together, helping each other edit and revise their pieces; girls became readers for the first time in their lives; my classroom became a community of writers.

*I'm not going to bore you with the details, but suffice it to say that my class was what you would generously describe as controlled chaos, with girls lying on the floor with their books or writing folders-- with pillows, blankets and whatnot-- looking like they were having a sleepover party.*

I will share the bad stuff, too. I had one class—a bunch of brilliant, fabulous girls—who somehow didn't click with me or with this method of reading and writing that my other classes adored. They wanted me to go back to the traditional way of teaching, and frankly, I should have listened. I had a miserable year with them, they had a miserable year with me, and nobody learned anything—except I learned that I didn't know how to listen to my students and find out what they needed, what wasn't working, and why. So if any of you here used to be in that class of mine and are reading, I want to apologize for not hearing you, for not knowing how your lives were turned upside down at home and how you were struggling just to survive some really tough stuff like divorce and poverty, illness and death, and other things that no kid should have to deal with. When you came to school, you needed order, not chaos-- even the controlled kind.



*Her best friend said, very warmly, “Mrs. Blumenfeld, she can’t give them to you. They are about her mother. They are private.”*

You needed to be contained, and while my style was intended to encourage independence, you were not ready for that.

I had another rotten experience. I was a fabulous seventh grade teacher to most of my students, most years. But one year, Bais Rivkah was short a sixth grade science teacher. Mrs. Halpert, who is still a teacher at Bais Rivkah, and I’m sure still a numero uno science teacher, was in my carpool every day and she told me, “Mindy, take the parallel science class. I will help you with it.”

Dumb, dumb move. Mrs. Halpert is a very dynamic teacher, so brilliant and wonderful and interesting, so passionate about her subject, that no matter how good I was at Language Arts, the single sixth grade class I taught that year never forgave me for not being Mrs. Halpert. I don’t blame them. I just wasn’t her. But-- and this is a big but-- the next year, when I had that same class again, this time for Language Arts, I made it up to them.

I will never forget how, on the last day of school, two delicious students came up to my desk.

“Mrs. Blumenfeld,” they said, “Can we give you a kiss?”

Until today, I regret my response. “No,” I said.

Let me tell you: I loved those kids, their whole class. If I would have been then the person that I am now, a hugger, a kisser, a grandmother of twenty adorable

grandkids, I would have said, “Of course!” and swept those darling students into a grand big hug and let them each kiss one cheek.

You have no idea how much I miss teaching.

I have taught in many schools, all grades. And I say this in all honesty: Bais Rivkah was my favorite school to teach in.

Hmm. Let me see. Any other memories?

Yes. I remember that simply yummy student who had lost her mother sometime before seventh grade started. She had a shy smile and a deep heart. She wrote all year long-- wrote and wrote and wrote. But she refused to hand in a single piece of writing for me to grade. Her best friend partnered up with her to work with her on revision and editing and do all the stuff my students were supposed to do. Seriously, that kid worked hard on those pieces of writing and finished each one. But I didn’t get to read a single one. She would smile at me sweetly when I asked her--just as sweetly--for her writing.

Her best friend said, very warmly, “Mrs. Blumenfeld, she can’t give them to you. They are about her mother. They are private.” And the author would stand right near her protective best friend and nod her head in agreement. No chutzpah; just a beautiful friendship and serious writing that was not meant for my eyes.

I remember loving those two kids. And I didn’t push it. I saw her hard work, even if I never read the work. Silly me for saying, “If I don’t see the work, I can’t give you one hundred percent on it. I will have to take off points.” She agreed--still sweetly.

I wish I could go back and give her the hundreds she deserved.

I have another not-so-pleasant memory. It’s about that seventh grade class who didn’t like the way I taught. They were full of personality and it came with a little



bit of boundary pushing, and one of those boundaries was making those prank calls. Some girls did it over and over, driving me nuts all evening. Their behavior in class was out of bounds, and honestly, I was as young and stupid as they were. I wish I had known how to reach them, how to understand them better. But I didn't. Instead, things escalated. There was a school trip at the end of the year, to Philadelphia, that I chaperoned. Two girls weren't allowed to come because of their prank calls and other not-okay behavior. But then when we were supposed to return home, a bus broke down and all the girls begged to stay behind with me on the bus that got stranded.

