

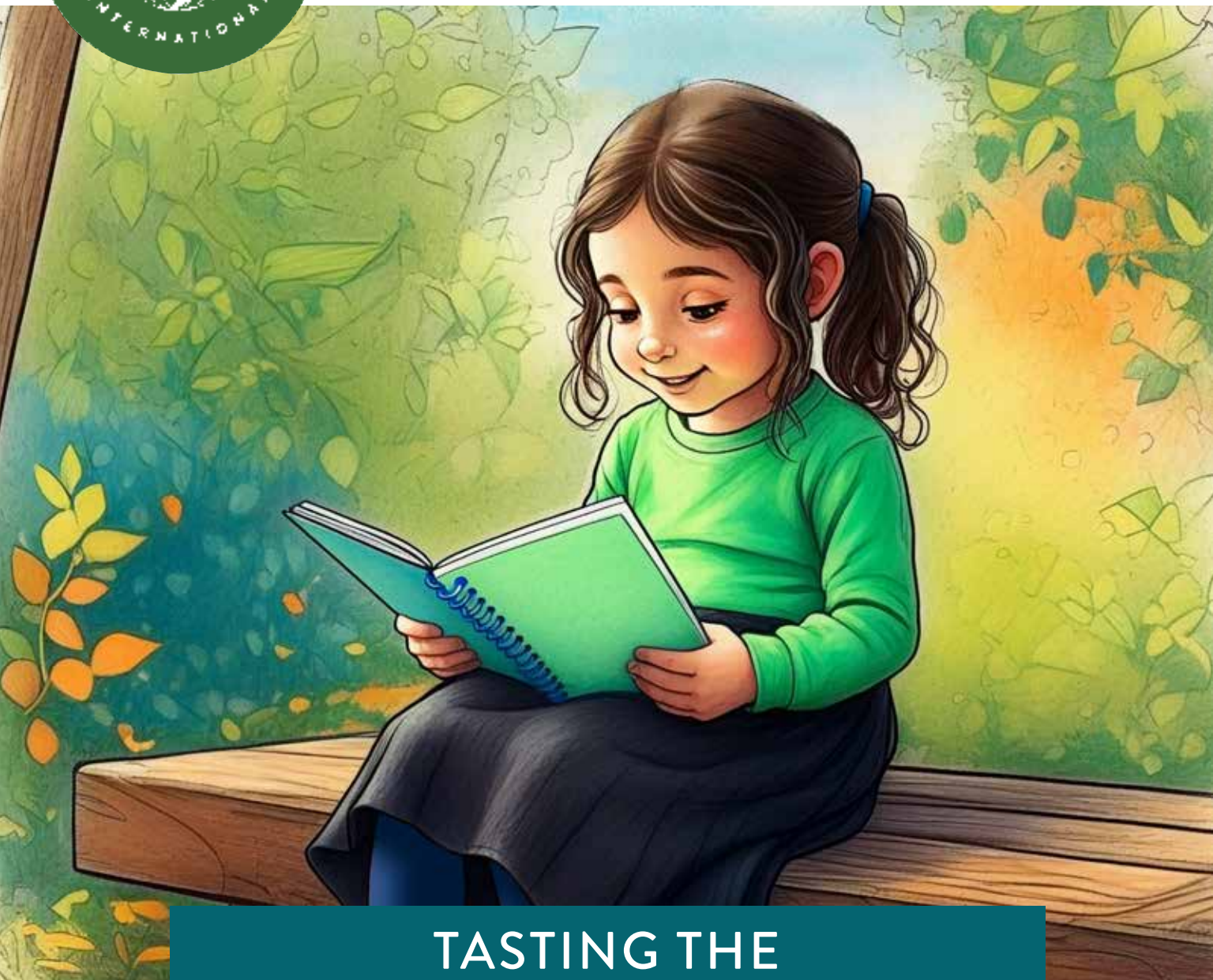


FALL 5786

ב"ה Volume 7, Issue 1

EMBRACE

Uniting and inspiring the worldwide community of Bais Rivkah Alumnae



TASTING THE SWEETNESS OF TORAH

ON THE
BLESSING OF A
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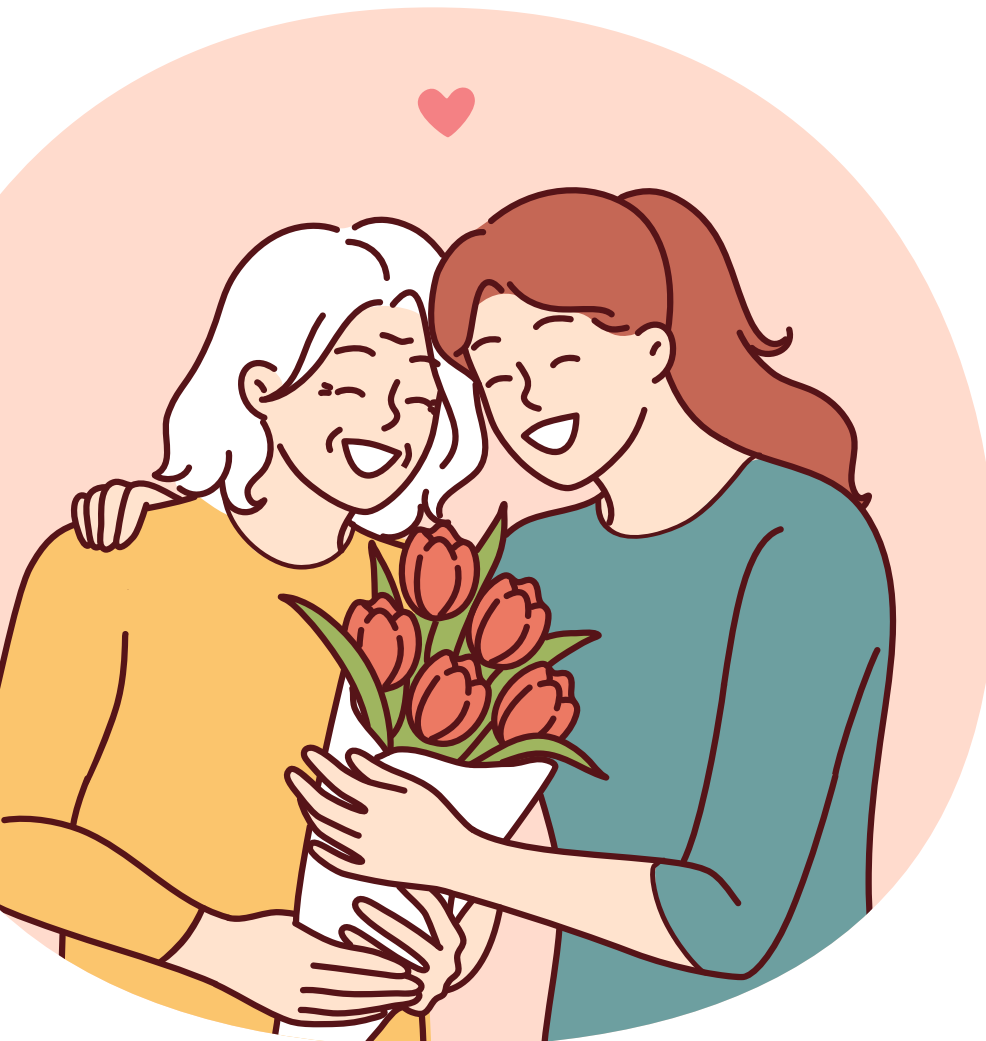
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From the REBBE

נשיא דורנו

By the Grace of G-d
Erev Rosh Hashanah 5712
Brooklyn, NY

Mr. Benjamin Glazer
1775 Broadway, New York, NY

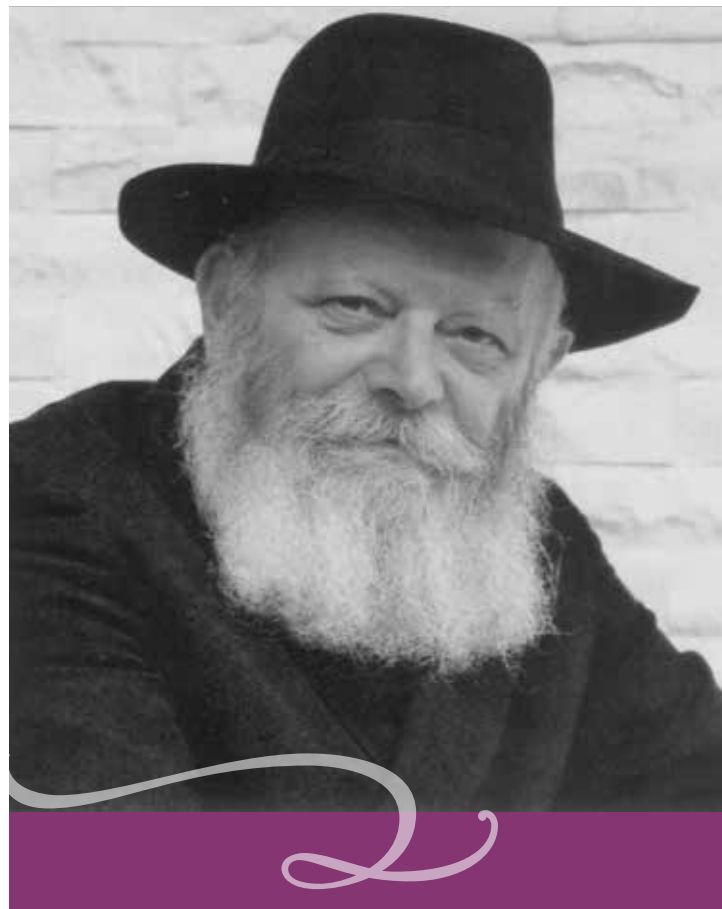
Dear Mr. Glazer,

Itake this opportunity to extend to you my prayerful wishes of *kesivah vachasimah tovah*, for a happy and blessed year, materially and spiritually.

The new year is ushered in with a host of Divinely ordained solemn days and festivals, rich in *mitzvos* and sacred customs. Every Jew— man, woman and child— finds profound inspiration in these holy days.

On our end, we must see to it that these precious moments in which we come closest to G-d, the Torah and Jewish fellowship, do not become lost to us, but hold their influence on us throughout the year, to inspire us to greater accomplishments in our duties to Hashem and our fellow man.

Foremost among these duties and accomplishments is, surely, your continuous and growing participation in the holy work of our institutions in the fields of education, the dissemination of the Torah, and the strengthening of *mitzvos* and good deeds in everyday life. These activities offer generous receptacles



We must see to it that these precious moments in which we come closest to G-d, the Torah and Jewish fellowship, do not become lost to us, but hold their influence on us throughout the year.

to receive and enjoy the blessings of our Heavenly Father.

With heartfelt wishes for a *shanah tovah u'mesukah* to you and yours,

M. Schneerson

P.S. Enclosed is a timely message. ■

ב"ה



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A Year Dipped in Honey

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



“Dip the apple in the honey, make a *brocha* loud and clear...”
It’s the song every three-year-old sings, their voices dripping with honey.

At first glance, it would seem like a custom just for the little ones — a sweet treat for toddlers, like the honey they lick at their *areinfirinish*. And yet, at every Rosh Hashanah table, from the youngest child to the eldest grandfather, we all dip apples in honey.

In Yiddishkeit, the most spiritual of concepts are embodied in the most physical of ways, and the spiritual is never divorced from the physical. The apple and honey aren’t just symbols; they’re an experience. When we ask Hashem for a sweet new year, we don’t just say it. We want to *feel* it. We want to *taste* it. We are asking for a year that is not just hidden good but good that we can see, taste, and celebrate openly.

That is the way it is with all our requests. We don’t want things to remain only in the esoteric. We want to train even our *guf* — our bodies, our senses, our *Nefesh Ha’behamis* — to crave the sweetness of Hashem’s ways.

Every morning we ask Hashem “*Veha’arev na Hashem Elokeinu es divrei Sora’secha be’finu uvi’fi kol amcha beis Yisroel...*”

“Please sweeten, Hashem our G-d, the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your nation,

Beis Yisroel; and may we and our descendants, all of us, be among those who know Your Name.”

We don’t want our Yiddishkeit to be dry or distant. We want it to be alive. We want to feel a sweet, revealed connection to Hashem.

In this issue, you’ll read about the sweetness of Yiddishkeit, whether it’s experienced through *chinuch*, in the careful crafting of a leather *tefillin* bag, or in small, powerful moments of daily connection.

Our hope is that this Tishrei, you won’t just ask for a good year.

You’ll *taste* it.

You’ll *live* it.

And you’ll *feel* it — in every part of who you are.

Wishing you a truly sweet year, in every sense of the word. And may we merit to greet the new year in the sweetest of ways, with the complete revelation of Moshiach, in the land flowing with milk and sweet honey.

Sara Blau

A background image of a field of purple lavender flowers with several bees flying around them. The image is slightly blurred, creating a soft, dreamy atmosphere.

Message *from* the Chairman

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov שיחי

Esteemed Alumnae תח"ה,

As we prepare for a new year, those of us who merited to receive a piece of honey cake from the Rebbe זצ"ל along with a wish for *le'shana tovah u'mesukah*, are reminded once again of that humbling and uplifting experience. The Rebbe, *nesi doreinu*, would take the time to personally give everyone who so desired, a piece of honey cake and a blessing for a good, sweet year. The implication of "good and sweet" was that the new year not only be a good year but also "sweet,"-- i.e., good that we would be able to see and appreciate.

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, we dip an apple into honey as we daven for a *shana tovah u'mesukah*. Because of this Rosh Hashanah minhag, I think now is an opportune

time to talk about honey and its practical lessons for us.

Eretz Yisroel is described in the Torah as a “land flowing with milk and honey¹.” There are several opinions regarding what this means. According to Rabbi Akiva², the honey spoken of in the Torah refers to bee’s honey. The Rebbe³ quotes the Alter Rebbe⁴ as saying⁵ that “milk and honey” refers to different aspects of *Pnimiyyus HaTorah*. Going with this interpretation, a land flowing with honey implies that *Pnimiyyus HaTorah* should come “down to earth”-- down to the most tangible levels of understanding.

This is the particular aim and goal of Chassidus Chabad. And this is the special characteristic and added value of the chinuch that you received at Bais Rivkah. You learned to take the deepest truths of Torah and make them a tangible part of your personal day-to-day life.

Let’s explore some more aspects of honey and their lessons for us as Yidden, Chassidim, Chassidei Chabad and Bais Rivkah alumnae.

The first thing that comes to mind is the question: Why is honey a kosher food? Being that bees are non-kosher creatures, shouldn’t whatever comes from their bodies be considered non-kosher as well?

The answer is that honey is not produced from the bee’s body, but *through* it. The honey does not contain anything from the bee itself. The bee produces an enzyme that breaks down the nectar molecules that it collects from the flowers, converting them into honey which is then deposited into the beehive.

The Rebbe points out that the same is true regarding our role as teachers of Chassidus. We must transmit that which we receive without adding anything of our own. It is *then* that we can be sure that our teachings of Chassidus are pure, authentic and “kosher” and will have an impact on the receiver.

Another point to ponder: The Yidden are compared to bees, who do all their work for the sake of their owner⁶. A bee works its whole lifetime in order to gather and produce half a spoonful of honey. From the bee’s perspective this probably doesn’t feel too productive, but from its owner’s perspective, this work is very valuable. While the

The Rebbe, nesi doreinu, would take the time to personally give everyone who so desired, a piece of honey cake and a blessing for a good, sweet year. The implication of “good and sweet” was that the new year not only be a good year but also “sweet,”-- i.e., good that we would be able to see and appreciate.

bee doesn’t care about its own individual accomplishment, the work of all of the bees combined is very significant to the owner.

In a similar way, as Yidden we dedicate our lives to produce that which we can in order to achieve the goals of our owner – Hashem. When Rosh Hashanah comes around we make a Cheshbon Hanefesh and are faced with the challenge of calculating our accomplishments accurately. Did we do enough? Was our behavior good enough?

The Rebbe cites in Hayom Yom⁷ the Alter Rebbe’s quote of Reb Mordechai Hatzaddik who quoted the Baal Shem Tov as saying that “a neshama comes down to this world for seventy or eighty years just to do a favor for another. This is true even if it’s just material help that he extends; it is especially so if it is regarding spiritual matters.” One might wonder: Is it really worth living a lifetime, with all of its trials and tribulations, just to do one act of kindness for one individual?

The above quote says: Yes.

How can that be so?

The answer is that we have no way of evaluating the real long-term, far-reaching impact of our actions. The Rambam⁸ explains that the only one who can truly evaluate the impact of each of our actions is Hashem, whose omniscience allows Him to see the full picture.

If the “beekeeper”, Hashem, considers our actions worthwhile, who are we to argue? Were we to see the bigger picture as Hashem does, we might view our seemingly insignificant accomplishments as great accomplishments.

Continued on page 53



*Mrs. Fay and
Rabbi Kranz
at an event in
Detroit,
Michigan.*

The Kranz Girls

From Students to Leaders

Dovid Zaklikowski

A group of teenage girls from Detroit deepened their connection to Yiddishkeit at Bais Rivkah and later blossomed into Jewish leaders. Decades later, these women continue to carry the light of their experiences, embodying the lasting impact of one dedicated Shliach who believed in their potential and helped ignite their spiritual journey.

He was tall, fun, fearless, and above all, nonjudgmental – not just in regard to Jewish observance, but also to intelligence or age. “It didn’t matter if you were a *lamdan*,” said Mrs. Devorah Loschak about Rabbi Yankel Kranz, “A lawyer or a *shmookie* teenager – he would talk to you.”

Rabbi Kranz was the newly appointed rabbi of Congregation Mishkan Israel in Detroit, Michigan, but he quickly gained a reputation as a disruptor. One day, his wife, Mrs. Fay Kranz, was standing in the supermarket checkout line when she overheard someone remark to a friend, “That new young rabbi is already making trouble. He wants to raise the *mechitza*. Believe me, he won’t last long.”

But he did, because he had a unique ability to connect with people on an individual level. One of those people was the young Mrs. Devorah Loschak. In her home, there was always a *Chassidische* atmosphere and deep reverence for *rebbeim*. While studying at the local Bais Yaakov, she also encountered powerful examples of *Chassidische* devotion, particularly from the school’s principal, Rabbi Sholom Goldstein.

She had a question that was bothering her deeply. Having heard stories of *rebbeim* both at home and from teachers, she felt that only a *tzaddik* could respond. “The only *tzaddik* I knew who

was accessible was the Rebbe,” she said.

One of the Lubavitcher teachers advised her to approach Rabbi Kranz for help in contacting the Rebbe. When told of her desire for a private audience, he suggested she start by writing a letter. He helped her draft one, but being who he was, he also asked if she’d like to learn Chassidus. She agreed and he told her to bring a friend.

She came to study with him every Sunday and quickly became hooked. Through that, she got to know the girls at the Mishkan Israel Hebrew School, where Rabbi Kranz was both principal and teacher. It wasn’t like the traditional Hebrew schools, which could feel off-putting. As Devorah Kroll, another one of the “Kranz Girls,” put it, “If you want to hate Judaism,” [go] join one of them.

When she first heard about the Mishkan Israel School, Kroll wasn’t interested in Yiddishkeit at all. But after some convincing, she joined and met Rabbi Kranz. It was the first time a rabbi had spoken to her in English. She was impressed that he never told her what she *should* do or believe. He didn’t push his own opinions – his knowledge drew people in. The more she spoke with him, the more she wanted to know.

“He was happy,” Mrs. Kroll said, “truthfully happy. And I wanted to know how that was. I



Above: Rabbi Yankel Kranz enthuses a crowd of curious people. (Photo: Library of Agudas Chasidei Chabad)

Right: Rabbi Sholom Goldstein (top left) at the wedding of Rabbi Velvel (sitting) and Mrs. Naomi Marasow, who were, at the time, Shluchim in Detroit. (Photo: Marasow family)



Mrs. Chaya
Teldon at her
graduation.



wanted him to share this great happiness with me.”

A similar story played out for Mrs. Rivkah Goldwasser. She heard about the Hebrew School from a neighbor, and it sounded more like fun than dry study. Though her parents belonged to another shul, she started going to Mishkan.

One way he influenced the older students at Mishkan was by taking them with him on visits to local Jewish camps, where he taught the campers about Jewish concepts and observances. He would encourage the teens to lead the singing and speak to the campers about various Jewish topics. They also visited the public schools they attended to encourage their friends to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lulav* and *esrog*.

Ever-innovative, Rabbi Kranz organized trips to give teens experiences in a Jewish atmosphere. They went snowmobiling, sightseeing and to Jewish expos as far as Washington, D.C. For the teens, the trips were wild. Rabbi Kranz would grab the microphone and shout, “Tell the world you are Jewish! Blast it out in the street!” He was fearless, unbothered by what others thought, and the teens reveled in his spontaneity.

On one trip to the East Coast, he brought them to Crown Heights for Shabbos. Every teenager responded differently: Some saw it as crime-ridden, others as rundown, but many found it to be the most meaningful experience of their lives. “Crown Heights was completely wonderful,” said Mrs. Loschak, “There was Hebrew on all of the stores, and rabbis walking all around.”

What they all experienced was a real, spiritual Shabbos, the kind they’d only heard about from Rabbi Kranz. Seeing the Rebbe for the first time,

they climbed onto benches and garbage cans to catch a glimpse. “I learned about *chassidim*,” Mrs. Loschak said. For her, “it was serious business to see the Rebbe.”

Trips of Pride

Over the years, the local Torah Umesorah day school maintained a strong partnership with Rabbi Kranz and the other Hebrew school teachers. Rabbi Goldstein served for several years as director of the local Camp Gan Israel, where many of the school teachers also worked. The Shluchim encouraged students who were more eager to deepen their studies to attend Beth Yehudah and its Bais Yaakov division. Principals and teachers supported their students in participating in Camp Gan Israel and other Chabad programs that suited their needs. Many of the teens from Mishkan also joined the Shabbos class that Rabbi Goldstein held at his home.

Some students, however, wanted to go further, and study at Bais Rivkah in Crown Heights. “There was no pressure at all,” said Mrs. Goldwasser. “No brainwashing.” Rabbi Kranz supported every girl’s path, whether it was to Bais Yaakov or Bais Rivkah. “He genuinely cared about people,” she said, “helping people to grow in their own way.”