I didn't let a single girl from that class stay behind with me.

They were really wonderful kids and I was a really good teacher. I think about that year a lot, and what I could have done better, and how teachers play such a powerful role in kids' lives and how sometimes, teachers, too, are human—and dumb.

It's been a hundred years since I left Bais Rivkah. So many things have changed in my life. I became a therapist, I married off my children, my youngest child had cancer, I became an author, a columnist, a speaker, a grandmother.

I wonder, too, about my Bais Rivkah students. Are they doing well? Are they happy? Do they forgive me for the stuff I didn't mean to do as I forgive them for being the kids they were supposed to be? I wonder where they are now, and how their lives turned out. I wonder if they remember me and the good times we had, pillows and blankets on the floor, reading and writing, and having fun.

Because it *was* fun.

Reach out and say hello. I really miss you, girls. ■

*Mindy Blumenfeld, once a seventh grade teacher in Bais Rivkah Elementary School, is now a therapist in private practice. She is also a writer, columnist for Binah, and author of Therapy Shmerapy and Hillel and the Paper Menschies—a hybrid picture-comic book for kids. When she isn't therapizing teens and adults or writing, she's kissing up her grandchildren, doing yoga, or rollerblading.*

*She really wants to hear from her old students (are you old yet?)! You can reach her at [Mindy.blumenfeld@gmail.com](mailto:Mindy.blumenfeld@gmail.com) and can check out her work at [www.mindy-blumenfeld.com](http://www.mindy-blumenfeld.com).*

bethrivkah.edu/babygift'."/>

**MAZAL TOV!**

**מזל טוב!**

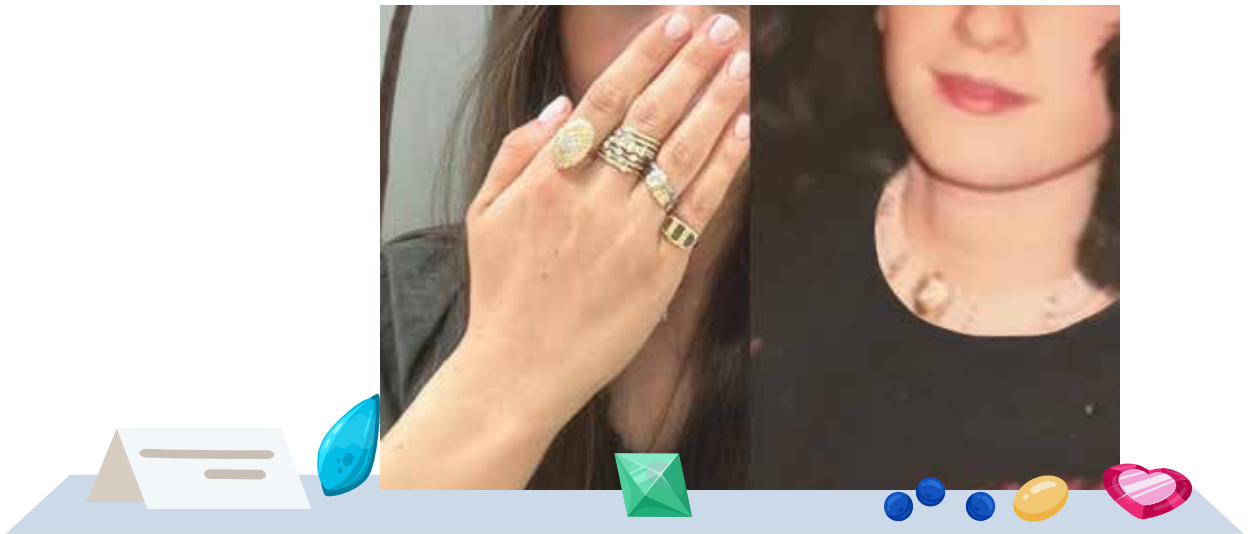
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# DESHA CRAFTED