For the many spectators it made little sense to send teens from suburban Michigan to gritty Brooklyn. Some families were shocked. Mrs. Teldon’s parents thought she had “fallen off the wagon.” Their Conservative rabbi said she’d grow out of it. Others were relieved that their children had found a welcoming place and embraced the idea that their teens were

going to study at the school.

One was Mrs. Janice Gittelson, who kept kosher, went to shul, and attended Mishkan. “I loved Hebrew school, I loved the minibus trips, I loved the learning and Rabbi Kranz’s personality,” she said. She also became close with Rabbi Avi and Yocheved Baitelman, Shluchim in the city. When the couple moved back to New York before her 11th grade year, she joined them.

Like the other students from Detroit, as if it was natural, she just showed up at Bais Rivkah.

Mrs. Teldon remembered saying goodbye to public school one Friday, then being driven to New York by Rabbi Kranz. By Monday, she was in her new class. “Twenty-five girls, fifty eyeballs looking,” she said. “It was like: *Hi, who is this creature?*”

Mrs. Loschak recalled arriving with no entrance exam. They didn’t know who paid for tuition or room and board. Rabbi Kranz handled it all, and Crown Heights embraced them.

Families like the Schustermans, Eichorns, Baumgartens, and Baitelmans opened their homes. Rebbetzin Lea Klein (nee Schusterman) said the community had become used to welcoming Jews who were exploring Yiddishkeit.

“It was not common but it was not so unusual,” she said. It was becoming the norm for people to come to Crown Heights searching for deeper meaning in life.

The doors of the Eichorn home were like a swinging

It didn’t matter if you were a lamdan,” said Mrs. Devorah Loschak about Rabbi Yankel Kranz, “A lawyer or a shnookie teenager – he would talk to you.”

door, always opening to welcome guests—many of whom ended up staying for extended periods. “The Eichorn girls were wonderful to anyone who came,” Mrs. Goldwasser said.

Despite the challenge of the constant flow of people, Mrs. Yachet Eichorn never complained. “She just did what needed to be done,” her daughter, Mrs. Nechama Hackner, said. “She didn’t ask a lot of questions.”

“It wasn’t such a big deal,” said Rebbetzin Klein. Mrs. Hackner agreed: “The Crown Heights community stepped up to the plate for the Detroit teens.” But for the students, suddenly immersed in a new world, it meant everything.

Mrs. Loschak said the ability to drop by the Eichorn home was a huge relief. But more than food and company, Mrs. Eichorn supported them emotionally. Mrs. Teldon saw the Kleins and Schustermans as role models and had a large part in her journey in Chabad. “The Baitelmans became my second family,” Mrs. Gittelson said.



*Left to Right:
Mrs. Yachet Eichorn,
Mrs. Henya Chasha Schusterman,
Rabbi Mendel &
Mrs. Nechama Baumgarten.*



Parallel Journey

In the summer of 1954, a young Chabad rabbinical student visited the Danielson, Connecticut farm of Yoel and Cyrel Kranz to tutor their son Yankel. The student quickly realized that Yankel was gifted and didn't belong in a public high school.

He wrote to the Rebbe, who advised that the boy attend the United Lubavitcher Yeshivoh in Brooklyn. Though it seemed like a radical idea, the student did as instructed. To his surprise, when he suggested to the parents that their teenage son go study in New York, they readily agreed.

The fourteen-year-old – tall, good-looking, and rosy-cheeked – was tested by the school but knew little beyond how to read Hebrew. In their best attempt to support him, the yeshivah placed him in a much younger Jewish studies class. They expected he would gradually advance through the grades. But Yankel put in every ounce of effort, and by the end of the semester, he was studying with students his own age.

Rabbi Kranz later married Fay Friedman, a Bais Rivkah alumna, and accepted the Rebbe's shlichus to Michigan. Under the Rebbe's guidance, he developed a unique philosophy and approach.

He feared no challenge—not people nor projects—

that seemed overwhelming. On his wall hung a poster of overgrown weeds with a tiny man mowing them. The caption read: "The best way to finish a large project is to begin." That's how he lived. If you don't begin, there's no way to reach the goal.

Through his many programs, Rabbi Kranz reached thousands. He didn't limit himself to his Detroit shul or neighborhood. He traveled to far-flung Jewish communities, sometimes connecting with someone just once. He called these "*neshamah* meetings," moments where he could share a Jewish teaching or mitzvah that might one day blossom.

"If someone knows what keeping kosher is about and rejects it, fine. But if he doesn't know, I'll explain it," he once said. "Our intent

is only to make information available to Jewish people so they can make a judgment. After that, it's not my business to judge them."

He refused to simply sit in shul and wait. "That's just wishful thinking and not practical," he said. But he also knew his limits: "G-d gave each of us a freedom of choice, and I surely cannot take that away." And just as G-d is always there for every Jew, Rabbi Kranz was always there for the young women he helped enroll at Bais Rivkah.

It came from personal experience. He knew firsthand what it was like to be dropped off in a new

"The best way to finish a large project is to begin."

*A Torah class at Camp Gan Israel in Michigan, circa 1960 (1960).
(Photo: Lubavitch Archives)*



*Rabbi Kranz (center back) with the "out of towners" group at the United Lubavitcher Yeshivoh.
(Photo: Rabbi Yosef Friedman)*

city, a foreign environment, and a strange school. “I would never do that to someone,” he would say.

“He really took care of us,” said Mrs. Loschak. He spent hours on the phone with them, called teachers when issues came up, and even drove to New York when bigger problems arose. When one student wanted to work to earn pocket money, Rabbi Kranz insisted she focus on her studies and he sent her a weekly stipend.

With all his talents and achievements, he remained humble, respectful, and deeply caring. He admitted his mistakes, once writing to a student, “[It is] a very good idea... I should have thought of it... I feel bad (sob, sob).”

To Mrs. Teldon, he once wrote that some people, when they encounter a brick wall, try to smash through it. “Ouch! That hurts!” Others, however, just walk around the wall. The first way is shorter, “but long and dangerous.” The second is long but short, but “you make it in one piece.” Fighting your desires head-on only makes them return stronger. When you study Chassidus, the desires calm down.

He ended, “If you still want to fight head-on, go ahead! Be my guest... but make sure you know where to go when you get yourself a fractured skull...”

Fitting In

At Bais Rivkah, students who needed to catch up

entered a preparatory program called Mechina. There, dynamic teachers helped them quickly close the gap. Despite being placed in separate classes at first, the students were never made to feel inferior.

“I felt that I belonged, and fit in with them,” Mrs. Gittelson said. “The girls were nice and down to earth. I had a ball. I had such a good time. They always included me in everything.”

Morah Chana Gorowitz spoke with each girl individually and took a genuine interest in their needs and growth. She made them feel that if they ever had an issue, her door was always open.

Even now, these women remember their teachers: Rabbi Leibel Groner, Mrs. Chaya Kramer, Mrs. Sara Kaplan, Rabbi Sholom Ber Gordon who taught the talks of the Rebbe Rayatz, and Mrs. Roseman, who taught Mesilas Yesharim.

From Inspired to Inspirer

Just after deciding to attend Bais Rivkah, Mrs. Loschak told a counselor at Camp Gan Israel about her plans. The woman told her, “In Bais Rivkah, there is *ruach*.” At the time, Mrs. Loschak thought Bais Yaakov also had *ruach*: There was joy, music, dancing. “We were a *lebedik’e* bunch,” she said, “There was a lot of *chayus*.”

But at Bais Rivkah, she quickly learned *ruach* meant something different. It meant Chassidus – the

*Rabbi Kranz with his parents
Yoel and Cyrel Kranz.*

(Photo: Kranz family/Lubavitch Archives)



*Rabbi Kranz reads a letter from the Rebbe at a Chabad
of Michigan event. (Photo: Lubavitch Archives)*



Top Left: Fay Kranz bringing Chanukah light to a hospital patient. (Photo: Library of Agudas Chasidei Chabad)

Top Right: Mrs. Chaya Teldon with her daughters-in-law, Chabad Shluchos in the United States.

Left: Mrs. Teldon with her students at Bais Rivkah, 5737 (1977).

Rebbe's *ruach*. Every time the students came back from a *farbrengen* with the Rebbe, the school became a hive of activity. "You went to a *farbrengen*," Mrs. Teldon said, "You were squashed into the window as one by one the Rebbe introduced the *mitvzoim*."

The next day, students mobilized. For the candle-lighting campaign, they packaged two candles with a mimeographed page of blessings and instructions, and began handing them out.

Inspired by the Rebbe, many of these girls would later become educators at Bais Rivkah and other Crown Heights schools. Five decades later, they are still creating ripple effects.

Mrs. Teldon is now co-director of Chabad of Long Island. Mrs. Loschak directs Chabad of Santa

Barbara. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Goldwasser teaches at a Chabad school. She credits her teaching method to Morah Shana Teichtel. "She didn't just say the facts," Mrs. Goldwasser said. She brought the material to life, and, "That made a big impression on me. I try to do the same."

Writing in 1976, Mrs. Fay Kranz – who, together with her husband, served as Shlucha to San Diego, California – described how the very students her husband had inspired to attend Bais Rivkah were now assisting them in their new mission, thanks to the school's educational philosophy:

In our days, going out of town on "shlichus" was considered a brave and daring adventure for the dedicated few. Today it is the rare girl who does not consider shlichus as an ideal goal in life.

“Whose credit is this?” you may ask. It is certainly not the society we live in that has developed this dedication. Is it the media, the television, movies and magazines that foster this spirit? Hardly! It is the educational institution that teaches “The Real Thing,” Bais Rivkah.

Fruits of the Labor

Every one of these young women’s journeys was unique and came with its own challenges. It wasn’t easy for their families. As one person put it, “People were inspired, and the parents and families were overwhelmed.”

At the time, Bais Rivkah was teeming with students who had little Jewish knowledge, coming from as far as Eretz Yisroel, Argentina, and London. “The Rebbe enabled us to bring people closer to Yiddishkeit and Chassidus,” Mrs. Baitelman said.

In her humility, she credits Rabbi Kranz: “He was the doer, the one who worked directly with them. He was the *koach*. We were just the outer layers, offering influence from the sidelines.”

The women see it differently. Even today, they say Mrs. Baitelman remains involved in their lives and continues to be their mentor and confidant. Looking back at those early days when the teenagers first

Inspired by the Rebbe, many of these girls would later become educators at Bais Rivkah and other Crown Heights schools. Five decades later, they are still creating ripple effects.

arrived at Bais Rivkah, Mrs. Baitelman is proud of what they’ve become and the “beautiful families that these women have.” ■

To prepare this article, materials were collected by Rabbi Kranz’s daughter, Sarah Ciment. Additionally, sources from The Yiddishe Heim and the Richmond Times, where the Kranzes later served on shlichus, were utilized. Special thanks to Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman of Kehot Publications for his invaluable help with background information, and to the staff of the Lubavitch Archives for their assistance with photographs.

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*Left: Mrs. Devorah Loschak, and
Rabbi Yosef Yehudah Loschak*



*Right: Rabbi Kranz at the
Kinus Hashluchim*



ALUMNAE

Who, What, Where

SHINING A LIGHT IN LA CELLE-SAINT-CLOUD: THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF BREINDY ALLOUCHE

As told to the Embrace team

A quick train ride west of Paris, or twenty minutes north of the picturesque Versailles, brings you to the leafy suburb of La Celle-Saint-Cloud. This tranquil area, with its manicured gardens and serene ambiance, seems far removed from the bustling metropolis of Paris. Yet, it's here that Mrs. Breindy Allouche and her family have dedicated themselves to a mission of transformation: Revitalizing Jewish life and building a community where Yiddishkeit can thrive.

A BAIS RIVKAH GRADUATE'S UNEXPECTED PATH

Breindy Allouche, a proud graduate of Bais Rivkah, admits she never imagined herself as a Shlucha. "Growing up, it wasn't something I planned for myself," she shares. But everything changed the year after Gimmel Tammuz, which left many wondering



how Lubavitch's momentum would continue. For Chassidim, the answer was clear: They would press forward with renewed strength and determination to fulfill the Rebbe's vision.

"When my husband suggested we go on shlichus, I was hesitant at first," Breindy recalls. "But after discussing it, I felt it was the right decision. We confirmed our plan, and from there, it was full steam ahead."

SETTLING IN FRANCE

The Allouches' shlichus began in Tunisia, where they hoped to make an impact in the local Jewish community. However, government policies made their stay impossible. "We had to leave every three months due to visa restrictions, and our apartment was bugged. It became too difficult to continue," Breindy relates.

The couple relocated to France, consulting with Rabbi Azimov, the head Shliach of the country, about potential placements. At the time, Paris was already home to a few Chabad centers, so they chose La Celle-Saint-Cloud, a suburb with little Jewish activity.

We had to leave every three months due to visa restrictions, and our apartment was bugged.

“When we arrived, it was a challenge,” Breindy says. “The community was small, traditional, and mostly Sephardic. Some members were skeptical about having Chabad here. I remember hearing comments like, ‘Men with beards? We don’t need you here.’”

But alongside the resistance, there was also hope. A small number of elderly Jews welcomed the Allouches warmly. “It was clear we had work to do,” Breindy says.

BUILDING BRIDGES AND LEARNING LANGUAGES

Unlike her husband, who was French, Breindy arrived without knowing a single word of the language. “It was overwhelming at first,” she admits. “I couldn’t communicate, and everything felt foreign. My in-laws became my teachers, helping me learn French and adjust to the culture.”

Despite the language barrier, Breindy’s warmth and determination began to shine through. “I’d bring American treats—marshmallows, candy, and even matzah for Pesach. People were so curious about us.”

Her husband found a unique way to engage with the local community. After shul, the then-rabbi would give a talk, during which questions were discouraged. “The atmosphere was tense,” says Breindy. “But my husband would ask questions based on the Rebbe’s sichos. When no one could answer, he’d provide the answer himself. Slowly, people began to listen, and we started forming connections.”

Within a year, the community asked Rabbi Allouche to take over and fill the position. “It was a turning point,” Breindy reflects. “The people who initially resisted us began to see us as part of their community.”

TRANSFORMING LA CELLE-SAINT-CLOUD

Over the next two decades, the Allouches, along with their six kids ka”h, worked tirelessly to breathe new life into the Jewish community. What began as a modest

effort soon grew into a hub of Jewish activity.

“We started with small steps,” Breindy recalls. “Our first project was a preschool, but it faced significant resistance. Some members of the community didn’t see the need. Others wanted a more liberal approach of taking in both Jewish and non-Jewish students. But we stood firm, and eventually, the preschool became a success. From there, we established a day school, starting with just nine children. Today, that school has over one hundred and twenty students.”

The Allouches also took on the task of building essential infrastructure. “We now have a kosher supermarket, a mikvah, and a vibrant shul,” Breindy says with pride. “The community is almost unrecognizable from the one we first encountered.”

*“Men with beards?
We don’t need you here.”*

MORE THAN A MISSION: A WAY OF LIFE

Through the years, Breindy has collected countless stories of transformation and resilience. One initiative that stands out is her effort to elevate the standard of *tznius* in the community.

“I made a campaign in my shul that the boys should start wearing suits. This started a trend of people dressing up for shul. Slowly but surely, women started to dress modestly and wear sheitels. At first, it seemed like a small effort, but the results were incredible. It was about creating a sense of dignity and pride in their Yiddishkeit.”

Another memorable moment came when a skeptical community member approached Breindy’s husband. Over time, through persistence and genuine care, this man began putting on *tefillin* and embracing *mitzvos*. “Today, he’s a proud Jew who bears a Hebrew name, Moshe,” Breindy shares.

A UNIQUE COMMUNITY

La Celle-Saint-Cloud is distinct in its demographics. While much of Paris’s Jewish population consists of

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On the Blessing *of a* Large Family

Nechama Dina (Kagan) Tiechtel, Lawrence, Kansas
BR Seminary Beis Graduating Class of 2004



Parenting and everything related to it has always been a deep passion of mine. Throughout my journey of raising children (a journey I'm still on, boruch Hashem) I have been and continue to be humbled many times over. As my family grew, so did my parenting joys and struggles. With every phase and new challenge I faced, I had to reach deeper, finding inspiration to keep my flame burning. I searched for inspiration not only for having more children but for continuing to raise the ones I already had with clarity, health and joy. Recently, my high school aged niece interviewed me for a school project on raising large families. This gave me the opportunity to reflect and put down on paper my feelings surrounding this most treasured avodah as well as the concepts I've learned and continue to learn on my journey of motherhood. The ideas I share are ones that I'm sure you've heard as many times as I have— they are not original. I share these concepts because they were pivotal for my self-growth, allowing me to continuously strive to be a healthy mother to many. The more I heard them the more I was able to internalize them. I share with you not as a coach or mashpia, but as a friend. I invite you to sit on my couch as we have this peer-to-peer conversation on the journey of mommying and self-growth.

What inspired you to have a big family?

The Rebbe was and is my biggest inspiration. As a Chossid, I try to live my life aligned with the Rebbe's directives. My choice to live on *shlichus* was due to the same inspiration. Both living on *shlichus* and having a large family are lifestyles that I deeply love and care for and at the same time can be extremely exhausting and challenging. But the driving force - my will to do it because I truly believe in it and, deep down, really want it- will always override the challenging times and exhausting days.

Another huge inspiration is my mother, who raised a large family with tremendous love and dedication. My mother showed my siblings and me that we are life's greatest gifts. I couldn't be more grateful for each of my ten siblings. (I'll admit I couldn't recognize this at eleven years old.)

And I'll just say it like it is: In every family, every child has their "stuff".

What do you find most challenging about raising a large family?

Being there for every child, both emotionally and physically, 24/7. Every child has many unique needs, and I want to help them become the best version of themselves.

And I'll just say it like it is: In *every* family, *every* child has their "stuff": One might have physical health challenges, another may have ADHD. One could be battling anxiety, while a sibling struggles with a learning disability or is on a turbulent journey with their Yiddishkeit. You might have a child acting like a bully, another with anger management issues, one suffering from an eating disorder, and another hospitalized in a psych ward. One may be refusing to go to school, another dealing with insomnia, and yet another facing sensory processing challenges. Some children need extra tutoring just to keep up, while others seem to need more TLC than you feel capable of giving. (I hope I've validated many of you by naming some of the "stuff" you might be facing right now.)

Each child's "stuff" needs to be tended to "*al pi darkoi*," and that takes tremendous mental space, emotional and physical energy, and lots of time. I've found that the only humanly possible way to deal with it all, is to let go of trying to control outcomes. I strive to internalize the idea that my husband and I do input and Hashem does output. This means I acknowledge that my children's "stuff" is part of Hashem's plan for each of their unique journeys, and that it's Hashem's responsibility to get each kid through whatever they are going through. And me? I'm just the facilitator, cheerleader, educator, researcher, nurturer...you get the idea. I'm not here to fix anything, because that's Hashem's job.

I once heard a great *mashal* from a parenting coach – a *mashal* that is now my favorite – that illustrates this idea so well: "Parents are shepherds- not engineers." Like shepherds, it is our responsibility to

bring our “flock” to good pasture, keep them safe from dangers, and be there for them when they are hurt or scared. And *unlike* engineers, our job is not to curate a certain “type” of person. Not only is it not our job to do this, but no matter how hard we try, we *can't*. We can't mechanically engineer our children to be a certain way. A crucial step in parenting is letting go of the engineer mentality and instead working on being the best shepherds we can possibly be to Hashem's precious flock.

What is the most rewarding part of raising a large family?

The most rewarding thing is knowing that I am living my life in accordance with Hashem's agenda— and not in a martyr kind of way. While being a mother of many children is also something that I *enjoy* and *appreciate* tremendously, my passion for this life is driven by my desire to do the will of Hashem.

To clarify: I feel that both the internal desire to do Hashem's will and the personal desire and satisfaction are both crucial. Either one on its own would not suffice to keep a mother driven and going— at least, not in a wholesome and joyful way.

It's also personally very rewarding for me to see and feel love and respect reciprocated by my children—there is nothing quite like it. And then, of course, there is great satisfaction from the *nachas* they give. Watching impossible toddlers morph into amazing adults is awe-inspiring.

But the reason I consider these benefits to be secondary is because, unfortunately, as parents we don't always get to see these beautiful gifts in a revealed way. Sadly, there are times when we don't feel the *nachas*, and when children don't reciprocate love and respect. So, the rewarding feeling needs to come from someplace deeper, from something that is unchanging. And that unwavering source of joy is the knowledge that I am partnering with Hashem to raise these *neshamos*. Hashem chose *me* for each specific child of mine because He knows and believes that I am the best candidate to raise these specific children. And He therefore gives me the *koach*, the *binah yeseirah*, and the resources to do the best I can. The rest is up to Him.

The notion that I am here to parent my children and that my children need not give me anything in return—whether it's satisfaction, *nachas*, appreciation, love or kindness— is an idea I had to internalize as my children grew older and went through some challenges. Of course, we do everything we can to raise our children to be *mentchen* and behave with *kibud av va'em*, but when my children do, I treat it as a “gift” rather than the driving force by which I parent. Being a healthy parent means parenting unconditionally— not for a self-serving motive. And it means constantly giving love and direction to the child regardless of what we get back.

Every child is a blessing. Can you share an instance when you saw that in your life?

I can't think of a specific story— it's such a deep feeling and a true knowledge that a parent experiences with each child. And really, the fact that Hashem gave you this tremendous task of raising a *neshama* is the real *brocha*.

On top of that, there is also tremendous love and joy in the family when a baby is born. It's incredible that regardless of what number child it is, there is always a thrilling excitement from the siblings. With each birth, I am in total awe of the miracle of bringing a new soul into this world. I feel my heart burst with overwhelming love for the child and a gratitude to Hashem that is simply beyond words.

Personally, my family has been gifted with seeing revealed *brochos* as our family grew. Deep happiness, personal growth, stronger *shalom bayis*, *chassidische*



nachas, and success in our *shlichus* and *parnassah* are some of the *brochos* we were bestowed in a way that it was very clear to us that they came along with the growth of our family.

But again, these *brochos* are not always evident, and not all parents get to see revealed *brochos* from raising a large family. That is why I like to focus on the biggest *brocha*: The fact that you are raising a *neshama* given to you from Hashem.

How do you manage the responsibilities of family and your shlichus?

Truthfully, it's hard. The idea that centers me most is that these responsibilities are not a contradiction. I'm constantly evaluating: What does Hashem want from me now? Is it to be present with my biological children or with Hashem's other children whose *ruchniyus'dike* growth I am personally responsible for? Practically speaking, it's a constant juggling act, ensuring that the balls that are dropped are not made of glass, but are rubber and will bounce back. On an even more practical level, it's about getting the right help and delegating the things I don't have to do or don't like to do, so that I can give my best energy to what I am needed most for, to what only I can do, and to what I most enjoy.

Also— and I can't say this enough— it's so important to let go of high expectations. We live in a time where many women live to create the perfect perception of their lives. Many like to believe that it's possible to always be dressed to the nines while also always having a super organized house, with magazine-worthy tablescapes and meals, along with kids who are always perfectly dressed, all while working a job and/or being on *shlichus*. Oh, and all this with the added pressure of posting pictures on social media to share the successes and the amazingness of this “picture-perfect” life.

It's too much and it's breaking us.

This culture of judging our real lives by unrealistic metrics is a bit poisonous. In reality, everyone is struggling with something messy (or many messy things) in their life. In my opinion we need to stop sharing so much. People— yes, even close family— don't need to know what we made for dinner, how we celebrated our anniversary, and how each *shli-*

I strive to internalize the idea that my husband and I do input and Hashem does output.

chus event was beautifully set up. More importantly, I strongly feel that we need to stop scrolling so much. Instead, we can use that time and energy on looking inward, working to be mentally healthy and spiritually grounded. I share this as a gentle reminder to us all, that it's okay to struggle and to sometimes feel that you don't have it together. After all, we're human. Hashem doesn't expect us to always have it together — that's His domain.

A trick that is super helpful for me is that I don't “look” or let myself care about how anyone else is “doing it all.” I put in a lot of effort to stay laser-focused on using my energy, my personality, my *kocho*s and the unique situation that Hashem gave me to do the best I can in my *shlichus* and in raising my beautiful children. I refuse to look at WhatsApp statuses, Facebook, or Instagram. I am a little proud that I'm a thriving Shlucha who's not on any Shluchos or grade Facebook groups. I do post for *shlichus* purposes only, but my personal boundary is not to scroll. This way, there is zero distraction from the task at hand, and there's no comparing myself to others.

And when it comes to sharing with family, I try waiting a day or two (or more) to share so it's not so impulse driven. Instead, it's intentional, as I choose to share the things about my life that actually bring me joy to share with my siblings. I try not to get caught in the trap of needing outside validation for my family life or *shlichus* life.

What's something you would tell someone to inspire them to have a large family?

This is always my go-to: Listen to or read what the Rebbe says about having children.

And consider this: Most people work really hard to pursue something they care about. Some people choose to spend most of their time, money, and energy on furthering their education, or building their career.



While those are wonderful and often very important things, they can at times be ego-driven, and at some point, a person needs to ask themselves, “What is the purpose of it all?” I’ve seen people sacrifice relationships, stay up many late nights, and take on tremendous debt that takes years to repay, just to get the degree of their dreams. Think about it: A parent does all of that too! (Except for giving up relationships— I believe it’s quite the opposite. Being a parent can help you create stronger relationships.) The difference is, a parent sacrifices not for sophisticated letters after their name, but for bringing another human into this world and raising them to Torah, *chupa*, and *ma’asim tovim*.

Yes, having a large family means that much of your energy, time, and money will be invested in raising them. (Which, by the way, is not a contradiction to *also* spending energy and time on your education and/or career.) But think for a moment about how much more meaningful and purposeful it is to invest your best time and energy into raising humans; Hashem’s children; people who will continue to live and give. It’s of infinite value!

Ultimately, the biggest inspiration for raising a large family comes from creating a paradigm shift within oneself through internalizing Torah and Chassidus. Living as a Yid means to live a life not for one’s self, but for a higher purpose. Yiddishkeit is not about acquiring rights— it is about fulfilling our responsibilities. This is manifested in every part of our life, from how we dress, to what we eat, and yes, to having children!

On a practical note, I would tell a struggling mother (I’ve been there!) that her primary mission is to be a healthy and happy mother who can have more children and raise them with love and care. Achieving this should always be her priority. For some mothers this comes more easily and for some Hashem makes it harder. As well, there are seasons in our life when it is harder and seasons in our life when it’s easier. All of it is ok. We just need to remember this: As mothers, we are our

families’ greatest assets. We must ensure that we are mentally strong, physically healthy and spirituality grounded to do this holy mission of raising children. Therefore, we must not overstretch ourselves in ways that will continuously compromise our wellbeing.

Imagine a person gets into a car to go pick up a treasure of infinite value, but the car is out of gas. That obviously wouldn’t go down very well. Our primary focus needs to be fueling up our car so we can reach the treasure and then drive back to our final destination. In mothering terms: We need to maintain our physical and mental health so that we can birth and raise children to adulthood, with joy.

Here are some guided reflections for an overwhelmed mama who is in a generally healthy situation. Sometimes, a small adjustment in our life can shift us from “not managing” to *thriving*.

*(Disclaimer: I want to clarify that many among us are dealing with **very** challenging situations—medical or mental health issues, serious chinuch or shalom bayis struggles, financial stress, addiction, special needs, and*

more. The list below is not meant to address such circumstances. In those cases, intensive support—and often professional help—is needed for a mother to manage.)

- Do I need more help with cleaning, cooking, shopping, driving (i.e. very long carpools)?
- Do I need a second or third hand to handle dinner and/or bedtime chaos in a calmer manner? (Is that even a thing?!)
- Do I need to reduce my phone time or get off social media?
- What is zapping my time and/or energy? Is it fixable? Can it be delegated? Should I reach out for help?
- Am I sleeping enough?
- Do I need more time with my spouse?
- Am I eating well?
- Am I exercising enough?
- Am I *davening* at all?
- Am I learning, listening to *shiurim*, joining *farbrengens*, filling up on inspiration from time to time? (Your seminary inspo might not pull you through after five or ten years... Time to refuel!)
- Do I need more childcare?
- Do I need to dedicate time (or more time) to work, *shlichus*, or projects—something fulfilling where I can share my energy, knowledge, and talents in addition to family?
- Do I need to work less, saving my best energy and time for what matters most—my family?
- Do I have a *mashpia*?
- Do I need therapy? Medication? A life coach? A support group? A parenting coach? Therapy for my child(ren)?

One more concept I want to share—something I've seen clearly in my life—is that Hashem gives you the capacity to deal with your life *only at the stage you're currently in*. Life is like a rubber band—your capacity stretches. And yes, a rubber band can snap, so it's essential to know when too much is too much. That's what *mashpios*, *rabbanim*, and mental health professionals are for. We must always keep a finger on the pulse, staying self-aware and honest to prevent reaching breaking point. Reaching out for help when we are struggling is a strength, not a weakness.

Life is like a rubber band—your capacity stretches. And yes, a rubber band can snap, so it's essential to know when too much is too much.

It's an incredible concept, that the *brochos* needed to get through certain situations will only come when you are in the situation. Not before. Not after.

There were times when I felt my plate was already full and I couldn't imagine having another baby. Only once I became pregnant did I feel calmer and only once the child arrived did Hashem help us figure out how to handle another one.

On an *erev* Yom Tov, when I feel like I'm not managing, I think back to the many Yomim Tovim I got through with a newborn. I wonder: How did *that* happen if I'm struggling *now*? Or I think back to how we got through past personal challenges, and I wonder how we did it. And I know the answer: Hashem has a way of stretching us and helping us through tough situations.

We have to believe that it's not all on us. While we need to do our part giving it all we got, we then need to take a deep breath, let go a little bit and feel Hashem carrying us through every moment.

May we all merit to see tremendous *nachas* from the beautiful *neshamos* that Hashem has entrusted us with!

Hatzlacha rabbah! ■



A Mirror *to* My Marriage

By Anonymous



If she would just listen to me,
everything would be so much better.

I had read the books, attended the *shiurim*, and soaked up every class on *shalom bayis* I could find. I knew the solutions. So when I saw my sister-in-law struggling in her marriage, how could I not share my hard-earned wisdom? Wouldn't any loving person want to help?

But somehow, my well-meaning advice always seemed to land wrong. At best, it was ignored. At worst, it created tension between us—unspoken distance and awkward silence

where warmth used to be. Why wouldn't she just give me a chance to explain?

Our husbands are brothers—very close ones at that—so we naturally spend a lot of time together. We are on *shlichus* in the same area, and our kids float between our homes like cousins on a joint family vacation. In many ways, her family is an extension of mine.

And that's precisely why it pained me to watch their marriage falter. Things had always been somewhat strained between them, but in recent years the stress had deepened. Yes, everyone has imperfections, but to me, the issues seemed so obvious. If only she'd stop criticizing him so much. If only she would let him lead. If only she would change—surely he would follow. I had it all figured out.

But somehow, my well-meaning advice always seemed to land wrong. At best, it was ignored.

I tried to gently offer examples from my own marriage—how I held my tongue, how I tried to show respect, how I grew to appreciate my husband's strengths even when I was tired or frustrated. It was simple, really. Do X, and you'll get Y. Cause and effect. But no matter what I said, nothing changed. In fact, things only seemed to get worse.

Then, one night, something shifted.

I had been carrying so much frustration—at her, at the situation, at how helpless I felt. I was ready to unload it all onto my husband when he walked through the door late, distracted, and exhausted. I knew he had been trying to help someone in crisis, and that he was swamped with work, but I needed to talk. He owed me that much.

He sat down on the couch, phone still in hand, barely present. I asked him—insisted—that he give me his full attention. Within a minute, his eyes drifted back to his phone. That was it. I snapped.

"You never listen to me!" I said, my voice sharp, my words tumbling out too fast. "You're always helping the whole world—but when it comes to me, you're MIA. I just want you to hear me for once!" I continued, unleashing everything I had bottled up.

He looked at me with a mix of fatigue and caution,

and quietly said:

"What were you saying about Shloimy's marriage?"

Ouch.

In that moment, I heard something different. Something painful and true:

"Are you tearing down our marriage while trying to save someone else's?"

I couldn't respond. The words, the fight—it all froze midair. I looked at my husband for the first time that evening. Really looked. He was tired. He hadn't eaten. I had cornered him the moment he walked through the door, not offering a smile or a plate of food, but a demand for emotional availability he simply didn't have at that moment.

I wanted to run. To flee the discomfort of that mirror he had just held up. It was so much easier to play the wise outsider—the rescuer, the fixer, the marriage mentor. It was harder, so much harder, to turn inward and face my own work.

My husband is a gentle soul. He didn't deserve my outburst. And I... I didn't want to be that kind of person anymore.

"Are you tearing down our marriage while trying to save someone else's?"

Maybe this wasn't about my sister-in-law at all.

Maybe it never was.

Maybe the best way I could help her was not through advice, but through example. To *daven* for her with sincerity. To appreciate my own husband, instead of lecturing someone else about how to appreciate hers. To actually practice the things I read in those books, not just quote them.

And maybe—just maybe—Hashem orchestrated this whole dynamic not for me to rescue anyone else, but to wake me up. To bring more peace, more awareness, more humility into my home.

I walked into the kitchen and quietly served supper. There was work to do—but this time, it was my own. ■

Relationship

A Marriage Comic

For more info visit createrelationship.com

Sara Gita (Rothstein) Sobel,
Crown Heights
BR Sem Beis Graduating Class
of 5765 (2005)



The Martyr

Also known as a superwoman, the martyr is willing to do whatever it takes to keep others happy. She doesn't know how to honor herself in the process. The martyr's motto is, "You do your thing, don't mind me!"



The Lifeguard

Always on the lookout for those who need help, the lifeguard's motto is, "Hang in there; help is on the way!"



The Judge

Values rules, the judge has strong principles for what's right or wrong. The judge's motto is, "It's not my way or the highway, it's just right or wrong!"



The Chef

Enjoys creating delicious gourmet dishes. The chef's motto is, "It's all about proportion- with just a little less of this, and a little more of that, everything will be perfect!"



The R-Queen

Gracious and secure, the R-Queen strikes a balance between inner fulfillment and caring for others. The R-Queen's motto is, "My life is full of gifts. What's the opportunity here?"

Cham
Jankvist



Chara
Leah Art

The Martyr



I'm so sorry Vanessa, I will not be needing your help anymore. I cannot afford your services any longer.



What happened?! I never said she shouldn't get help!



The Lifeguard



Here, take this money my parents gave me for my birthday... you know what, I'll ask the school if they need me to teach, let's sit with a financial advisor and make a budget...



The Judge

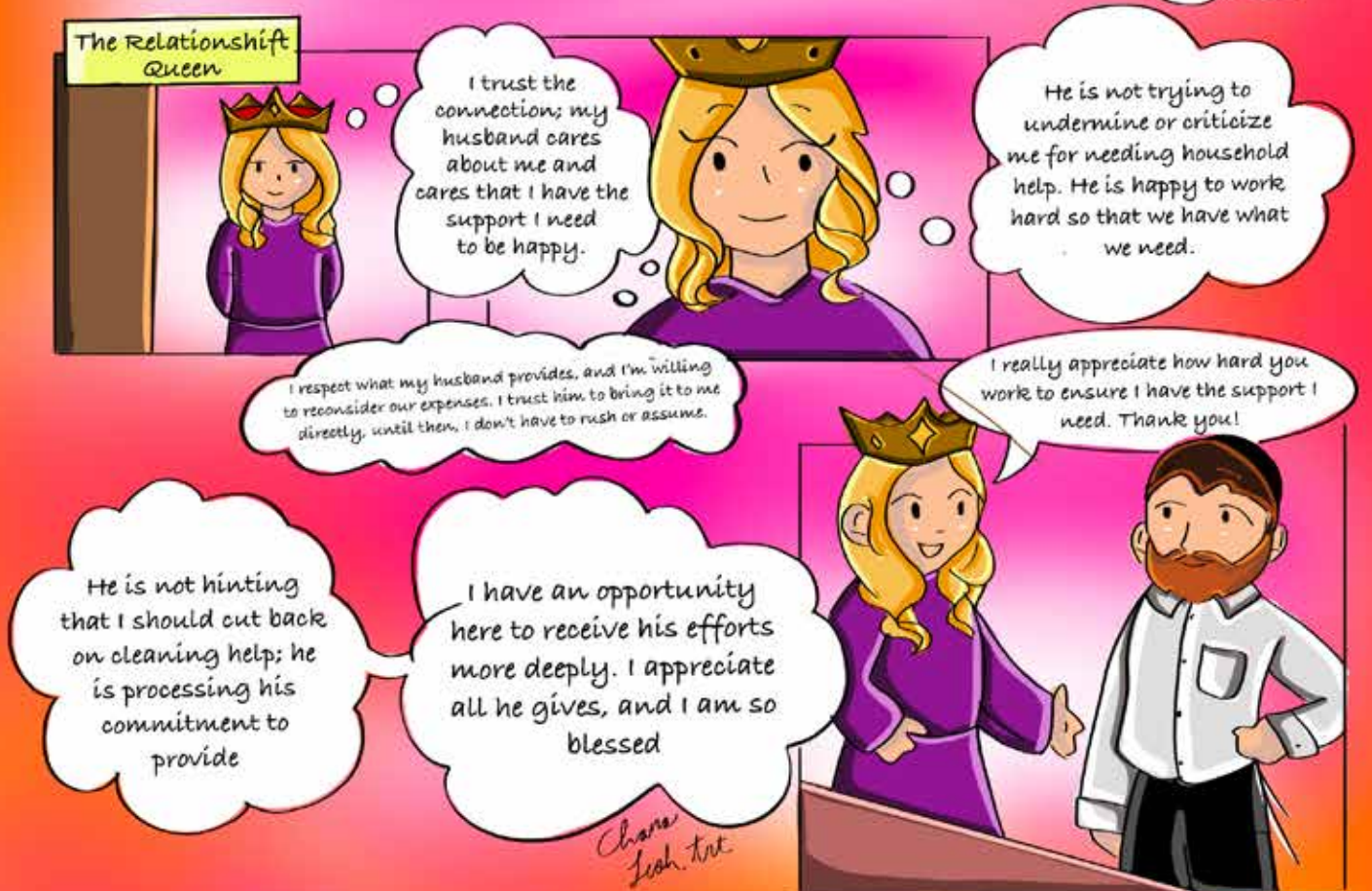
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She doesn't appreciate me... does she have any idea what I do to provide for the family?!



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The Wonder of Becoming You

A BOOK'S JOURNEY

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



If you're a Jewish woman, chances are high that you've encountered the bestselling book *The Wonder of Becoming You*, by Dr. Miriam Grossman. With well-chosen words and extreme sensitivity, the book's mission is simple, yet profound: To educate young girls about the physical changes they experience as they grow up, in a way that aligns with Torah's values.

Chances are also high that you've heard of Dr. Grossman's other works: As a medical doctor and

an acclaimed child and adolescent psychiatrist, she's also the author of four other books.

But did you know that while in training, she was considering leaving medical school? Did you know that at first, a book was nowhere on the horizon? Did you know that it all started out in Bais Rivkah?

Here is Dr. Grossman's story.

Difficult Decisions

It was the early 1980s. Miriam Grossman had just finished an internship in pediatrics and had gone to Minnesota to study in Bais Chana, where she became a *ba'alas teshuvah* after learning from Rabbi Manis Friedman. She had then moved to Crown Heights and attended Bais Rivkah's Mechina program, where she'd learned from teachers such as Rabbi Osdoba, Rebbitzin Groner, and Rabbi Mangel, who made a huge impression on her. And now she was facing some tough decisions: Should she officially stop her medical education? Was it the right field for a *frum* woman to enter?

"All I wanted to do was to go to the best place for

women to learn Torah," she recalls. "Then someone outside of Chabad told me that Gateshead was the place to go. I got it in my head that I absolutely had

The subject: Empowering students to understand their bodies and the changes they would experience as they grew.

to go to Gateshead, and I wrote to the Rebbe. But the Rebbe wouldn't have any of it."

She received a letter with very strong, definitive wording, instructing her to return to her medical studies. The Rebbe encouraged her to build her career, assuring her that she would be successful.

It was this letter that kept Dr. Grossman in the medical field. It gave her the confidence to pursue her career, and although she didn't know it at the time, it would lead her to a life-altering mission. In her words, "That was the first time the Rebbe made a huge difference

Fliers for The Total Approach to Chinuch, and the Rebbe's response

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SESSION ONE—to be held P.G. on Wednesday, 17 Shvat (Feb. 10) 7:00–10:30 P.M.
Our Children, Ourselves: Getting back to Basics
Guest lecturer: Mrs. K. Deren, Principal, Yeshiva Achel Tmimim Nechama Minsky H.S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Workshops
A. In the Early years—Mrs. L. Friedman—early childhood teacher, Bais Yaakov of Boro Park
Mrs. Y. Heller—educator, Bais Rivkah Seminary; Sara Schnierer H.S.
B. Early Adolescence—Mrs. Y. Libel—Clinical Social Worker, Jewish Board of Family and Children Services
C. In the Later Years—Mrs. Y. Bogomilsky, educator, Jewish Education Center of Elizabeth, N.J.
Mrs. R. Fedder, educator, writer

SESSION TWO—to be held P.G. on Wednesday, 24 Shvat (Feb. 17) 7:00–10:30 P.M.
To Raise A Chassidische Child:
Insulating Without Isolating
Guest lecturer: Rabbi Sh. Majesky, Principal, Machon Chana

Workshops
A. Boys—Rabbi A. Osdoba—Mashgiach Tomchei Tmimim; formerly Rav of Copenhagen, Denmark
Rabbi E. Piekarsky—Principal, Mesivta Cholei Torah
B. Girls—Mrs. Ch. Gorovitz—Principal Bais Rivkah Seminary, N.Y.
Mrs. E. Sternberg—Coordinator, Neshke Campaign

These sessions will be held at the Bais Rivkah main auditorium, 310 Crown Street.
Admission: \$2.00 per session. Refreshments will be served.
This is an effort of Neshke Chabad realized with the help of the Almighty and the cooperation of our Mosdos of Chinuch and the advice of their Menaholim: Rabbi M. Bogomilsky, Rabbi L. Newman, Rabbi E. Piekarsky, Rabbi H. Lustig, Mrs. Ch. Gorovitz, and Mrs. Sh. Teitel.
For more information call: 493-0571 from 10:30 A.M.–3:30 P.M. or 773-4617 from 9:00 A.M.–4:00 P.M.
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כפסוק האלה אר החסיד המסדה
צריך להיות אר

in my being a doctor.”

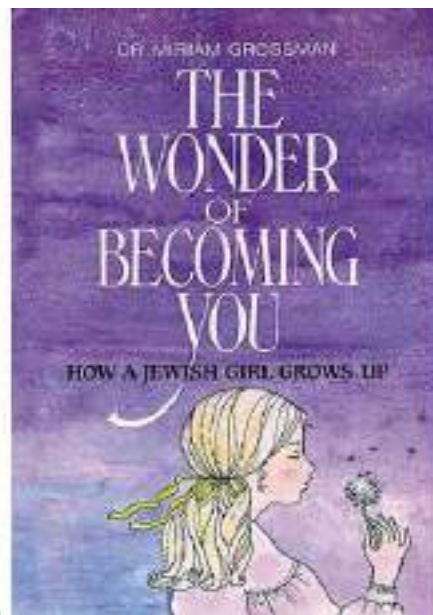
And what was the second time, you ask? Keep reading.

Bais Rivkah Beginnings

In 5744 (1984), the Rebbe wrote a letter to N'Shei Chabad, saying that a *frum* female doctor should speak to the girls at Bais Rivkah, “about *tznius* and *veses* (monthly cycle), *vechulei*.” Right away, Rebbetzin Tema Gurary from N'Shei Chabad reached out to Dr. Grossman, asking her to go into classrooms and speak to the 5th, 6th and 7th graders about these topics. When Dr. Grossman asked what “*vechulei*,” (etcetera) meant, they discussed it and decided to write to the Rebbe for clarification. The Rebbe didn’t respond.