Chava (Farkash) Merovitch, Cedarhurst, NY  
*Graduating class of 5773 (2013)*



**HAVE YOU EVER** walked into a jewelry store only to feel underwhelmed by the selection, seeing the same pieces that you've noticed are circulating in your community? While most jewelry stores offer a wide array of beautiful pieces, few stand out as exceptional or truly unique. My passion for distinctive jewelry was really born once I discovered antique and vintage jewelry. The craftsmanship, weight, and old-world charm of these pieces were unlike anything I had ever encountered before. Thus began my journey of curating a small yet extraordinary collection of jewelry for people to purchase and enjoy. Each sale felt bittersweet as it reminded me that I'll never encounter a piece quite like it again.



By day, I work as a makeup artist, often meeting brides-to-be searching for that special piece, be it for their engagement gift or wedding ring. Many express admiration for the jewelry they see, but few find pieces they truly adore. It struck me that having a budget to invest in jewelry should mean finding pieces you love and never want to part with. This recurring sentiment inspired the creation of Desha.

For years, I had been designing my own jewelry, often



repurposing vintage pieces and breathing new life into them. I've crafted pieces for friends and family, and now, I'm excited to expand that service to the public. To me, jewelry is like a photograph—it preserves memories and carries within it a sense of nostalgia. Each piece serves as a marker of life's significant moments. Whether it's an anniversary necklace, an engagement ring, or a pair of heirloom earrings, it is a treasure that carries timeless value.

At Desha, you'll find a curated collection of ready-to-wear vintage and antique fine jewelry.

Alternatively, I can guide you through creating a bespoke masterpiece from scratch or transforming a vintage piece filled with memories into a modern-day beauty.

Behind every Desha-designed piece, there is a story waiting to be told—your story. You can experience magic when your jewelry becomes more than just an accessory; it becomes a meaningful and timeless reflection of the chapters in your life.

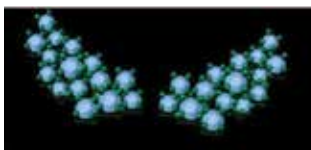
Take Client S for example. Client S has a signifi-

*To me, jewelry is like a photograph—it preserves memories and carries within it a sense of nostalgia.*

cant milestone event approaching. While she typically doesn't wear much jewelry, she is eager to create a unique pair of cocktail earrings that are both show-stopping and timeless. She desires a center stone that matches the color of her eyes, complemented by diamonds. It's really important that this statement piece can be worn on multiple occasions, not just once a year.

We collaborated on the design of her cocktail earrings, deciding that the colored stone should be detachable so that the diamond cluster can be worn independently as a stud, offering versatility.

The process began with a visit to the jeweler to play with scale and select the perfect stone. We made several adjustments to the diamond cluster until it was precisely to her taste. There was considerable back-and-forth and behind-the-scenes work, but the final piece was absolute perfection. It was worth the effort and the amendments, because it fulfilled her jewelry dream for a perfect, unique, and timeless earring. ■



# A Taste of Bais Rivkah



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

Fruma (Silberstein) Resnick  
Pleasanton, CA

Graduating class  
of 5760 (2000)



FRUMA RESNICK IS A  
SHLUCHA IN TRI-VALLEY,  
CALIFORNIA.





## APPLE & HONEY TORTE

### APPLE FILLING INGREDIENTS:

- 4 large apples, peeled and cut into  
¼ inch slices
- Juice from 1 lemon
- ½ cup honey (divided)
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- Pinch salt

### TORTE INGREDIENTS:

- 1 stick (½ cup) margarine
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Pinch salt
- 2 eggs\*

### Directions:

1. In a medium bowl, place apple slices, juice of 1 lemon, ¼ cup honey (the remaining honey will be used to drizzle at the end), cinnamon and salt. Mix well and set aside. It's important to let the apples sit in the juice for a few minutes.
2. In a mixer, beat margarine and sugar together until

creamy.

3. Add flour, baking powder, salt and eggs and mix well. Batter should be smooth and creamy.
4. Pour batter into a greased 9-inch springform pan or 2 disposable round foil pans lined with parchment paper.
5. Smooth out batter and top with apples, either laying apples out neatly in a nice design or sprinkling on top.
6. Pour the juice that has collected in the apple bowl on top.
7. Drizzle with the remaining ¼ cup honey and bake at 350°F for 45 minutes—1 hour (or until cake is set). Enjoy!