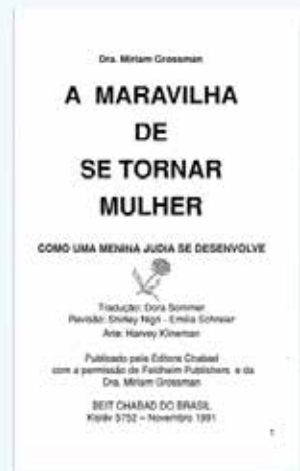
Seeing that, Mrs. Gorovitz, then principal of Bais Rivkah, and Mrs. Groner, who was also involved, told Dr. Grossman to stick to *tznius* and *veses*. A letter was sent out to the parents, giving them the option to keep their girls home. And then, Dr. Miriam Grossman, actually in her ninth month of pregnancy at the time, became an honorary teacher in Bais Rivkah. The subject: Empowering students to understand their bodies and the changes they would experience as they grew.

“The girls were shocked at first, many of them embarrassed, looking down and not wanting to engage,” Dr. Grossman remembers. “One girl announced, horrified: ‘This is not appropriate!’”



But as the minutes went by, the interest grew, the girls became more involved, and the questions started flying. “By the end, with almost every class, they had so many questions. It was a huge success!”

That success marked the beginning of something much bigger. The questions the girls asked were deep, personal, and, often, the kind of things they hadn’t known how to ask. They were also given papers to write down any questions they were still embarrassed to ask out loud. And it became clear to Dr. Grossman that this conversation needed to continue beyond the classroom.



Book translated into four languages.

A Book is Born

Dr. Grossman was very close to the family of Rabbi and Mrs. Leah Klein. She went to them often for Shabbos, and it was there that she met Professor Herman Branover. He greatly encouraged her lectures at Bais Rivkah, and following their success, proposed an interesting idea: Why not turn those classes into a book?

They wrote to the Rebbe, and got a *brocha* for its success. But there was one caveat: The book should not mention Chabad, and it should not be published by Lubavitchers. If it would be published by Chabad, then only Chabad would buy it. And as Dr. Grossman explains, “The Rebbe wanted this to reach all Jewish girls.”

What began as instructions from the Rebbe to give girls a talk about sensitive topics evolved into a global movement.

When the manuscript was complete, the Rebbe reviewed it, inserting small corrections. Then, Professor Branover put Dr. Grossman in touch with Feldheim Publishers, who was very interested in publishing it.

But the road to publishing was far from smooth. “They were very nervous about it,” Dr. Grossman admits. “There was no book in the Jewish world like this. There were certain words the Rebbe had agreed to but Feldheim insisted on removing. They also got their own *haskamah* from their own authority—Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg from Ner Yisrael in Baltimore. That was a big deal.”

The *haskamah* said the following:

“I have carefully gone through Dr. Grossman’s book about how a Jewish girl grows up. It is written with delicacy and in sensitive consonance with Torah teachings and values. May Hashem grant the author great hatzlocha in her undertaking to guide young Bnos Yisroel to know themselves as vessels for Avodas Hashem. Sincerely, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg.”

Dr. Miriam Grossman wrote the original manuscript in 5744 (1984). And four years later, in 5748 (1988), after countless revisions and discussions, *The Wonder of Becoming You* was finally born!

The Global Impact

Once published, *The Wonder of Becoming You* quickly became a bestseller at Feldheim. And its influence spread far beyond the United States: When the Shluchim in Brazil read it, they translated it into Portuguese. Soon after, the principal of a Jewish girl’s school in Zurich, Switzerland reached out, and she translated it into Swiss German. Those translations were followed by Spanish and French, offering Jewish girls across the globe a sensitive, Torah-based approach to maturing. The book was a lifeline for so many families, providing a trusted voice for a topic that previously, had too often been left unspoken.

“I’ve received letters from parents saying they wish they had this book when they were growing up,” Dr. Grossman says. “It gave them a way to talk to their daughters about these things, which they didn’t know how to do before.”

She was even contacted by a woman from St. Lucia, a Caribbean island, who wanted to use the book to help non-Jewish girls there!

Today, Dr. Miriam Grossman’s book remains a best-seller at Feldheim publishers. What began as instructions from the Rebbe to give girls a talk about sensitive topics evolved into a global movement. And her messages continue to educate and empower, just as they did when she first walked into that Bais Rivkah classroom forty years ago. ■

To explore more of Dr. Grossman’s insights and work, visit her website at miriamgrossmanmd.com





ASKING FOR *a* FRIEND

FINDING THE BALANCE



DEAR CHAYA

As a mother of a large family, I am hoping to get advice for a challenge I'm facing. I want to be attentive to all my children, but it's really hard to be there for each of them when they're at such different ages and stages.

When I had a bunch of little kids, they were all on a similar schedule, and it was easier to manage. Now I have, *boruch Hashem*, a newborn baby who needs to be nursed, preschoolers who want bedtime stories, elementary-aged children who need help with homework, and teens who just want to vent about their day.

I feel pulled in so many directions at once, and I would love to know how to juggle the different stages—especially since my oldest will be starting *shidduchim* soon, which I know will require a whole new kind of emotional bandwidth. Not to mention my son in *yeshivah*, which requires that I stay attuned from far away. Just recently, my four-year-old insisted that I stay and read multiple stories before bed. By the time I finished taking care of her, I simply couldn't get to the rest of my to-do list.

I guess my question is: Just like there are systems for budgeting money, is there a system for budgeting time? How can I allocate and focus my time to ensure that each of my children gets the amount they need from me?

Looking forward to hearing your advice,

Scattered Mom

DEAR SCATTERED MOM.

The fact that you're asking this question is proof that you're a wonderful mother, one who is deeply invested in doing her best for her children. Chances are, your dream is to be available to each child wholeheartedly, at any time they need you, so they never feel alone in their struggles. But alas, you are a human being and it's physically impossible. Chances are you feel guilty about this and wish it could be otherwise, which only adds stress to an already limited situation.

The first thing I'm going to suggest is that whenever you feel this way, stop and take a deep breath. Remind yourself that Hashem is the One who gave you each of your children, and He did so very intentionally. He believes you are the best mother for them, and that your specific family is the best environment to help them grow into the best people they can be. Any challenge within that setup is not a *problem*, but a situation that you need to navigate together—one in which you can certainly be successful and that all of you can grow from.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

One of my favorite “hacks” in parenting is recognizing that it's often quality over quantity. It may seem like our children need us all the time, but what they're truly craving is a genuine sense of connection, which grounds them and sets them free to function more independently. They need to feel their roots strongly enough so they can grow branches, leaves, and fruit of their own.

Of course, this will look different at different ages. Your toddler may need to sit on your lap for ten minutes a few times a day to feel connected, but they won't mind if you're also talking to someone else or glancing at your phone. Just take a moment to greet them, look them in the eye, and give them a wholehearted hug and kiss when you see them.

Younger children want to tell you about their day or their latest ideas. They want to be listened to, asked questions, and heard, but five to ten minutes of real attention is often all it takes, and then they're usually happy to run off and play with their siblings. (As for homework, this is just one of the reasons I'm personally not a fan of it, especially when the child needs

Hashem believes you are the best mother for your children, and that your specific family is the best environment to help them grow into the best people they can be.

a parent's help. It's simply not reasonable to expect a parent to become a full-time tutor after an eight-hour school day. This is something you can discuss with teachers or even the school administration. A parent's primary role is to educate in life, *middos*, and emotional balance, which includes time *away* from academics. Schoolwork belongs during school hours.)

As for your son in *yeshivah* or daughter in seminary, they may just need that hour-long chunk of time once or twice a week to connect with you about their life and feel your love, but the rest of the time should be busy with their friends and/or teachers and rebbeim to whom you have entrusted them.

It's important to remember how meaningful our personal investment in our children truly is. There is no one in the world who can replace a parent. Every minute you spend building a relationship with your child is pouring concrete into the foundation of their life. Whatever they succeed at in the future will be built on that solid base of knowing they were loved, seen, and believed in.

So yes, the hours do add up, but if we keep in mind just how crucial our connection with our children is, surely we can afford those few hours a day to invest in it, no matter how busy we are with everything else in our life. And if it means hiring help for the dishes or laundry (even if we need to borrow to do so!) it's well worth it, if it allows us to show up as the mothers our children need.

FOSTER INDEPENDENCE

At the same time, I want to emphasize that most children (barring special needs) need us *less* than it



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

I want to emphasize that most children (barring special needs) need us less than it may sometimes seem. Yes, they need time, especially focused time, but even more, they need our confidence in their ability to do things on their own.

may sometimes seem. Yes, they need time, especially focused time, but even more, they need our confidence in their ability to do things on their own. It's not our job to entertain our children, mediate every fight, or even problem solve for them. Our job is to coach them so that, with a little bit of prodding, they can begin to do all of the above on their own.

And it's not just about convenience. Children are in fact *less* confident and *less* happy when they need their parents' help for everything. Our job is to be a guide, not a crutch. A child who can do things independently, in an age-appropriate way, is a confident child. Their confidence comes not from what they are told, but from what they know they can do.

EXPLAIN TO YOUR CHILD

Of course, it is possible that with many children and the demanding schedule that many of us have, even the above minimum may be a struggle. And there are times and seasons when a particular child may need extra attention to get through something difficult.

Have faith in your children. Believe that they are capable of understanding their place in the bigger picture. Talk to them about why you aren't available for them as much as they might want when you're dealing with another child, and that when they will need that extra time from

you, you will be there for them too. Your four-year-old can understand that you'll read a book or two, but after that you need to take care of their siblings—whom they love dearly. Ask them what might help them go to sleep even if mommy doesn't read another story. Children can come up with amazing ideas; they know best what they need, and they'll accept it more willingly if the idea is theirs.

HAVE SIBLINGS PITCH IN

Another option is to invite an older sibling to read some of the stories instead. Once again, this isn't just a matter of convenience; caring for and nurturing a younger sibling is tremendous for building character and, for some kids, excellent for their emotional balance.

The truth is, while raising a large family certainly has its challenges, in many ways it can be easier than raising a small one. A family is a unit, and in

a healthy family, everyone helps out. Older siblings help with younger ones, children of all ages help with chores and cleaning up, and younger children entertain each other far better than most adults ever could. Yes, it takes coaching, but it's a short term investment with an eternal payback.

TAKEAWAY

We need to be there for our children

when they need us, and that looks different in every family and at every stage. You ask for a system, but without specific details of your family setup and situation, that's beyond the scope of what I can offer here. Hopefully, considering the ideas above, you can come up with your own system to make your time with your children count more. Consider handing off other tasks and additional time to others who can help - whether they are hired, or from within the family itself.

Believe in yourself, believe in your children, and nothing is beyond you!

Chaya ■



והערב נא ה'
אלקינו את
דברי תורתך
בפינו ובפי כל
עמך בית
ישראל

*Make it sweet for us, please,
Hashem our God, the words
of your Torah into our
mouths and into the mouths
of your whole nation of
Bnei Yisroel.*



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You Are Hashem's Dessert

Morah Chani Brod's Sweet Approach to Chinuch

Shternie Elewitz, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5778 (2018)



As a former Bais Rivkah student, I feel privileged to have the opportunity to interview my beloved first-grade teacher. Morah Chani Brod, a renowned educator who inspires all those around her with her passion for Yiddishkeit, shared many treasures that I'm excited to present to you. Whether you are a parent, an educator, or someone who just has a love for Yiddishkeit, I hope this will inspire and empower you to be more intentional and passionate about your Yiddishkeit, as it did for me.

—Shternie Elewitz

Tell us a little about yourself.

I always wanted to teach. When I was a fourth-grade student in Bais Rivkah, they already drafted me to substitute for a first-grade teacher. I was so excited! Boruch Hashem, I did well then, and now as a professional teacher, I never get tired or bored. I'm so happy to go to school every day!

I feel that where I am today is in the *zechus* of the *mesiras nefesh* of my father, who established underground *yeshivos* in Russia under the direction of the Frierdiker Rebbe. There, he taught *kinderlach* Aleph-Bais, Mishnayos, and other subjects. Today, my brother, two of my daughters, and I all teach first grade.

Can you take us through your process of becoming a teacher—how you started, all the way to where you are today?

I started out teaching in Bais Rivkah. In my second year, I left mid-year because the Rebbe sent us on *shlichus* to Tzfas. In Tzfas, I taught first-grade English, believe it or not. Unfortunately, we had to return to New York, because my father passed away, leaving my mother as an *almana* without any of her children in town to look after her.

We asked the Rebbe what to do, and the Rebbe asked how I felt about the situation. I said that I'm not leaving my mother alone in New York. The Rebbe told us that no matter where we are, we will always be his *shluchim*. We returned to New York, and boruch Hashem, my husband got a job as the *menahel* of 1414.

I substituted in middle school and high school in Bobov and Belz. I would teach *sichos* of the Rebbe to my students and would just tell them that these were teachings of a *tzaddik*, as I couldn't mention that it came from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. After this experience, I came back to teach first grade in Bais Rivkah, with the Rebbe's *brocha*.

It's such a *zechus* to be a teacher in the Rebbe's *moisad*, doing *mileches Shamayim* and affecting a child's *mo'ach* and heart. There is nothing greater than this, even though it is not a well-paying job. Nothing beats teaching our children. Even though all children are Hashem's children, working with other Lubavitcher *mechanchos* who share the same values is like working with family—an extended family!

Nothing beats teaching our children. Even though all children are Hashem's children, working with other Lubavitcher mechanchos who share the same values is like working with family—an extended family!

Can you give us some background on how the Yiddish class began and what it is like teaching this class?

The class was founded by Mrs. Tiechtel and dedicated to her daughter, Alta Mina a"h. The plan was for it to be a full day of only Limudei Kodesh subjects for one year. Mrs. Luba Friedman, who was teaching the first grade at the time, coached me that first year. She taught me how to teach the children to speak, read, and write in Yiddish.

Once I started teaching, I began looking for a curriculum to use, but I didn't find anything I liked. The best curriculum out there wasn't designed for Lubavitcher girls, so I began creating my own. I wrote books and stories and even collaborated with Mrs. Chani Goldschmid to create workbooks that teach children how to speak, read, and understand the language.

Together, we created a workbook with child-friendly stories for Lubavitcher children, which also incorporated important skills such as organizing a story and understanding its content. We also created three skills workbooks on the specific *nekudos* that get replaced by certain *osioyos*. I test the children not only on their reading fluency and accuracy but also on their knowledge of the content. Those who know the material get prizes and chocolate chips—the Enjoy Life brand, double the price of others! These treats keep students motivated to listen while we are reading.

Someone once told me that if I'm teaching Yiddish, it should be total immersion. So for the first two months of the school year, I translate from Yiddish to English, and eventually, the students pick up the language and we speak only Yiddish. Here and there, I have one or two children who don't understand and tell me that

It's important for children to be gaining academic skills, though the best thing they can learn is middos tovos.

they don't speak Yiddish at home. I tell them not to worry, as very few students in the class speak Yiddish at home—we are all going to learn.

Boruch Hashem, my students are successful. Those who came into my class with no prior Yiddish background and kept up their Yiddish by reading the Rebbe's *sichos* and *Der Rebbe Redt Tzu Kinder* still have those skills today. Some of my former students who are now on *shlichus* even teach in Yiddish in their *chadarim*. When asked where they know Yiddish from, they say they remember it from Morah Chani Brod's class. Yiddish is a beautiful skill to have!

How did you see the Rebbe's guidance in your teaching throughout your years in chinuch?

The whole summer before I began teaching the Yiddish class, Bais Rivkah kept asking me to consider the position. I was hesitant about it because I had young children at home. I wrote to the Rebbe about taking on the Alta Mina class, and the Rebbe gave me big, big brochos. Of anyone who had a connection to this Yiddish class, the Rebbe said, "*gadol zechusam*." I felt it over the years.

When I went to the Rebbe that Tishrei for my birthday, the Rebbe told me "Happy Birthday!" I asked my friend Chani Charitonov, who stood by the Rebbe during dollars, "Why didn't the Rebbe speak in Yiddish to me? I always write and speak in Yiddish." She asked me, "What do you speak at home?" "Uh oh," I said. "As my children started speaking English in school, I started answering in English at home." "Good for you," she said. In other words, because I spoke English with my children, the Rebbe spoke English to me. From then on, as you can imagine, we spoke Yiddish at home.

During Zoom school at the height of COVID-19, I was ready to resign due to my lack of computer skills. It was such a stress for me, so I decided to ask the Rebbe if I should resign. The answer I received was, "You have a *chelek* in life, and you're not going to do it?!" I went right back!

Right after COVID-19, when school resumed, the psychologists were telling us teachers that we needed to be very understanding and kind to the children, as they went through a lot of emotional stress and may be very anxious or depressed. I stopped disciplining because of this, and my students were all over the place. Naturally, this led me to feel like I couldn't do it anymore.

I knew I needed a different approach, and I decided to start disciplining, with love. Boruch Hashem, it worked! The first two weeks of the school year, I come into my classroom very firm and serious, and after that introduction, I feel like I can be myself.

These days, it has become a trend for parents not to discipline their children. The children coming from homes where there is no discipline are often the ones acting out in school and going from psychologist to psychologist, being given many labels in an attempt to address the



issue. What these children really need is discipline, in order to feel safe and secure and to be *mentchen*.

I am so grateful that the Rebbe guided me and showed me what my *shlichus* is and where I belong!

Did you ever feel like you wanted to transition into another position in *chinuch* rather than staying in the classroom?

At one point, I wanted to get a degree so I could work one-on-one with students. I asked the Rebbe, and the answer I received many times when I wrote was that I should teach על פי מסורה, according to “*Yisroel sabba*”— aka Yaakov Avinu. I understood that I should stay in the classroom.

Where in Torah can one find the tools to be *mechanech* one’s children the right way?

As a guide, I look at the beautiful stories of our Rebbeim and Rebbetzins and how their parents were *mechanech* them. I very often tell stories to my students about the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe.

There is a story about the Rebbe Rashab telling the Frierdiker Rebbe, when he was about three or four, that when one awakens, one puts their hands together, their head down, and says *Modeh Ani*. The Frierdiker Rebbe asked why, to which the Rebbe Rashab replied, “I’ll tell you why.” He called over his elderly *meshares*, Reb Aharon, and asked him how he says *Modeh Ani*. He proceeded to put his hands together, his head down, and he said *Modeh Ani*. When asked why, he answered, “What kind of question is this?! I do it because that’s what my parents taught me to do, and they learned it from their parents— all the way back to Avraham Avinu.” The Rebbe Rashab explained to his son that we do it because our parents told us to, and they told us to because Hashem told us to. In the same vein, a *morah* or a *rebbe* is telling you what Hashem wants you to do.

There’s another story where the Rebbe Rashab noticed that the Frierdiker Rebbe had already begun eating breakfast and asked him if he had said *brochos* yet. The Frierdiker Rebbe answered that he did. The Rebbe Rashab asked if he had already made a *brocha* and kissed his *tzitzis*. Again, the Frierdiker Rebbe answered in the affirmative. The Rebbe Rashab none-

theless asked him to recite the *brocha* for *tzitzis* again.

The Frierdiker Rebbe asked, “For whom am I repeating this—for Hashem or for you?” The Rebbe Rashab proceeded to give the Frierdiker Rebbe a *patch*—the only time in his life—and said, “If you listen to the *tatteh*, you are listening to Hashem.” Based on these two stories, I created a song about how listening to one’s parents and teachers is like listening to Hashem.

How do you stay so passionate about teaching all these years?

It gives me so much satisfaction and life—so much so that I would say it’s the highlight of my day.

These days, I have to work harder than I used to, as it’s more challenging to keep children engaged than it used to be. Children’s attention spans are very short, and I think this is because many of them spend a lot of time at home playing on devices, or their parents are distracted by a device and are unable to give them quality time and attention. This makes the teaching prep much more time-consuming.

To Hashem, we are everything, and when we see ourselves in that way, it’s easier to see others in that way. We need to show our children how precious they are to Hashem and build them up. I tell my students that they are Hashem’s dessert!

Right before COVID-19, I took guitar lessons so I could make a concert when I teach a song, which would engage the children much more. I can play for first graders and those who are hard of hearing!

Either you keep up with the times or you quit. It’s a whole different way of teaching now, but I’ve adapted my methods because by hook or by crook, the children have to learn.

When my phone rings at school, I tell my students, “I’m teaching *kinderlach* now and I don’t pick up the

phone. Whoever is calling doesn't know that I'm teaching, and I'll tell them later. Right now, I'm teaching."

During Zoom school, I used to tell my students a story at the end of each class. That way, I knew that they would stay on until the end and learn whatever I'd teach. Boruch Hashem, the following year my students were learning at grade-level because I worked so hard to make sure they stayed on our Zoom classes. At one point, my principal, Mrs. Brawer, joined my Zoom class and asked if she could take a picture, because the other classes were not that full. Out of twenty-five students, I had twenty-three on the call.

There are times when I get stressed from the difficulties of teaching and I think to myself, "Oy vey, they can't have a teacher who's nervous." I try hard to keep things calm, and when I need to, I let my assistant take over. The Rebbe gave me this job, and I'm going to stay as long as the Rebbe encourages me. Every time I ask for a *brocha*, the response I receive is always "in the *zechus of chimuch*"—so that's where I'm staying.

It's important for children to be gaining academic skills, though the best thing they can learn is *middos tovos*. At one of my student's birthday parties, the birthday girl chose girls who didn't yet have a turn that year to help in the classroom, to help her give out her birthday *pekelach* and *tzedakah* coins. I told her, "I'm so very proud of you!"

How do you make Yiddishkeit come alive in your classroom and make it sweet for your students?

We are so close to the *Geula she'leimah* that everything we do should be with *aseh tov*—positivity. A "Geula morah" has "Geula students." I try to make my students feel good about themselves. This will help them make *Geulah* choices and improve their learning as well.

Every day, my students bring in *Geula mitzvah* notes. I tell them, "The fuller the jar of notes gets, the closer we are bringing Moshiach. And the first people that we should do favors for are our parents and siblings."

I use humor while teaching, which creates a happy and fun atmosphere in the classroom. For example,

I tell them that a *guf* is a good thing, but when you "goof off with a *guf*," it's not a good thing. I tell them, "You have a *maidele yetzer hara* while I have a *bubbe yetzer hara*."

I also tell stories with props and have the children act them out. I have a puppet in class named Musia, which I use to model the proper way to behave. This way, it's Musia teaching the children, which makes it more exciting.

Additionally, I teach my students how to be a *baalabus-ta* and do whatever a Yiddish mommy does. I teach them how to fold clothes, sew a button, and make *challah* and *krepelach*.

I try to bring out the best in my students. In fact, one of my former students still likes to see me in the hallway because she knows that I

view her in a positive way.

To Hashem, we are everything, and when we see ourselves in that way, it's easier to see others in that way. We need to show our children how precious they are to Hashem and build them up. I tell my students that they are Hashem's dessert!

I think it's important to learn some Chassidus every day in order to be a proper *chossid*, because if in my mind Hashem and the Rebbe are important, this priority will carry over to the children. Children absorb what they observe, and by living as a *chossid*, I'm a role model for them. What a *zechus* to be a Lubavitcher and to be part of Hashem's army!

Tell us about the process of writing your books and songs.

Stories and songs are amazing educational tools. Although my songs are very simple and child-friendly, there's deep Chassidus in them. I look to the Torah and our *rebbeim* for inspiration, and my songs are almost all Lubavitcher niggunim. They teach how to be the best Yid that we can be!

The songs are all about being a Yid: Eating nicely, sleeping nicely, learning nicely, and so on. I also teach my students stories about *simcha shel mitzvah* and the preciousness of Tehillim. My storybooks are stories that actually happened, as I can't make up stories. One story is about a child who doesn't let her friend jump rope with her. The following day, the friend who was excluded the day before allows everyone to

join in the fun—including the girl who didn't let her join the previous day. The girl exclaims, "I'm going to learn from you and allow everyone to join!"

How can we access your songs?

If you search Chana Brod on Spotify, you'll find three of my albums: *Ich Frei Zich Ich Bin a Yid*, *Yidden: An Eretz Cheifetz*, and *A Dirah Lo Yisbarech*. There's also a book available on Spotify called *Most Precious To Hashem*.

How do you recommend we keep up the Yiddish in our homes?

I would suggest that you use every word that you know. Yiddish is a beautiful skill to own—you can't express yourself as well in any other language. I learned in a Chassidus class that when Moshiach comes, we will continue to speak Lashon Hakodesh and Yiddish. By speaking Yiddish, we are turning all "seventy languages of the nations" into *elokus*, because the Jewish people would always adopt whatever the spoken language was during their time, into their Yiddish lexicon.

Hashem enjoys that we are adopting the local language into *kedushah* by using it for Torah learning, and therefore, it's not a waste of time to learn to speak Yiddish properly. Learning and speaking Yiddish is by no means nerdy, nor is it something to be embarrassed of. In Shulchan Aruch, we learn not to listen to those that scoff at us. Since the Torah is *emes* and doesn't change, if you stand strong, those who mock you will not deter you from doing what's right—in fact,

they'll join you. Don't be afraid; this is Hashem's way.

Did you know Yiddish before you began teaching, and what resources do you recommend people use to learn Yiddish?

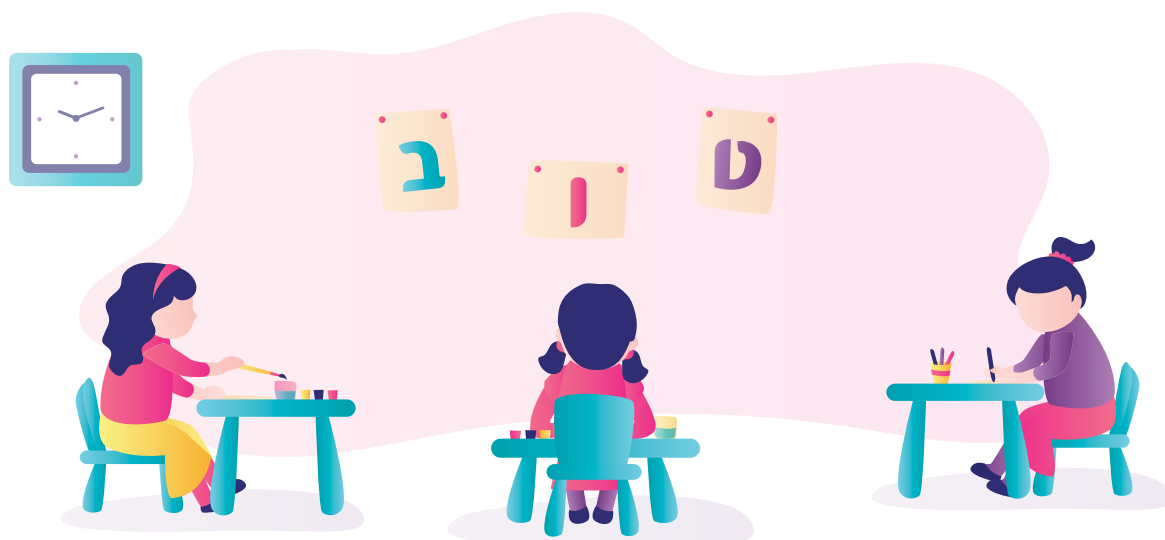
I spoke Yiddish at home, though my Yiddish then didn't compare to what it is after years of teaching my Yiddish class. Mrs. Luba Friedman, whom I was privileged to learn from, spoke such rich Yiddish! Boruch Hashem, I also had good teachers who taught me to write Yiddish with proper grammar, and now I am also comfortable writing in Yiddish.

Over the years, my books have been checked by Reb-betzin Chodakov, Rabbi Nemenov, and Rabbi Yehoshua Dubravsky. I also learned a lot from Rabbi Schmerling of Far Rockaway, whose daughters I taught.

I recommend reading the Rebbe's sichos and picking up Yiddish from the Rebbe's Torah. If need be, hire a teacher who can teach you. I teach adults and have taught post-seminary students as well. I once taught a couple who was on *shlichus* and wanted to learn Yiddish grammar so they could speak it correctly to their children.

What is one last message that you'd like to share with our readers?

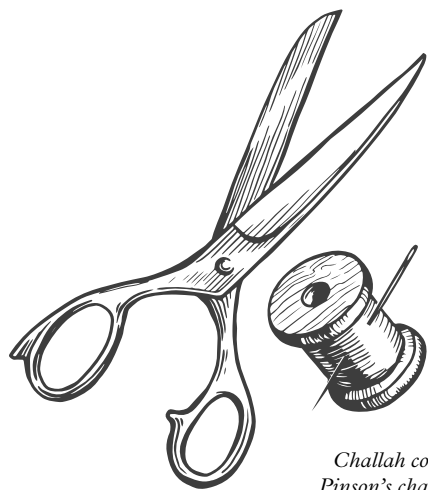
We are right before the *geulah she'leimah*, and the only way to live is through positivity and happiness. We need to use praise rather than criticism, and discipline should be done through love. We need to give each child the message that they are a *tzadeikes*, and that we believe they can do it! ■



Stitching *with* Purpose

*How Aliza Blizinsky
Threads the Sweetness of
Torah and Yiddishkeit*

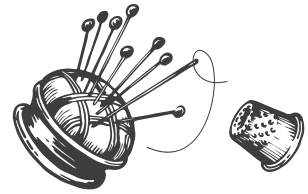
As told to
Sara (Kravitsky) Blau, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5766 (2006)



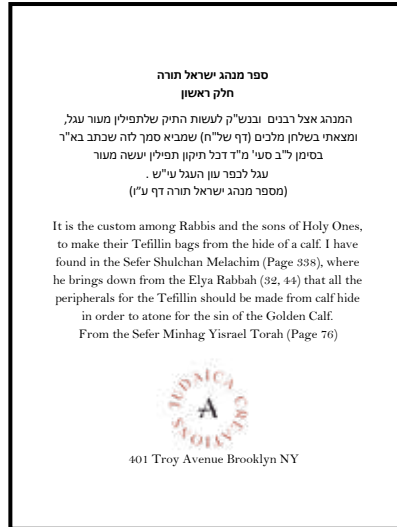
*Challah cover featured in Rochie
Pinson's challah cookbook, Rising.*



When you step into Aliza Blizinsky's Judaica design studio, you might first notice the shelves lined with rich leather—cowhide, goatskin, and more—in hues and textures you never imagined belonged in a Judaica workspace. But spend a few moments watching her interact with a *bar mitzvah* boy, guiding him through leathers, thread colors and fonts, and you'll realize: This is not any old store.



For Aliza, stitching leather tefillin bags isn't just a business— it's a shlichus of helping people serve Hashem with joy and pride.



David Friedman, the American ambassador to Israel, with his tefillin bag



Former Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisroel, Rabbi Lau, with his tefillin bag



Professional basketball player, Omri Caspi, with his tefillin bag

Aliza's sincerity and focus shines through in all her work. As she creates masterpiece *tallis* and *tefillin* bags, she really fuses *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*, helping each customer attain the most beautiful encasing for a *mitvah*. "I believe Hashem is present in every second of our lives," Aliza says. "We just need to open our eyes and become sensitive to the messages He's sending." For Aliza, stitching leather *tefillin* bags isn't just a business— it's a *shlichus* of helping people serve Hashem with joy and pride.

A Teacher of Warmth and Encouragement

I first met Mrs. Aliza Blizinsky as a student in Bais Rivkah, where she taught sewing. I still remember her trying to help me sew a pillow. I don't think I could manage a straight line, but what I remember most was her warmth, her patience, and how much I loved being in her class.

Many women remember Aliza

from sewing class. "She noticed everything," one former student recalled. "Once, I was absent for two weeks, and she stopped me in the hallway and said, 'I missed you! Where were you?' I couldn't believe it. I only had her twice a week, and she noticed."

In her classroom, Aliza taught more than sewing. She discussed *tznius*, not with criticism, but through gentle, loving guidance. "She empowered us," says another student. "We loved her."

Sewing Through the Struggle

After marrying at eighteen, Aliza and her husband moved out on *shlichus*. Things were difficult financially; they borrowed money for rent and groceries, and Aliza began teaching in a local day school. Meanwhile, she was expecting a baby and couldn't afford maternity clothes. So, she

"If you don't try," she says, "how will you ever know what Hashem has given you?"

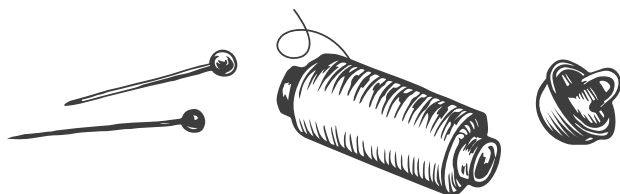
began sewing her own clothing. Two years later her cousin was getting married, and she didn't have a gown—so she made one. She made coats and pants for her kids, honing her skills with whatever she or her family needed. In difficult times, she discovered that Hashem had given her a gift.

A Business Is Born

After those early years of *shlichus*, Aliza returned to Crown Heights to teach in Bais Rivkah. That, too, was a form of *shlichus*, and it fit into her life's mission perfectly. But the next shift happened gradually. When the sewing program at Bais Rivkah was downsized, Aliza wrote to the Rebbe and received a clear directive: "Speak to *mevinim* [experts]." She already had the embroidery machine and had begun practicing on leather. Encouraged by others who recognized her talent, she began

to design and sell Judaica items from her home.

Aliza had no idea she would one day run a full-fledged Judaica studio with a team of seven, state-of-the-art equipment, and custom work shipping worldwide. "If you don't try," she says, "how will you ever know what Hashem has given you?"



Jeff Rosen, owner of Maccabi Haifa, being gifted a tefillin bag



Hollywood Actor David Arquette with his tefillin bag

First it was in her playroom, then her garage. Within a year, the demand grew so quickly that she had to move into a professional workspace. "The *brochos* were flowing," she says. The building is owned by a non-Jew, but as Aliza puts it, "I'm making it a *makom kadosh*."

Aliza's main work today is custom leather *tefillin* and *tallis* bags—elevated, meaningful, mitzvah-centered art. She also designs *challah* and *matzah* covers, embroidered pieces for *shuls* and families, and specialty gifts for *simchos* and Yomim Tovim. Her work has redefined the Judaica space, introducing elegant, refined materials like leather in a world once dominated by heavy velvet.

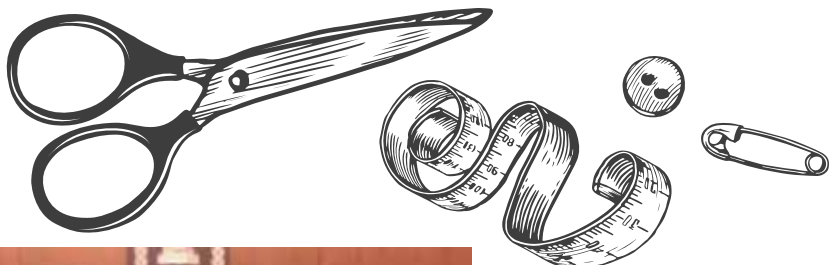
Not everyone understood her design choices and use of leather at first. One rabbi even challenged her for straying from traditional velvet. But then she met Rabbi Clapman, a respected *sofer*, who shared a powerful insight: Since *tefillin* atone for the *chet ha'egel*, storing them in leather from a cow is actually a *hiddur mitzvah*. That moment became a turning point. "It wasn't just validation—it gave me a message to pass on. Now, I share that idea with every *bar mitzvah* boy I meet. It turns a design decision into a Torah conversation. And it helps the boys connect to the *mitzvah*."

"And maybe that's part of why women don't wear *tefillin*," she adds with a smile. "The women didn't participate in the *chet ha'egel*, so we don't need that *kaporah*. But we still get to help elevate it. Hashem gave women *binah yeseira*; I get to use mine to help boys beautify a *mitzvah*."



Ka'arah of Robert Kraft,
owner of New England Patriots

“Every thread can carry Torah. Every detail can become a vessel for Hashem’s light. And when we do our work with this focus, it becomes the sweetest thing in the world.”



Prime Minister Netanyahu being
gifted a Challah cover

Empowering Bar Mitzvah Boys, One Bag at a Time

Aliza is deeply invested in empowering *bar mitzvah* boys to take pride in this new *mitzvah*. She always asks for *their* input, not just the parents’. “This is their *mitzvah*, their *tefillin*, their beginning of being responsible for *mitzvos*. I want them to feel ownership and excitement.”

She’s seen firsthand how much this matters. A boy from out of town came in with his parents, excited to choose a *tefillin* bag.

He was vibrant, expressive, and had a colorful sense of style. As they looked through leather samples and threads, Aliza complimented his creative taste and his bright sneakers.

A week later, the boy’s mother reached out to Aliza. Her son had been in a *yeshiva* where he felt out of place. But Aliza’s comment gave him the courage to transfer to a *yeshiva* that was a better fit for his creative style. “It reminded me how powerful compliments are,” Aliza says. “Kindness can change a child’s direction.”

Aliza believes every boy should

feel proud of his *tefillin*. “When a boy helps create the bag—chooses the color, the thread, the shape—he walks into *shul* feeling, “This is mine.” His *davening* is sweeter. His pride in the *mitzvah* is stronger.”

Aliza’s team is trained not only to deliver beautiful work, but to understand the significance behind it: “This is for *kedusha*. We’re not just making something beautiful—we’re making something holy.” She photographs each piece professionally before sending it to the customer. “The presentation matters. People should feel that they’re receiving something sacred.”



David Friedman, the American ambassador to Israel, with his tefillin bag



Singer Gad Elbaz with his tefillin bag



Aliza's clientele has grown to include public figures—a *tallis* bag for Gad Elbaz, a *matzah* cover for Robert Kraft, a *challah* cover for Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, a *tallis* bag for Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, and one for Rabbi Berel Lazar. She even embroidered a team logo into a *matzah* cover for the owner of the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team.

But just as meaningful are the quieter stories: A Lubavitcher bubbly brought her not-yet-*frum* grandson, hoping the experience would touch him. It did. He listened to Aliza explain the

meaning of *tefillin*—the *mitzvah* of wearing them, the symbolism in the leather. He turned to his grandmother and said, "That's really interesting." She hugged Aliza and whispered, "You have no idea what you just did."

Aliza's personal connection sets her apart from others in the trade. Her honesty, too, shines through in her work—whether she is guiding a child or an adult—and people trust her because of it. She once remade an entire bag after realizing a name had been misspelled. "I'm a *frum* Yid. I say the truth. And as a businesswoman, I want my clients to trust me."

A Gift from Hashem

Asked how she found this path, Aliza says: "Hashem gave it to me. Every time I needed to take a step forward, even when it was painful, He gave me the next step." For women looking to find their own gifts, Aliza offers this advice: "Try. Explore. Hashem gives us all something. You don't have to be perfect at everything. But you do have to show up and try. The gifts are there, but you won't find them unless you begin."

Aliza is not a trained artist. But Hashem gave her creativity and a vision, and her love for Yiddishkeit ties it all together. "I use it for *kedusha*, and I get to make people happy at the same time."

Whether teaching girls, helping *bar mitzvah* boys, or designing for world leaders, Aliza's focus remains the same: "Every thread can carry Torah. Every detail can become a vessel for Hashem's light. And when we do our work with this focus, it becomes the sweetest thing in the world." ■

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בזכות נשים צדקניות
נגאלו... ובזכותן נגאל

If the “beekeeper”, Hashem, considers our actions worthwhile, who are we to argue? Were we to see the bigger picture as Hashem does, we might view our seemingly insignificant accomplishments as great accomplishments.

One last thought: The nature of honey is that it does not spoil with time. Indeed, it has the ability to preserve, practically forever, that which is stored within it. Chassidus has the same quality: By immersing ourselves in it, we enjoy a special protection and spiritual durability.

With best wishes for a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*,
le’shanah tovah u’mesukah,

Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov ■

1. שמות ג, ח; שלח, יד, ח. ועוד.

2. מכילתא דרשב"י, יג, ה.

3. התנועות ה'תשד"מ ח"ג, ע' 1977

4. לקושי תורה כי תבוא מא, ג. ראה באריכות תורה אור קז, ב.

5. מיוסד על חגיגה יג, א. וראה רמב"ם הל' יסוה"ת ספ"ב.

6. דברים רבה א,ו.

7. ה' אייר

8. הל' תשובה פ"ג, ה"ב, ד.



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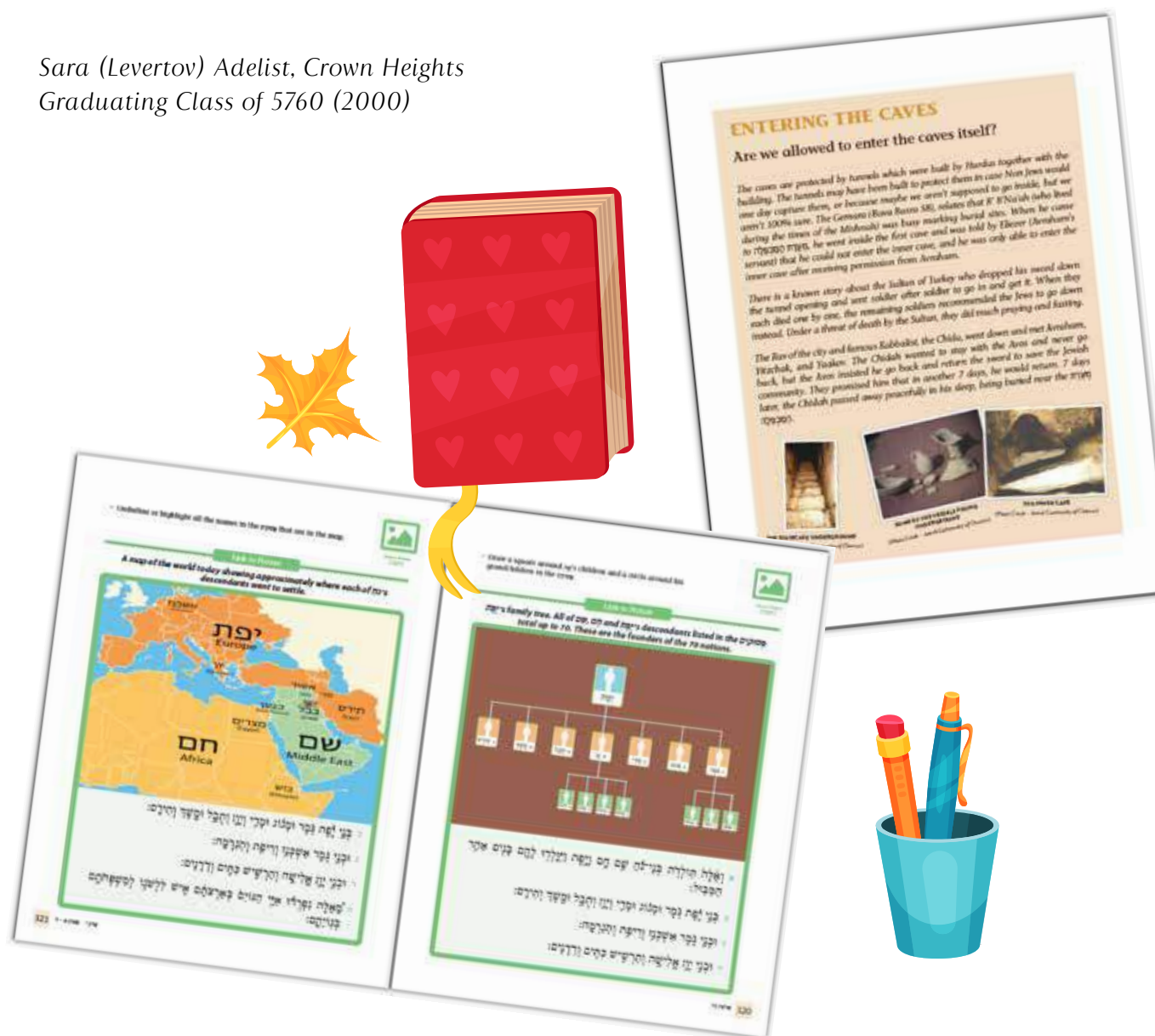
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ACU FOR ATHLETES

Sweet From The Start

Sara (Levertov) Adelstein, Crown Heights
Graduating Class of 5760 (2000)



It begins with honey.