## SIMANIM-INSPIRED SALAD

*Bursting with flavor and color, this presents beautifully in a large salad bowl or individually plated.*

### SALAD INGREDIENTS:

- 8 oz mixed greens\*
- 1 cup shredded purple cabbage\*
- 2 leeks\*, sliced and sautéed or roasted until soft
- 2 carrots, peeled into long strands
- 3 small cooked beets, cubed
- 5 medjool dates\*, pitted and sliced in rounds
- ¼ cup pomegranate seeds
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds

### SALAD DRESSING INGREDIENTS:

- ¾ cup fresh squeezed lemon juice
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- 1 Tbsp sumac
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper

#### Directions:

1. Place all dressing ingredients into a container and shake well until combined.
2. Assemble salad and pour dressing over.
3. Serve immediately. Enjoy!



## HONEY CHICKEN MEDLEY

*This is a real crowd-pleaser and even serves well reheated. I like to serve it for a Yom Tov lunch because I can prep it in advance, pop it in the oven to reheat or warm in a chafing dish and it's good to go. (I keep the chicken and vegetables separate until the final warming so the veggies don't get mushy).*

### CHICKEN INGREDIENTS:

- 3 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into strips

- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup olive oil
- 8 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp black pepper

### VEGGIE INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large purple onion, cut into strips
- 8 oz. mushrooms, cut in half
- 2 unpeeled zucchini, sliced in half moons
- 1 red pepper, cut into strips
- 1 yellow pepper, cut into strips
- 2-4 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 (sometimes 2) baking sheets lined with parchment paper

#### Directions:

1. Mix honey, soy sauce, olive oil, garlic, ginger, and pepper together to create a sauce.
2. Pour sauce over chicken and toss well.
3. Pour chicken in a large foil pan or baking dish.
4. Prep veggies and toss with olive oil and a sprinkle of salt and pepper.
5. Place the chicken and veggies pans into the oven and roast at 375°F for 20-30 minutes until both are cooked through; veggies should be cooked but not mushy.
6. Pour the cooked veggies into the chicken and toss well, fully coating the veggies with the sauce.
7. Place back into the oven and roast for another 5 minutes. Serve and enjoy!

*\*Please consult your local Orthodox rabbi for guidance on how to check this food.*



**Moshe Shagalow**  
**Menachem Freeman**

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*“Chinuch is the process and endeavor of revealing the neshama of a child. To the point that they can strongly and confidently respond to the question, ‘who am I’ with, ‘I’m a piece of the Aibeshter, and I’m in this world to serve him.’”*

*- Mrs. Chanie Wolf*



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Talent



## GIGANTIC LOVE

Mussia (Lipskier)  
Kaminetzky,  
Melbourne, Australia

*Graduating class  
of 5770 (2009)*

Like a tiny fist around your  
finger,  
Can lock your heart in giant  
love,  
Like a long-lost twin, torn  
from your shoulder,  
Like raindrops tear from the  
sky above,

A little land, a little people,  
Few, it's true, but never  
small,  
The constant inner cord's  
vibration,  
Ties us tightly, one to all.

It weighs our hearts now,  
sharply so,  
It stays upon us night and  
day,

A longing crying from our  
depths,  
To pull our family home and  
away.

A million different real  
opinions,  
A million changes, life  
demands,  
A million people to find  
home in,  
A million different colored  
hands.

But we are one, we have one  
soul,  
We run deeper than the  
earth,  
We run higher than the  
heavens,  
G-d alone knows what we're  
worth.

Who can understand the

heart ache,  
Faced with countless heart-  
less foes,  
Who can comfort or find  
comfort,  
While such relentless horror  
grows.

Who can dare to justify,  
And mete out justice  
through their hate,  
In venomous, faceless words  
typed neatly,  
Emboldened, ugly hearts  
relate.

A little land, a little people,  
Surrounded by so many  
beasts,  
While teeth are bared, we  
can't be scared,  
Upon our fear this terror  
feasts.