At the Areinfinish—the cherished moment when a young child is introduced to learning Torah—our *minhag* is to place honey on the Alef-Beis letters. The child licks the sweetness

from the holy letters, a taste they'll hopefully associate with Torah forever. Some even "receive sweets from Malach Michoel," an early reminder that learning Torah is not only holy, but pleasurable.

The Baal Shem Tov, before revealing himself, lived this principle. Each morning, he would carry the small children of the town to cheder, treating them like precious Sifrei Torah. It wasn't just the ride they cherished—it was the love, the warmth, the sense that Torah is something beautiful, something to run toward.

Making the Torah sweet is the foundation for children to be successful in their learning and in their observance of Yiddishkeit. But how do we preserve that sweetness as the child grows? How do we move beyond the candies and rewards, and cultivate a genuine love for learning Torah?

True sweetness comes from understanding. When children can decode, translate, visualize, and apply what they're learning, they feel successful. And when they feel successful in their learning, they enjoy learning.

In order to decode Torah texts, children need language skills. And ultimately, comprehension has to translate into practical lessons that inspire keeping *mitzvos*.

These beliefs are what led my husband and I to establish *Torah For Children*, a curriculum designed to build the foundational skills of Kriah, Chumash, and Gemara in a way that is clear, visual, relevant, and empowering. We want children to not only learn Torah—we want them to love it.

Lashon Hakodesh is a foreign language to many children. Learning the art and skill of vocabulary, *dikduk*, and the basics of translating Lashon Hakodesh in the context of learning Torah is key for children to feel empowered and gain independence. So we designed our materials to be skill-based and accessible. As children follow the steps in our seforim, they gain the tools to translate and make sense of *pesukim* on their own. With understanding comes confidence—and with confidence comes joy.

We also use full-color illustrations (though abstract, to avoid limiting imagination) to train children to visualize what they are learning in the text. The comic-style lessons at the end of each perek show how Torah applies to their world. As a result, teachers are seeing that students not only learn more, but they're *excited* to learn. One teacher told us that our Chumashim have given her students a love for learning Torah. Their *chayus* and success are thanks to their

How do we move beyond the candies and rewards, and cultivate a genuine love for learning Torah?

getting to taste the sweetness of Torah.

Take Parshas Noach, Perek Yud, for example. It's easy to skim the thirty-two *pesukim* listing Noach's descendants. But when children learn that these are the names of the founders of the seventy nations of the world—and that some, like Tiros, are still around today (Iran)—the text becomes meaningful and the Chumash carries a different relevance. Similarly, for the story in Parshas Chayei Sarah about Avraham purchasing Me'oras Hamachpe'lah, we made a feature section giving a tour of Chevron and Me'oras Hamachpe'lah throughout the ages and how our claim to Me'oras Hamachpe'lah applies today.

When children taste the Torah and find it sweet, they thirst for more. That's our passion—and our goal. ■



When children taste the Torah and find it sweet, they thirst for more.

Substantial Sweetness

Kesem Mia (Nir) Hetsrony, Houston, TX
BR Seminary Graduating Class of 5777 (2007)



It's all the difference a pinch of sugar can make in your sauce, or a splash of honey can make in your cup of tea.

And yet, no one's eating spoonfuls of honey or sugar alone.

Because sweetness needs substance; a cake it's mixed into, a drink it's dissolved in. Even candies need flavoring and other ingredients to make the sugar palatable.

The sweetness of a Jew's life is the same. It needs substance.

Imagine finding yourself at the most magnificent party. The decor is impeccable. From the tasteful linens and serveware, to the detailed centerpieces and china, the celebration is alight with beauty and elegance. Brilliant flower arrangements decorate the hall, infusing it with the most wonderful fragrance. Top singers are perform-

ing, accompanied by the most talented musicians. And the tantalizing food is an exciting culinary adventure of taste, texture, and presentation.

The entire event is a masterpiece of beauty, enjoyment and pleasure that enlivens all your senses. Yet you are sitting alone, with no friends in attendance. You painfully attempt to make small talk with strangers who seem clearly disinterested.

Everything is literally being served to you on a silver platter. Yet you look for something to do, to belong to, to participate in. Amidst all this beauty and wonder, you find no inspiration, nor connection. Despite it all, you are simply not happy.

And suddenly it dawns on you:

Pleasure alone is not happiness!

—

For a Jew, each day is an incredible celebration of life and living. We can fill our lives with all the physical beauty and pleasure in the world, yet without substance, we simply won't be able to enjoy it.

That substance is to live with *meaning* and *connection*. That is the sweetness of Jewish life. No physical pleasure or fun will ever be able to give a Jew true joy and satisfaction. This applies to all of us, our children and students included.

Recently, my daughter worked hard in a *middos* campaign. For each level she passed, her principal gave her a chocolate. Her excitement and joy for that small treat was incomparable to any nosh I could have given her at home. She earned the chocolate, it was given for a reason, her achievements were recognized, and she felt part of something.

The meaning and connection amplified the sweetness a thousandfold.

Sweet Bites for a Substantially Sweet Life



**"לא טוב
היות האדם לבדו"**

We are not meant to live alone.

Of course, our personal connection and relationship to the Aibishter is vital to our very existence. But here I want

to focus on the connection we have with one another.

If you were ever the lonely kid on the bus, I'm sure you can relate to this. If you were ever traveling on a trip with non-stop fun and excitement, but no one made an effort to talk to you and include you in the socializing, you know that loneliness can make you feel empty inside.

How can you prevent that?

Our dear Rebbe empowers each and every one of us to be a *נר להאיר*, a light that illuminates our surroundings. When we turn on the light for others, it ensures that we ourselves are never in the dark.

*Amidst all this beauty and wonder,
you find no inspiration, nor
connection. Despite it all, you are
simply not happy.*



To illustrate how practical and profound this is, join me for a moment on a walk down memory lane...

I'm eight years old, in the car on the way to school. My mother is navigating us through traffic on Los Angeles's notorious freeways, yet her thoughts are on the playground and lunchroom.

"Kesem Mia, if someone is sitting alone, sit next to them. If someone is by themselves, you be their friend!" This scene repeats itself many times, for many many years, as we travel and explore all kinds of roads to school.

Because of this outlook, my childhood friends were a wide range of colorful personalities, which painted my worldview in a way I am forever grateful for. (And, as a born extrovert, it took me years to recognize that some people actually do like "alone time," and you need to respect that too!)

As I continue on my road of life, my mother's words guide me. In fact, even now, as the new school year begins, my mother reminds me to look out for my students and help them have friends.

My mother's instructions were aimed at ensuring that every child would feel seen and united. The byproduct of that, is that my mother instilled in me how to

When I find myself in new - and often lonely - surroundings, I have a mission: I'm there to be a friend.

find meaning in the face of loneliness.

When I find myself in new - and often lonely - surroundings, I have a mission: I'm there to be a friend.

From a young age I was charged with seeing the meaning to my very existence. I know that I am here to make the world a more welcoming and joyful place for others. And this makes my life meaningful and joyous.

With this mission in hand, I fight loneliness and negativity that confronts me. I don't *look* for the light. I *am* the light. The Rebbe taught us to become leaders. And as leaders, when it comes to connection, the Rebbe's approach gives us the ability to unite with the greater whole, without losing our identity in the process.

What could be sweeter?



תורה מלשון הוראה

As the Rebbe's Chassidim, we know that every nuance

in Torah is layered with deep meaning, practical application, and a personal mission to our avodah. *Ash-reinu mah tov chellkeinuu!*

But knowing this is not enough. We actually have to do the work. We have to learn and find that meaning. And when teaching our children and students, we have to help them find it too.

Every single part of Torah is practical and relevant. If we're not seeing it, it's on us to discover it. When we don't, the emptiness gnaws at us from within. No physical delicacy can placate a starved soul.

"Who cares?"

"What's the point?"

"What difference does it make?"

"Why are we learning this?"

The questions of our teenage children and students are a reflection of their deep desire for living with

meaning. They are phenomenal questions that we need to embrace and find answers to.

We need to own Torah, and explore it. If we find a topic uninspiring, we need to search for *peirushim* and stories that will bring to light its depth. And we need to share it with others. Open a book, listen to a podcast, ask a friend. The world of meaning is literally at our fingertips.



האמנתי כי אדבר - Talk About It!

The more you talk about something, the more you strengthen your *emunah* and conviction on

the matter. Empowering ourselves and our children to do this is huge. Creating opportunities for our youth to be leaders, to share, and to inspire others is how we can permeate all of our lives with Torah. Don't be scared of the "whys." Embrace them, ask some questions of your own, and empower your children to discover and share the sweet answers!



Live a Life of Farbrenging!

Have you recently, as an adult, had the chance to *farbreng* with your friends? To really open up and talk about G-dliness, challenges in *Avodas Hashem*, inner struggles in becoming better

people, our desire to actually desire Geula?

The other day, my friends and I did just that. Sitting around my dining room table, we *farbrenged* about our struggles with self-criticism and procrastination. We *farbrenged* about bringing Moshiach being a life-mission and not just a slogan. We *farbrenged* about finding Hashem in our labor and delivery experiences. We *farbrenged*.

The joy and satisfaction of such conversations are unparalleled. As Jewish women, so much of our *ruchniyus* is intertwined with our family's *gashmiyus*, and it's so easy to fall into the trap of superficial conversations and relationships. Personally, I love beautiful

things, get a thrill from shopping, and can totally talk sheitels, home decor, and baby clothes.

But I know that will never fully satisfy me. Those superficial conversations are like a cookie, sweet and fun, but nauseating if you eat too many. You, too, know you are so much more than that. You are one of the *nashim tzidkaniyos* of our generation. Your inner essence stirs with depth, *bitachon*, and greatness. Creating opportunities and conversations that allow you to tap into those aspects of yourself, is freeing.

Have you experienced the sweetness of letting your *neshama* soar?



Sweetness Requires Hard Work

When all is said and done, what exactly makes Yiddishkeit and Chasidishkeit sweet?

Many of my former students can attest that on the first day of school

I will often come to class with a bag of clementines—an idea my older sister is credited for. As I hand each student a fruit, I explain that they can see, touch, and smell it. But if they want to *taste* it and truly enjoy the fruit for what it was created for, they are going to have to peel it. Peeling can sometimes be a challenge. Pith can get under your nails. The acid can cause stinging on a fresh cut, and some peels are hard to remove completely. Yet, if you want to truly enjoy your fruit, you simply need to work at it. The same is true of our learning. If we truly want to enjoy the learning experience, we need to work hard and peel away at layers of meaning and understanding. We need *yegiah*—hard work. It's challenging, but it's all part of the process of uncovering the sweetness that awaits.

Hard work brings sweet results.

So yes, *all* of Yiddishkeit is deliciously, magnificently sweet.

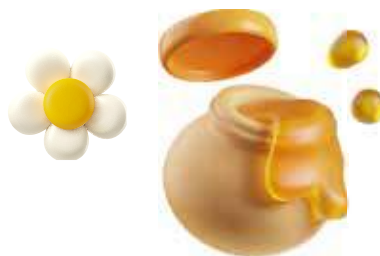
When it's challenging, when it gets under your nails, when it feels like a sting—all of that hard work ultimately leads to the endless joy and sweetness of Torah living.

The rich meaning and deep connection of Yiddishkeit gives our lives a sweetness and pleasure beyond measure. Working to fill our lives with true, fulfilling

Hard work brings sweet results.

substance, is what allows us to truly enjoy and appreciate the sweetest moments of our lives.

I wish each and every one of you a *shana tova u'mesukah* - a year permeated with the sweetness of Jewish life and living, a year of meaning and connection, and above all else, a year in which we welcome Moshiach now. ■



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Chinuch from the Inside Out

Make It Sticky, Make It Sweet

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



Today's world is a challenging one to grow up in. The Rebbe often spoke about the task of the educator as being "to immunize children so that they will be able to stand up to the tests of life and the winds that blow in the world."¹ But those winds are not friendly and are swirling closer to home every day, as the Rebbe continued to reference "the winds blowing in the street" of worldly influences.

The book “The Hurried Child” by David Elkind, PhD, talks about how children today are “growing up too fast, too soon,” because of the onslaught of media, exposure to scary news and inappropriate images, increased need to be independent and alone while parents are distracted and busy, and the rapid speed of modern life.

And this book was written in 1981!

Today, the hurried child is even more hurried and the wind that the Rebbe said is blowing in the street has made its way into our homes, bedrooms, and pockets. Our children are crying out - whether silently or overtly - for a truth that will hold them safe and secure in these turbulent times.

They need an anchor, and we have one for them!

The Rebbeim explained that the term “*kevius itim la'Torah*,” establishing fixed times for Torah, connotes “*kevius ba'nefesh*” - established (fixed and rooted) in the soul. This imperative is about more than just time management; it is telling us to consider our Torah study so important to who we are that we would never dream of missing a session. This term conjures for me the image of an anchor, sent deep down inside of us, so that our choices will always reflect who we are.

This is a lesson not just for establishing set times for learning (something I can definitely improve on), but also for our approach to *chinuch* in general. Yiddishkeit needs to be anchored within us—not merely external, superficial, or done by rote. And this is what we need to give our children so that they have a firmly rooted identity that no winds - outward or inward - can blow away.

How do we accomplish this?

The answer is in our honey dish on the Rosh Hashanah table.

Make it sticky.

We need to make Yiddishkeit something that permeates our whole being—not something that washes off easily but something that leaves you licking your fingers because it just won't come off! This anchors Torah and *mitzvos* deep within; instead of it being just a list of dos and don'ts it becomes who we are—a clear identity in a confusing world.

The most cherished compliment I got in all my years of Chinuch was when a parent told me that I gave

“To immunize children so that they will be able to stand up to the tests of life and the winds that blow in the world.”

the students “the *lachluchis* of Chassidus.” *Lachluchis* literally means moisture.

Why does this matter?

When I'm baking *challah* with my children, if I spill flour on my clothing, I can mostly brush it off. If I spill water, though, I'm wet. If I spill oil, I'm stained. If I spill honey - good luck! I'm sticky!

Chassidishe lachluchis is what makes Yiddishkeit stick! Chassidishkeit doesn't just mean checking off the boxes of *chassidishe hanhagos*, it means diving into the world that Chassidus invites us into, a world of *niggunim*, stories, *farbrengens*, *chassidishe chayus*. This life makes Yiddishkeit a part of us. We're not just wet - we're swimming!

By sharing this world with our children, the *geshmak* of Yiddishkeit that Chassidus gives us, we help them connect deeply with Yiddishkeit so that it's a part of them - not something that can come off in the washing machine.



*Just like there is a shturem today
for all things gashmiyus, we need
to make a shturem for ruchniyus.*

The depth of Chassidus is not an extra in our generation. It's no accident that Jews of all stripes are now gravitating to *Pnimiyyus HaTorah*. In our chinuch, we need to make time for the deeper dimension, instead of just prioritizing ground to be covered and skills to be taught (though both are important as well). At home, we can live our life with this depth, this *geshmak*, this *lachluchis*, through our bedtime songs, the stories we tell, the *niggunim* at the Shabbos table.

Chassidus makes Yiddishkeit sticky, if we'll just let it inside.

And make it sweet.

The Rebbe taught us to make Yiddishkeit the most beautiful, tasty and attractive thing to our children.

The Alter Rebbe's refrain of "*ta'amu u'reu ki tov havaye*" (taste and you will see that the Aibershter is good) is a lifelong approach to *Avodas Hashem*, but also a fundamental approach to *chinuch*. In the simplest of ways, we can make Yiddishkeit delicious and wonderful for our children.

The first step is connecting Yiddishe *inyonim* with things kids find to be yummy - literally. Like a new *cheder* boy licking the honey off of the Aleph-Beis, giving out treats for knowing the answers to the *parshah* questions, Cocoa Club for Chitas, danishes for Shabbos Mevorchim Tehillim, and putting out goodies at *farbrengens* for all ages.

Then there are the more subtle and abstract joys of life, like spending quality time on a parent's lap while reviewing Aleph-Beis; sitting together on the couch while learning Torah; going on an exciting trip, to the Rebbe's library (and then pizza!), or to the Ohel for a child's birthday; dancing together while *niggunim* are playing; or setting a beautiful table for a *chassidishe* Yom Tov.

Another way to make Yiddishkeit sweet is to make it experiential. Educators will tell you how they strive to create multisensory lessons to involve every part of the student in the learning, and parents auto-

matically do this as they go about their daily lives, weaving fun and hands-on experiences with Torah and *mitzvos*. This has (at least!) two benefits:

1) The children associate Torah and *mitzvos* with enjoyable activities, so that the joyful memory is inseparable from their association with Torah and *mitzvos*.

2) As Bruriah advised young students who were learning silently in the Beis Medrash, "עם ערוכה ברמ"ח" – if [Torah] is embedded in all of your 248 limbs, it will be retained; if not, it will be forgotten." The more we involve not only our bodies and senses, but metaphorically, every aspect of our personality, the more Torah will be one with who we are and will stick with us. All five senses, all parts of our body and being, will be anchored in Torah.

To anchor students in Torah, and to withstand the raging winds, we also need to compete in a sense with all the worldly values swirling around us. The *gashmiyus'dike* world of instant gratification is very much in our faces and has a magnetic pull, and we need to make the truth that we have to offer—the *true* sweetness and deep gratification of Torah and *mitzvos*—even more compelling.

The Rebbe emphasized that just like there is a *shturem* today for all things *gashmiyus*, we need to make a *shturem* for *ruchniyus* - hence the Lag B'omer parades, prizes for learning and *mivtzoim*, and all the fun and fanfare we now take for granted in our extracurricular programming. At home or in the classroom, there is no shame in promising children exciting prizes and trips for achievements in learning or *middos tovos*, or giving an allowance of spending money for Mishnayos or Tanya *ba'al peh*. We can see this not as bribery, but as celebrations of what we truly value. This, too, makes Yiddishkeit sweet.

Finally, there's the enjoyment of the *ruchniyus* itself. How do we teach kids to enjoy a *blatt* Gemara or a *chassidishe vort*? How do we help them make friends with their *siddur*, or feel good about befriending the new kid in the class? How do we give them the joy that propels our adult commitment to Yiddishkeit?

By living it.

And don't be shy. Why is Mommy getting a babysitter and going out? Because she also wants to learn the *parshah*, just like you! Why are we having a cake at dinner tonight? Because Tatty finished a *mesechta*! Why are we listening to that song in the car? Because it's our favorite *niggun*, we just love it! And wouldn't

you believe this amazing idea I heard in a podcast on the way to work today?! I never knew that story in Navi before, thanks for sharing it with me, I want to hear every detail!

The golden rule in writing is, "Show, don't tell." That sounds to me like a golden rule for Chinuch as well! By showing our children how lucky we feel to be Yidden, to be Chassidim, that is the best way to convince them of the same.

Because ultimately, we are their anchor. It is me and you - mommies, tatties, morahs, rebbies - we are the ones that children look to in the storm. How we live, and what we exude, is the basis for their entire identity.

Today, more than ever, the *neshamos* in our care need us to give them a truth they can hold onto - in a way that they can hold on tight.

So make it sticky, make it sweet.

Our generation is ready and waiting. ■

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

1. Hosafos Le'Sichos Kodesh ,5728 vol 1 .p506 .

**"Show,
don't tell."**



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sweet New Year!

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Chani (Chein) Lunger, Monsey, New York
BR Sem Beis Graduating Class of 5771 (2011)

About Me

I grew up in Argentina. Now, I am a wife and a mother to two boys, and I live in Monsey, New York.

I love to express myself through art— with bright colors and mixed media like beads and gems. My passion for the idea that the world runs on a cycle where we all give and receive from each other is what drives my current occupation: Leading art sessions at day-hab programs. In leading these sessions I witness how, when given the opportunity, *everyone* can create. Even if someone's physical abilities or verbal communication are challenged, they can use their imagination to create masterpieces.

Lately, I have been sharing on my Instagram page (@chanilunger), not only my works of art but a window into my daily life and thoughts as someone living with a disability.

I was born with an AVM in my spine which caused weakness in my lower limbs. Today, I use crutches and braces to walk around.

My passion for the idea that the world runs on a cycle where we all give and receive from each other is what drives my current occupation: Leading art sessions at day-hab programs.





chanilunger

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Message



Chani Lunger

Artist

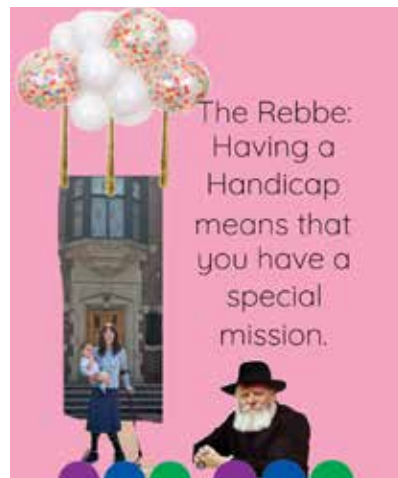
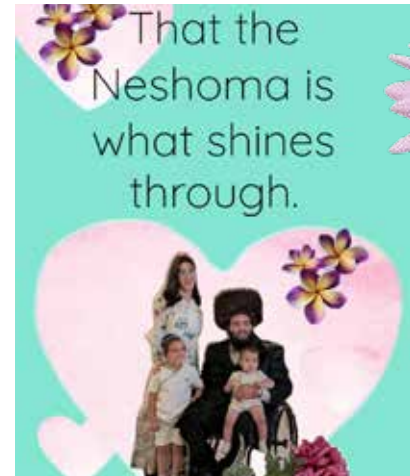
👤 @avrumilunger

mom 💕💕

paraplegic 🦯🦯

artist 🎨🖌️

finding joy in the everyday



I find the format of writing in short sentences alongside collages to be a fun way to express and share. Allow me to show you a few samples!

Torah is Sweet

Here is an instagram carousel that I made for the readers of the

Embrace magazine. It relates to the theme of this issue, "Torah is Sweet."

Chosen, Not Limited

It was Chol Hamoed Sukkos, and I was sitting in the Sukkah. I was thirteen years old, and I was feeling sorry for myself. My friends had gone on a trip, and I hadn't joined because I felt that the walking would be too difficult for me.

I questioned: "Why is it hard for me to walk while my friends can run around? Why me? Why is this hard?" My mother showed me the *sicha* where the Rebbe speaks to the נכי צה"ל, soldiers from the IDF who



were injured during their service. The Rebbe turned around the whole idea of being physically challenged. He explained that having a handicap is something that highlights the special mission and direction that you have. When you are missing something in your body, it means that Hashem gave you the strength to overcome the challenge and to be an example to other people as to how you live life with confidence and happiness. Most of all, at the end of the day it is the *neshamah* that shines and overpowers the body, allowing us to do so many *mitzvos*.

Learning that *sicha* flipped a switch for me. It turned something that seemed sad and bad into something special. It brought light into my seemingly dark situation. My perspective changed: I didn't feel limited; I felt chosen.

Of course, maintaining this perspective is a lifelong *avodah*. But suddenly, I started noticing all the things I could do instead of everything that I couldn't.

Now, I ask myself questions like: What can I contribute? Where am I needed? The world needs me just as I am, and I *can* make a difference. I have so much to be and to give.

And the same is true for you. (And it just so happens that when you start viewing yourself that way— with confidence— people around you view you the same way).

What good can you do with the talents and circumstances that Hashem gave you?

And here's another thought: Sometimes, just by being our unique selves, we already accomplish so much.



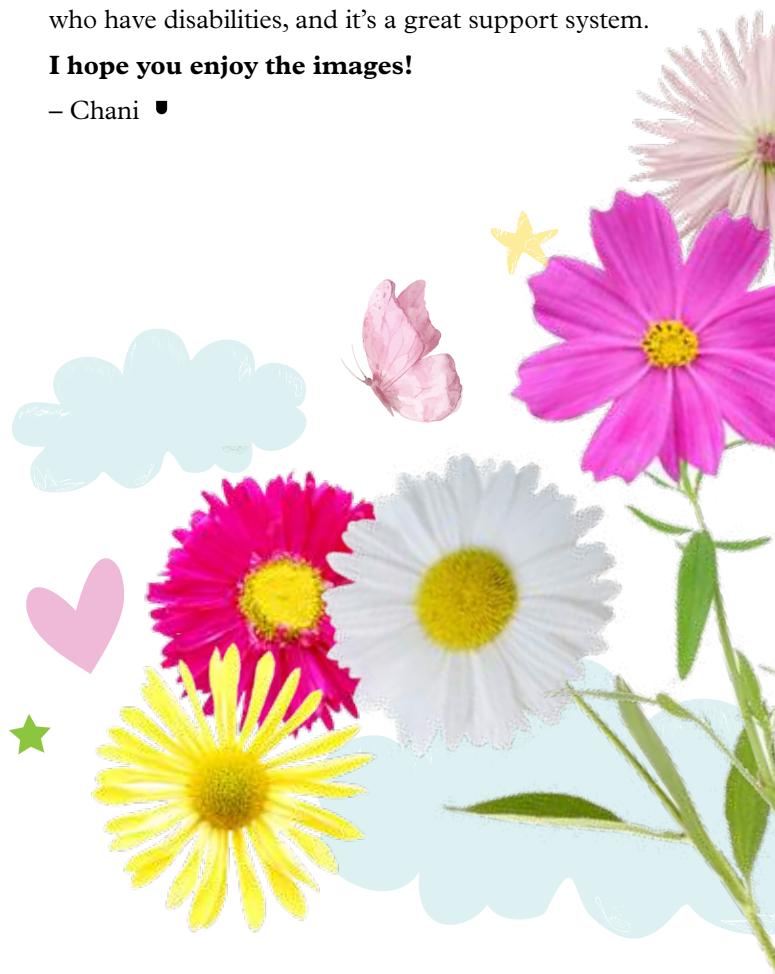
Managing a Home

Even before I got married, my mother would tell me to seek out moms with disabilities to see how they managed raising their kids. I told her that when the time came I would figure it out.

Here is a collage I made of a few pointers of how I think I manage. I think we all manage more or less the same and find things that work and make the job easier. And of course, now I'm friends with moms who have disabilities, and it's a great support system.

I hope you enjoy the images!

– Chani ■



י"טו

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Gift Giving on a Budget

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Batya R. (Wolvovsky) Engel, Crown Heights, NY
Graduating Class of 5761 (2001)



APPRECIATING MY CHILD'S CHINUCH TEAM

When my first child entered the revered halls of Bais Rivkah Lefferts— a building that I had heard so much about growing up but never merited to actually study in—I felt a whirlwind of emotions. I was immensely proud that she was old enough to learn in the institution founded by the Rebbe, the school where I had learned as a child. Yet, this milestone also meant that I would no longer be her primary educator. I was now joining forces with a talented team of women, both young and seasoned, who would share the responsibility of nurturing my child's education.

In those early days, I would enthusiastically participate in class Chanukah *gelt* collections, gladly contributing my share. And as the school year would draw to a close, I would once again look to express my gratitude to my daughter's wonderful teachers for the *chassidishe* knowledge, Tanya *ba'al peh*, and skills they had instilled in her, all before she even turned five. As a teacher myself, I knew how much gifts were appreciated, so I chose to give gift cards.

By the time my second daughter joined her sister at school, I had transitioned from the classroom to an administrative role. My daughter was facing some sensory challenges, which led me to be introduced to IEPs, evaluations, and a variety of therapists. This expanded the team involved in her education, making it essential for me to express gratitude to a larger group of individuals. Additionally, being in an administrative role helped me appreciate those who work with the teachers outside of the classroom. I managed to keep the gifting reasonable and continued contributing to the Chanukah *gelt* collections and gifting teachers, principals, and therapists at the end of the year.

CREATING A GIFTING SYSTEM

By the time my fourth child entered the school system, I realized I needed a more systematic approach to showing appreciation. I understood the importance of thanking everyone involved in my children's *chinuch*, as the educators often spent more of my children's waking hours with them than I did. That year, while collecting Chanukah *gelt* for my daughter's class, I decided to ask parents to send in cards alongside their contributions. I organized these cards into a binder, designed a charming cover, and even wrote a six-line poem. The binder was a hit with the teachers, sparking my journey toward meaningful, budget-friendly gifts.

At the end of that year, I wrote a poem to express how the teachers, therapists, and principals nurtured our “flower,” and paired it with a live plant. I found a local nursery where I purchased potted plants in bulk for about five dollars each. I wrapped them in cellophane bags from the dollar store, creating a thoughtful gift. The following year, I decided to give small gifts to all my children's teachers. As one who enjoys baking and working with chocolates, I purchased a mold that said “Shana Tovah” and created chocolates and honey cookies. I ordered boxes and bags in bulk from

Each child expresses gratitude in their unique way—thanking us for family meals, shopping trips, or summer camp—and they even write their own thank-you letters to their teachers at the year's end.

a wholesale supplier, along with mini jars of honey, and included a poem about our excitement to partner with the teachers for the upcoming school year. Each gift cost around two dollars and was warmly received.

This approach evolved into a seasonal tradition. Now, I give gifts four times a year: At the beginning of the year, Chanukah time, Purim time, and at the end of the year. Each gift features cookies and chocolates. For example, during Chanukah, I make cookies and chocolates shaped like dreidels and include chocolate coins. For Purim, my mishloach manos consists of homemade truffles, hamantashen, and a mini bottle of *mashkeh*. At the end of the year, I prepare flower-shaped cookies and chocolates, along with a small token gift, like a keychain.

While I initially sourced packaging from wholesale suppliers, platforms like Amazon and Walmart now make it easy to find affordable options. My gifts typically range from one to three dollars each, allowing me to express my gratitude to everyone involved in my children's education—teachers, secretaries, coordina-





A personal note adds immense value to your gift, as it highlights the thought behind it.

tors, bus drivers, and more. My list has grown to over one hundred recipients, but I take joy in recognizing all who help me in raising my children. To keep things organized, I photograph each gift I create annually and store the images along with my poems in a digital folder. I often reuse my poems because the sentiments behind them remain unchanged. My gift-giving has expanded beyond the school year to include similar tokens at the beginning and end of camp.

GETTING THE KIDS INVOLVED

People often ask how I find the time to bake and prepare chocolates and gifts while managing a large household and a full-time job. For me, the key is to bake and work with chocolates in the time between when my children arrive home and dinner. They love watching me in the kitchen, and it keeps them engaged and out of trouble (mostly!). When it's time to pack the gifts, I involve my kids in the process, letting them help with the packing and keeping track of how many packages we have.

The most rewarding aspect of this journey is witnessing my children internalize the message of *hakoras hatov*. Each child expresses gratitude in their unique way—thanking us for family meals, shopping trips, or summer camp—and they even write their own thank-you letters to their teachers at the year's end. Addi-

tionally, our school community recognizes us as parents who are willing to collaborate, fostering a supportive environment for addressing any challenges that arise.

TIPS FOR GIFTING ON A BUDGET

After many years of practice, I've gathered a few tips and tricks for making gift-giving a very doable and budget-friendly endeavor.

1. **Create a List:** Identify those you want to thank, including teachers and support staff.
2. **Leverage Your Skills:** Use your hobbies and talents to create personalized gifts.
3. **Plan Ahead:** Buying in bulk early can save you money and reduce last-minute stress.
4. **Seek Ideas:** Ask friends and family for suggestions; they can give suggestions based on gifts *they* appreciate receiving. Some of my best end-of-the-year gifts came from asking my colleagues what kind of gifts they appreciated.
5. **Look for Deals:** Take advantage of coupons and sales, especially for personalized gifts.
6. **Variety is Good:** It's okay if not all gifts are identical; include a few special items for those who go above and beyond for your child.
7. **Add a Personal Touch:** A personal note adds

immense value to your gift, as it highlights the thought behind it.

8. **Presentation Matters:** Invest a little time in wrapping gifts nicely—good packaging can elevate even the simplest of gifts.

By following these tips, you can express heartfelt gratitude while staying within your budget, creating meaningful connections with those who play vital roles in your children's lives. ■



בס"ד

You planted a seed
One year ago
Watered and weeded
Watching it grow

With patience and perseverance
Through song and through play
You nurtured that plant
Each and every day

With devotion and with care
You watched the bud peek out
You cultivated it with love
As it began to sprout

You cherished each moment
As the plant grew
And it began to flourish
Through all that you did do

Thanks for caring for our flower
And helping him grow
He will continue to blossom
In the way you have shown!

With much appreciation,
Yitzchak Engel and family

ט"ו

We're handing you a flower
That's been cultivated with care
By his parents and his teachers
Throughout the past nine years

He's bursting with excitement
And a yearning to succeed
A thirst for knowledge, a desire to learn
To grow and to achieve

A partner in his chinuch
You truly are
Because you ensure his safety
When you go near and far

Thanks for your patience
In handling him each day
You are a super bus driver
In every single way

May this new year be sweet
And may you succeed in all you do
And as the year does begin
We are excited to be partnering with you!
בתיבה וחתימה טובה לשנה טובה ומחוקה
With much appreciation,
Sadya and Batya Engel



ט"ו

Dear Morah Kiky,
I walked in with trepidation
Yet your warm smile made me feel better
And I knew that smile began an adventurous year
That we would spend together

You've taught me songs for shapes
And all the colors we see
But the songs of our Davening
Will forever stay with me

You've taught me about weather
Sunny, cloudy, windy and rain
But I know that you really cared for me
When you dried my tears and feel my pain

You've taught me about the seasons
Winter, spring, summer and fall
But the stories of the Parashah
Taught me important lessons above all

You've taught me how to share and care
And how to sit by the circle everyday
But how you've taught me to be a good friend
With me forever will stay

I know I have still time to grow
And much to achieve
But you've helped me on my path
So that in my mission I can succeed

In years from now I might not remember your name
I may even forget your face
But the Middos you've installed in me
Time will not erase

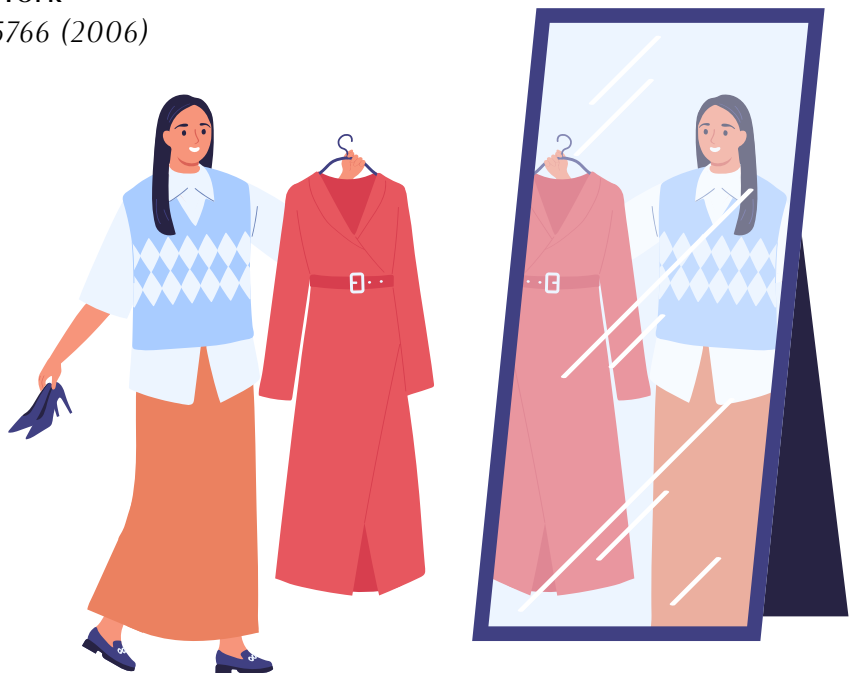
Thanks for all you've done till now
And what you continue to do in your special way
And it's gonna be the little, little kinderlach
Who will bring Mashiach today!

With Love,
Yoel Zisman Engel

Holy Mirrors



Shula Mathless, Woodmere, New York
BR Seminary Graduating Class of 5766 (2006)



Raise your hand if you've ever felt a little under the weather, but after taking a shower, putting on a nice outfit, and brushing on some makeup, you'll suddenly feel a little better. There's a mysterious and metaphysical quality to how looking polished and put together can make you feel better. Clothing has a unique ability to uplift its wearer as well as the people in the wearer's orbit. There's even scientific research that points to how color can affect mood. Different colors elicit different emotions. For example, red stimulates appetite. (Next time you see red decor in a cafe, you'll know why.)

As Jews, we see beauty as more than a physical feature. There are many sources in Tanach that point to the link between physical and spiritual beauty, expressing the idea that beauty can be a conduit for serving Hashem. The Gemara (Sukkah 51b) states, "One who has not seen the Beis Hamikdash has never seen a majestic building." The Beis Hamikdash was the pinnacle of spirituality and holiness; yet, it was a *physically* breathtaking edifice adorned with gold and other precious materials. The Beis Hamikdash and its ornate design served as a tangible manifestation of the idea of elevating physicality to a holy realm.

In Parshas Terumah, Hashem tells Moshe, “And let them make for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” The Shaloh highlights that the use of the plural, “dwell among **them**” teaches us that Hashem wishes to dwell within each individual. From this phrase we deduce that we are commanded to create a beautiful, G-dly sanctuary within ourselves— in every space we occupy, every experience that we come by, and every facet of our personalities, strengths, and interests.

Jewish women in particular have the unique ability to discern between worthy and unworthy physical drives. When gold was being collected for the crafting of the *egol*, the women remained steadfast in their faith that Moshe would return. Their belief was stronger than that of the men—their *bitachon* overpowered temptation, even though both men *and* women had been previously steeped in immoral Egyptian culture. The women refused to donate their jewelry to this cause because they knew that the *egol* was not aligned with Hashem’s will. When it came time to collect materials for the building of the Mishkan, it was the women’s mirrors that were used in the creation of the *kiyor*, the wash basin for the *kohanim*. These mirrors were far from a representation of vanity. They were the mirrors that the righteous women in Mitzrayim used in beautifying themselves during the most oppressive of times, for the sake of the continuity of the Jewish nation. Like the Mishkan itself, these mirrors represented the ability to use physical beauty for the sake of Hashem.

So, being concerned with physical beauty does not need to become a frivolous or vain pursuit. When we maintain the right perspective and keep the ultimate goal in mind, it can actually be a gateway for serving Hashem. I am passionate about focusing on physical beauty for the sake of beautifying my spiritual life, and I am always excited to help others do the same.

Do you often find yourself standing in front of your closet, faced with the “what should I wear” dilemma? It’s true: Picking out an outfit can sometimes become a soul-searching, confusing experience, and it becomes easier once you cultivate your personal style. Over time, I’ve collected some tips and tricks that helped me do this, bringing harmony to my daily wardrobe selection.

Here are just a few:

1. Seeing double: I used to think that buying two of the same item was silly and that it would

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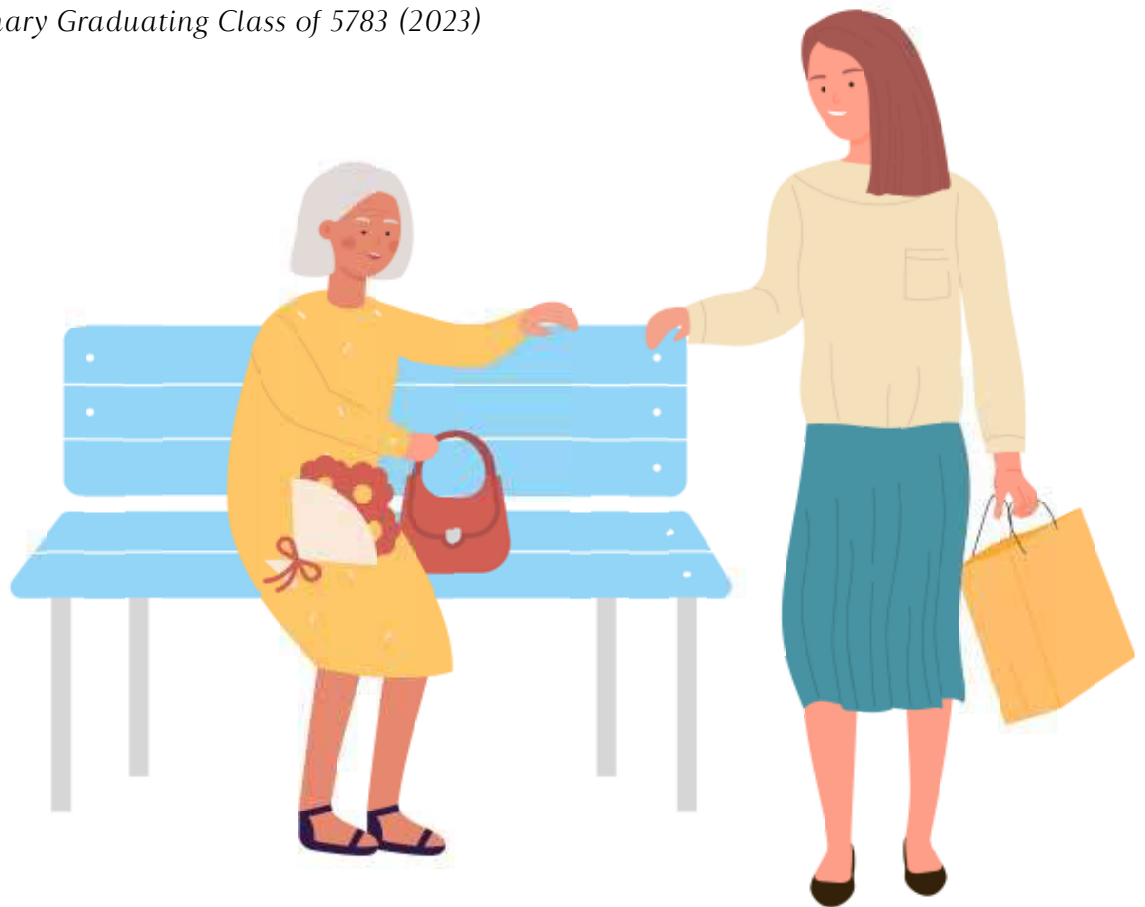
take away from the fun of variety and keeping things fresh and different. Now that I’ve settled into my personal style and learned which styles I like, which styles work for me and, most importantly, which styles I can rely on, I never regret having multiples of a look that works. Many of us play many different roles in our day and we need our wardrobes to carry us through them all with as few outfit changes (and hopefully as few trips to the dry cleaners) as possible. So, if you see that you are really drawn to the fit and wearability of a particular clothing item or shoe, buy another one! And just a little pro tip: If you are having trouble finding the item again, try resale sites like eBay and Poshmark. I recently found a skirt that I purchased ten years ago, on Poshmark!



Continued on page 85

Chesed Shel Emes

Sarah (Levine) Kazatckov, Crown Heights
BR Seminary Graduating Class of 5783 (2023)



I met Susan in Sivan of 5783 (June 2023). I was on my way out of Penn Station. I gathered up the courage to ask this sweet lady if she was Jewish. She introduced herself as Miss Rogers, and she was very happy to take a pack of Shabbos candles from me. We were standing outside Penn Station. I was waiting for my brother, and Miss Rogers was waiting for a taxi. The minutes ticked by, and no taxi was coming for her. I knew what I had to do, so I called my brother and said, “I think we have a *mitzvah* to do.” We were both tired, hungry, and not so thrilled to do this, but I also knew that doing a physical favor for a Jew was

perhaps even greater than a spiritual one.

We spoke as we drove her home. She told us a lot about her experiences and was interested in hearing all about our family. We exchanged emails, and I told her that I would love to visit her sometime. Perhaps I thought I had gained a friend to visit and bring *challah* to. I never imagined that I would be visiting her in the hospital towards the very end of her life...

Around Tishrei time, we had a *farbrengen* in seminary with Rabbi Sholly Freundlich, a chaplain of the hospitals on the Upper East Side. I couldn't believe the *Hashgocha Protis*. I felt he would be a very good person for me to be in touch with about Susan. So I spoke to him, and we remained in touch.

I visited her in her Upper East Side apartment a few times. I brought her a *mezuzah* and put it up. We discussed all sorts of things, and she even did some small sewing jobs on some of my blouses. Susan loved sewing.

Susan and I corresponded all the time. I would send her candle-lighting times, some articles on chabad.org, and updates about my life. In exchange, Susan would offer her advice. She called me her honorary Lubavitcher granddaughter. She loved hearing everything that I was going through, and she encouraged me through it all. Her catchphrase was, "Oh good, that's wonderful." I can hear her voice and see her smile now as I think of it.