We won't be silenced, Never  
Again!

We won't be bowed, we won't  
be dimmed,  
We have a gift we hold forever,  
In Sapphire, words etched and  
rimmed.

We are etched into this Land,  
Engraved beneath His only  
throne,  
Call it holy, call it truth, which-  
ever it is,  
Call it your own.

Claim or let it claim you,  
This force above, both death  
and life,  
Name or let it name you,  
And rid your mind of doubt  
and strife.

You are the purpose, the  
reason, the truth,  
The holy, the mountain, the  
colors, the coat,  
The only child born to ones  
past their youth,  
The precious one saved in a  
basket-made boat.

We'll hold to each other,  
As long as it takes,  
We're just getting stronger,  
While all the world shakes,

With each other and our G-d,  
We're coming back home,  
Connecting, we're forging,

The real iron dome.

United in essence,  
From close and from far,  
A little land, a little people...  
We know who we are.

And soon, and soon, and  
sooner,  
The moon will shine just as  
the sun,  
The truth will not be covered,  
And all the heart ache will be  
done.

And soon, and soon, and  
sooner,  
The pain will be left in the past,  
The ugliness transformed to  
beauty,  
The children all returned  
at last.

United in person,  
Come home from so far,  
A little people, a little land...  
All will know,  
Just who we are. ■



## THE JOURNEY

Chana (Metzger) Perman,  
Toronto, Canada

*Graduating class  
of 5750 (1990)*

Some slide in skates,  
Others glide on jet,  
We're all on some journey,  
A soul is the ticket you get.

When roads scream unpaved,  
And trails bear snakes,  
Keep eyes trained on lessons,  
Being there, no mistakes.

We are only moving forward,  
Some days it doesn't seem so,  
Flat tire, high wire,  
Then the blinding snow.

But don't let go,  
Plod onward,  
Look forward,  
The journey is the pearl,  
Destinations are evasive,  
Traveling through this world.

Push through,  
Jump over,  
The journey is the goal,  
Refining, upward climbing,  
Attaining your perfect whole. ■

*Chana has been in the field of education for thirty years. Her cherished roles as Jewish woman, mother and Learning Strategies instructor provide inspiration and material for writing at every turn.*

## MY MEDITATION

Chani (Zalmanov) Vaisfiche,  
Crown Heights

*Graduating class  
of 5765 (2005)*

(Breathe in) I am safe...  
(Breathe out) Even when I feel unsafe.

I am respected ... Even when I feel disrespected.

I am valued... Even when I feel devalued.

I am beautiful... Even when I feel ugly.

I am loved... Even when I feel unloved.

I am appreciated... Even when I feel unappreciated.

I am grateful... Even when I feel angry.

I am treasured... Even when I feel trashed.

I am okay... Even when I feel like a mess.

I am worthy... Even when I feel guilty.

My mind, my soul, my heart,  
my body

All one,

Created by The One.

Always loved valued and worthy,

Even when I feel...



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# Keepsakes



## Snapshots from the Younger Divisions of Bais Rivkah

Do you recognize anyone in the photos?  
Let us know at [history@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:history@bethrivkah.edu)

Have photos of your Bais Rivkah experience?  
Please let us know.



Bais Rivkah Elementary Division, Church Avenue between 1973-75

### Bottom Row, L to R\*:

Kenny (Minkowitz) Feigenson, Dini (Schanowitz)  
Gorman, Devoiry (Wilschanski) Reicher, Rochel  
(Friedman) ?, Yehudis (Lipskier) Braun, ?, Nechama  
Dina (Rosenblum) Bergstein

### Middle row, L to R\*:

Dina (Feldman) Deitsch, Shternie (Schwei) Ginsberg, ?,  
Dini (Haskelovitch) Uminer

### Top row, L to R\*

?, Dinie (Laine) Rapoport, ?, ?, Chanie (Neubort)  
Anzelak

Teacher in green\*: Mrs. Toby Leider



\*These are the faces that have been identified. Recognize someone you know? Share it with us! If you have any corrections or additional details, please contact us at [alumni@bethrivkah.edu](mailto:alumni@bethrivkah.edu).



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