Susan was admitted to the hospital around Chanukah time, then a rehab, then back to the hospital. In all that time, it didn't really work out for me to visit her. Thanks to my communication with Rabbi Freundlich, arrangements were made to have someone read Megillah for her on Purim.

On Chol Hamoed Pesach, I sent her an email with a picture of me and a friend. She sent me an update that she was admitted into a hospital and would love a visit. She told me that it was complicated to get there on public transit and maybe I should bring a friend—perhaps the friend in the picture?

So my friend Mushka and I hopped on a train, then another train, and then a bus. Susan loved meeting Mushka, and she asked her about her family lineage. Susan loved Jewish geography. In fact, she had a whole website detailing her family ancestry.

Because of Susan's situation, thoughts of a Jewish burial kept entering my mind. But I was reluctant to bring up the topic with her; after all, it's not exactly

I never imagined that I would be visiting her in the hospital towards the very end of her life...

a comfortable thing to talk about. At the same time, I was concerned that perhaps she didn't know the importance of having a Jewish burial and that maybe I could help her understand. In the end, Susan actually brought it up. She told me about the rabbis who were coming to convince her to get buried, and that she doesn't really believe in it. She believed G-d would be happy getting her soul back. I didn't really know how to respond. I never questioned why a Yid must be buried. The truth is, I really just wanted to run away from all of it. I thought, "She has rabbis she's talking to, it's not really my responsibility." But something inside me strongly felt that perhaps this was the whole reason I got to know Susan in the first place.

So I called Rabbi Freundlich. I was hoping he would tell me that it's not my responsibility. But he told me that since I have a relationship with her, she might take me more seriously than the rabbis, and I should try my best to convince her. So I started reading articles on chabad.org and learning about the holiness of a Jewish body. I never thought I would read an article titled, "Why Does Judaism Not Allow Cremation." It felt so strange to me that a little twenty-one-year-old was now talking about these things. I kept thinking,



I never thought I would read an article titled, “Why Does Judaism Not Allow Cremation.”

“How did I get here? Why did Hashem put me in this position?”

I knew this might make me very anxious, and I spoke to one of my teachers in seminary about it. I told him the situation and asked him, “How should I approach this without it affecting me negatively?” He told me that I should constantly have in mind that whatever happens is because Hashem decided it should be that way. “And you need to know that you are doing your best. And knowing you, you’ll do your best.” The confidence he had in me filled me with strength.

I came to each visit with Susan armed with perspective and knowledge. We continued to enjoy our visits together, and I noticed Susan getting thinner and weaker each time. Yet, she was still the bubbly, classy lady I had met at Penn Station.

It was the Friday before Shavuot and I thought it was a good time to visit Susan. I got some flowers and chicken soup and set off. Susan was ecstatic about the flowers. She held them and sniffed them for a long time, as if the flowers transported her out of her pain and brought her to a place of serenity. She loved the chicken soup and couldn’t stop telling me how delicious it was. I was amazed at the level of gratitude she expressed. She was so genuinely happy.

It suddenly occurred to me that I had never taught Susan to say Shema. I decided to say Shema with her. She covered her eyes and repeated the words after me. It was like watching a child say Shema. I observed that, as she was getting sicker and sicker, she was almost becoming more childlike—layers and layers peeling off to reveal her true essence. Her *neschama* shone so brightly. She wanted to hear everything about Yiddishkeit. I explained to her that our bodies are holy—that just as a *mezuzah* cannot be thrown out because it was used for a holy purpose, how much more so our bodies become elevated through the *mitzvos* we do. She got excited and said, “Oh, I have to tell my brother to bury the *mezuzah*!”

It seemed that she understood why getting buried was so important and that she wanted to do it. Shabbos

was getting closer and I really had to leave. So I left, not knowing that it would be the last goodbye. As I left, I was so happy. I really felt like I had accomplished my mission. Susan would be buried in the proper Jewish way!

Two weeks later, I felt like it’d be good to visit Susan again. But I had a feeling that something wasn’t right. She wasn’t answering my emails. I was scared to go. But I thought that someone for sure would have let me know if she had passed away. I texted Rabbi Freundlich, and when I got the dreaded, “I will call you in a minute,” text, I immediately knew what had happened. He called me and told me that Susan had passed away two weeks earlier, on Motzei Shabbos. And unfortunately, she did not get Kevuras Yisroel. I just said, “But she wanted to.”

I had my teacher’s words playing in my mind: “Whatever happens is because Hashem decided it should be that way.” Susan passed away on Gimmel Sivan 5784 – not even two days after I saw her for the last time. On the day that I found out the news and for a few days afterward, I kept having thoughts of regret and guilt. “I should have done this or said that... if only...” It was hard to push away these thoughts. I recalled the story of the chossid of the Maggid who asked how it’s possible to control your thoughts and emotions. He was sent to another chossid’s house, where he knocked and knocked, but nobody answered the door. My thoughts were knocking. And I didn’t let them in. Over and over they came, and over and over I repeated to myself, “It was all Hashem’s Will.”

We can’t always know exactly why we are led in a certain direction or put in a certain situation. If I believed the whole goal of my getting to know Susan was so that she would get a proper Jewish burial, then I would have felt like a failure. But the truth is that we are so small, and are given such a big mission. We can’t always see or sometimes even comprehend the effect of our actions.

Rabbi Freundlich told me that when I said Shema with Susan, I made a Kiddush Hashem. Susan acknowledged Hashem before her death. And that was an idea that came to me out of nowhere. I don’t know why I suddenly had that thought. I guess my *neschama* knew what had to be done.

That Friday night, I went to my friend Mushka. I was so grateful I had someone in my life that had also known Susan. I was feeling sad for Susan. She never got this—this connection and warmth of a Shabbos meal. She never experienced the holiness and beauty.

But all that she did learn and experience, she *truly* experienced—with joy and presence. I realized how fortunate I am that I get to experience Yiddishkeit every minute of every day. *Ashreinu!* And now, I strive to feel the level of joy that Susan felt in each holy opportunity that she was given.

I had my teacher's words playing in my mind: "Whatever happens is because Hashem decided it should be that way."



I also learned of the incredible power and confidence the Rebbe instilled in us. I learned that when I am connected to a higher source, I can do things I never imagined I would be capable of, and that when it comes to igniting *neshamos*, there is no age-limit. I learned that Hashem has a plan, so intricately and beautifully designed. And I learned that a young woman at the cusp of life's journey and an old woman at the end of life's journey can learn together to truly experience what it means to be a Yid.

May we be reunited with the coming of Moshiach now!

L'ilui nishmas Shoshana Miriam bas Avraham. ■



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Stronger *than* Circumstance

Brocha Leah (Levinson) Greenberg, Buffalo, NY
Graduating Class of 5765 (1995)



*In loving memory of my mother, Esther Malka Levinson ע"ה, on her
20th yahrzeit—a woman whose spirit walked where her legs could not.*

*My mother, Esther Malka Levinson ע"ה,
was a four-foot giant—larger than life
in every way.*

Stricken with polio as a young girl, she lived with paralyzed legs, yet overflowed with strength, warmth, and an unshakable zest for life. She gave with her whole heart, lifted others with her words, and inspired everyone by how she lived each day with joy, resilience, and purpose.

Her story began in Yerushalayim, where she was born on Shevi'i Shel Pesach in 5709 (1939)—a healthy, joyful baby girl. Everything changed at eleven months old when she contracted polio after playing in a public pool with her sister. The virus left her permanently paralyzed from the waist down.

Her parents embarked on a relentless journey from Eretz Yisroel to Switzerland and eventually to America, pursuing every treatment, every hope, every miracle. They spent money they didn't have and relied on the kindness of strangers. In an era when privacy was sacred, they even allowed the New York Daily Mirror to publicize their story in a fundraising appeal. They would do anything for their child.

The miracle they prayed for—the restoration of her legs—never came. But something far greater did: A soul whose inner strength would inspire thousands; a woman who would build a family, a home, and a legacy. She accepted her disability as her reality, but never as a limitation.

In 5727 (1957), my grandfather, Reb Boruch Goldberg, had a *yechidus* with the Rebbe. With a heavy heart, he shared his concern: His eighteen-year-old daughter was intelligent, capable, and full of life, but who would marry her? The Rebbe's response came without hesitation: "*Zee vet chasunah hobben dee yahr, un tzu einer fun meine Chassidim*"—"She will marry this year, and to one of my Chassidim."

And so it was. With the Rebbe's blessings and guidance, on Chai Elul 5718, my mother married my father, Hillel Levinson. From a young age, she made bold declarations: "I'm going to get married. I'm going to be a mother, a grandmother, and even a great-grandmother." To many, these sounded like naive dreams. But she wasn't dreaming, she was planning. And she fulfilled every word.

My mother raised eight children. Despite numerous miscarriages, stillbirths, and health setbacks that would have devastated most people, she persevered. Our home was modest but radiated warmth. It was always clean, with dinner on the table. I remember the aroma of her apple pie, homemade *hamantashen*, savory cho-

"Mommy, how did you manage to keep up with us on crutches and leg braces?" Her answer: "I don't know. I just did what needed to be done."

leptches, and her famous *kreplach* and spinach cutlets. She prepared everything while seated on a wheeled stool, maneuvering around the kitchen with crutches nearby. Her alarm rang at 4:00 a.m. every day. She needed more time than other mothers to accomplish certain tasks, but she did them all. She would *daven*, say Tehillim, make breakfast, and be fully present for each of us before school. She attended everything—PTA meetings, Bais Rivkah productions, camp visiting days—regardless of the distance or stairs involved.

I didn't fully grasp her strength until years later, when I was married with three children under two and a half, and I was hit by a car, leaving me in a cast for a few



Rabbi Hillel and Esther Malka on their wedding day

Every time she heard an ambulance siren, she paused and said a perek of Tehillim for the person inside. She didn't need to know them. She just knew they needed prayers.

months. Suddenly, I saw life through her eyes. I called and asked, “Mommy, how did you manage to keep up with us on crutches and leg braces?” Her answer: “I don’t know. I just did what needed to be done.”

That was her secret. She didn’t waste energy overthinking: How will I manage on so little sleep? How will I do it all? She didn’t exhaust herself evaluating limitations. She simply kept moving, step by step—sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling, but always rising again.

Motherhood was her full-time career, her life’s mission. And Hashem rewarded her. When she passed away at sixty-six, she was already a grandmother many times over and had lived to see her dream fulfilled: Four great-grandchildren had been born.

What was truly remarkable was that while raising her own eight children, my mother somehow found the capacity to nurture countless others. My parents opened their home as a haven for children in need. Lubavitchers and non-Lubavitchers alike found comfort under their roof. Some stayed weeks, others months. Many called her “Mommy” or “Bubby.”

Generations of children and teenagers grew up in our home—some even before my time. My older sister

Mashi recalled Judy, a woman who adopted my mother as her own. When Judy struggled with infertility for years and was finally blessed with a child, my mother flew to Florida to help her through the first postpartum week. My sister Devorah Rochel remembers accompanying my mother as she brought three-year-old Asher B—who lived with us for several months while his mother tended to her mental health—to Dr. Plaut for his well visit. This was my mother’s *chesed* in action: Opening not just her home, but her heart, to every child who needed mothering.

She was deeply passionate about children learning to read properly and volunteered to tutor students who struggled with *kri’ah*. She quietly raised funds for needy families, never announcing her good deeds—just simply doing them.

It wasn’t just what she did, it was how she did it. Her kindness was fierce and genuine. When she told someone, “Call me anytime,” they knew she meant it. Every time she heard an ambulance siren, she paused and said a *perek* of Tehillim for the person inside. She didn’t need to know them. She just knew they needed prayers.

One of the greatest gifts my mother gave me was her complete intolerance for self-pity. She believed with unshakable conviction that if Hashem gave her paralyzed legs, then clearly legs weren’t necessary for her mission. She had no pity for herself—and definitely none for us. “If Hashem gave you a disabled mother,” she would say, “then that’s exactly what you need.”

Through every action, she taught us that Hashem doesn’t make mistakes. If something feels impossible, it only means we haven’t yet discovered the tools



Esther Malka at one of her children's weddings



Author Brocha Leah Greenberg at her wedding 5757 with her mother



Rabbi and Mrs. Levinson



Mrs. Levinson's eight children

Hashem gave us to handle it. There's one moment I'll never forget. During the Crown Heights riots in the summer of 5761 (when I was fourteen) I was walking beside my mother to shul, when three teenage boys ran up to us. In an act of cruelty, one grabbed her crutches and hurled them over a fence. I panicked. My mother had no balance without them. I held onto her, terrified. But she remained calm and said in Yiddish, "ס'איז דא א סיבה"—"There's a reason for this." "A reason? Ma! What should we do?" "We're

In a world that often measures people by their limitations, my mother taught us that we are defined by what we do with what we're given. Courage doesn't mean being fearless—it means showing up anyway.

going to shul," she answered. I was shocked. "How? You'll fall!" She held onto me, took one step, then another. After several slow, deliberate steps, she stopped, turned to the boys, and in her thick Israeli accent, called out: "Boys! Come here—I want to thank

you. What you did was cruel, but it helped me discover strength I didn't know I had. It was my dream to walk to my *chuppah* that way, but I was scared. Today, I took my first steps without them. Thank you. And since you acted in meanness for no reason—now go and do kindness for no reason." One boy climbed over the fence, retrieved her crutches, and handed them back, eyes lowered in shame.

That was my mother—always transforming pain into purpose. I share her story not as a biography, but as a beacon. Because we all carry struggles—some seen, many invisible. Illness. Heartbreak. Loneliness. Financial pressure. Exhaustion. In those moments, when it feels like Hashem handed us something we simply can't handle, we can think of a four-foot woman with crutches, and the infinite strength she carried.

She didn't wait for life to get easier. She chose to live anyway. She didn't ask, "Why me?" She asked, "What now?" She believed every hardship was both a test and an opportunity. And she faced each one with honesty, faith, and determination.

Twenty years have passed, and her voice still echoes in everything I do. Her legacy lives on, not just in her children and grandchildren, but in the countless people whose lives she touched with her words, her open arms, and her iron will. In a world that often measures people by their limitations, my mother taught us that we are defined by what we do with what we're given. Courage doesn't mean being fearless—it means showing up anyway. And even when you can't stand on your own two feet, you can still stand tall.

You don't need to be strong all at once. You just need to take the next step. And the one after that. With hope. With trust. With the quiet knowledge that Hashem has already planted the strength inside you.

That's how my mother lived.

And that's how I try to live—every day. ■



GATES OF GOLD

Mushkie (Korn) Uliel, Abu Tur, Yerushalayim
Graduating Class of 5766 (2006)



A selection of small prints

Art with the door in Abu Tur that inspired it

Once heard a beautiful saying about Yerushalayim: “Every person can transform their surroundings into Yerushalayim, by finding the Yerushalayim within their hearts.”

My journey of self-discovery took place gradually over many years. It’s only now when I look back, that I can connect the little points in time that brought me to where I am today.

When we moved out on shlichus to Abu Tur (a small neighborhood in Yerushalayim) sixteen



Tucked away in the very center of town. Do you recognize where this is?

years ago, I was very young, still trying to figure out who I wanted to be. For years, I felt lost in this city. According to Kabbalah, Yerushalayim is connected to the element of fire. Fire overwhelms and consumes everything in its path, and that's exactly how I felt in Yerushalayim – overwhelmed. Whenever we would visit my mother in Tzfas for Shabbos, I would feel the difference in my body. In the city of Tzfas, I felt light as air. And as we would drive up the hills back towards Yerushalayim, the choking sensation would return to me.

These feelings followed me for years as I experimented with different paths in an attempt to find my passion. I was looking for ways to enhance my role as a *shlucha* and use my talents to do shlichus.

And then came the moment when I realized I had reframed my perception of the “fire” that I felt in Yerushalayim and the way that it affected me. This reframing happened innocently, in conversation with a friend. I realized I had learned something else about the nature of fire.

I realized I had found fire within myself: I had learned how to give of myself, care for my family, and listen to others without diminishing my own light.

Fire has the ability to give without becoming diminished. And in that respect, I realized I had found fire within myself: I had learned how to give of myself, care for my family, and listen to others without diminishing my own light.

As I experienced this shift, I turned to art as the physical manifestation of my journey – the growth and learning that I was experiencing. I was learning how to change my perspective and practice acceptance, both internally as well as externally, with an openness to others. I was learning how to find my center, in order to be able to share what I have inside. I was learning to rid myself of the fear of being consumed by the intensity of my world and my many responsibilities.

I started with photographing the intricate and varied doors of Yerushalayim. I wanted to capture that magical quality of the city; the whispers in the air that draw you in, encouraging you to seek the truth in yourself, to bring out your highest potential. I wanted to show how even though we all seem different, we can still find commonality with each other. I wanted to convey how Yerushalayim automatically unifies everyone within its walls, and how we can recreate that



Gates of Gold artwork



One of the many beautiful entrances in the German Colony

harmony and unity within our own lives if we allow it.

I wanted to capture the golden hue that shines as the sun rises and sets each day, the shine that gives Yerushalayim that extra sparkle. I wanted to show the ancient beauty of the city and how it still lives on, fresh in modernity. I wanted to portray a city that all types of people can connect to, one where everyone can find inspiration in the energy of ever-renewing potential. To me, the doors represented the fact that throughout all the centuries of our nation being away, we still daven that we will return.

All my art is inspired by real doors found here in Yerushalayim, because I wanted to give you a doorway

When we're feeling afraid, a door can be a mode of escape to safety. In a calm, centered space, a door can represent opportunity and a chance for growth.

back home.

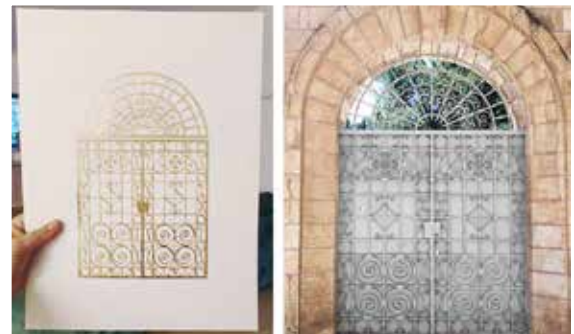
These doors are like an invitation to discovery. Through doing this project, I realized how important it is to have the power to reframe our experiences. External circumstances may not change, but that doesn't mean we can't change the way we experience them. When we're feeling afraid, a door can be a mode of escape to safety. In a calm, centered space, a door can represent opportunity and a chance for growth.

And just as a door represents the opportunity for safety and growth, Yerushalayim has always been that portal through which we could connect to the highest parts of ourselves, our past, and our future. The door to Yerushalayim is the door that leads us home. 🖤

To see more of Mushkie's artwork, visit gatesofgoldjlm.com or follow along at [@gatesofgoldjlm](https://www.instagram.com/gatesofgoldjlm).



Gate of Balance with the original gate



Gate of Return with the original gate



Gate of Acceptance and the original door



Mizrach and the original gate

As Jewish women, we are gifted with the unique ability to beautify the physical world around us for the sake of creating spiritual opportunities for the people in our lives.

2. Be kind to yourself: Buy clothes that fit you as you are *now*. Don't make purchases for an ambiguous moment in the future when you will lose ten pounds, get rid of the baby weight, or get back in shape. It's natural and normal for bodies to evolve over time and for weight to fluctuate throughout different stages, health conditions, and procedures. Embrace that reality. Don't put off purchases waiting till you [fill in the blank] to wear nice clothes again. You are worthy and deserving of a beautiful wardrobe as you are right now.

3. Make a system:

Come up with a system for putting together your daily outfits. You can do this by curating a core collection of wardrobe pieces that you can style in many different ways. Ask yourself the following questions to figure out which pieces you'll need for your wardrobe system: How do I start my day? Do I go straight to my place of work? Do I exercise first? Drop kids off at school? Am I someone who will care to have my clothes dry cleaned, or is the delicate cycle good enough? How professional do I need to look when I get dressed? Dressing for multiple roles throughout the day can be simple too, it just requires some creativity. For example, a base outfit consisting of a jersey skirt and top can be a total wardrobe chameleon. You can exercise in this outfit, then throw on a blazer and do a quick shoe change (think ballet flat, ankle boot, or loafer), and, voila! You're ready for work.

4. Colors and accessories that bring joy:

Figure out which colors and accessories make you happy. If you're not someone who wears a lot of color, you can incorporate little pops of color into your wardrobe with shoes, headwear, scarves, and costume jewelry. If you're not ready to do a complete transformation into color-wear-

ing, you can experiment by purchasing one item of clothing in a vivid color or print, and see how it makes you feel.

5. A little bit goes a long way: Even if you're not one to care very much about clothing or makeup, putting in a little effort to tweak your appearance can have a big impact and make you feel great. Discover which small tweaks make you stand a bit taller. Is it some mascara or lipstick? Facial moisturizer or a nice perfume? Maybe jewelry is what does the trick for you. Especially if you're not big on fashion, you may think that these add-ons are mere externalities. In reality, these steps toward highlighting your beauty serve as a gateway towards developing a deeper sense of confidence.

When Eliezer succeeded in finding Rivkah Imeinu, the soon-to-be wife of Yitzchak, he gifted her with beautiful gold jewelry to adorn herself with. These gifts were given to the righteous and modest Rivkah, the one who instinctively covered herself when she approached Yitzchak. This highlights that as Jewish women, we are gifted with the unique ability to beautify the physical world around us for the sake of creating spiritual opportunities for the people in our lives. When we use this strength, we create a dwelling place for Hashem in this physical world. Beauty does indeed draw the eye's attention—but for the ultimate purpose of stirring the soul. ■



Clear Home Florida

HELPING MOMS FIND CALM, ONE SYSTEM AT A TIME

Bracha (Tiechtel) Hurwitz, Boca Raton, Florida
Graduating Class of 5769 (2009)

There's something uniquely satisfying about walking into a space that just feels right. For one recent client, that moment happened when she stepped into her new home, freshly moved into, organized, and stocked. "It already feels like home," she told me, as she opened drawers filled with her neatly folded clothes, admired her family pictures already hung on the walls, and took in the stocked fridge and made beds. She hadn't lifted a finger, yet everything was in its place.

That's exactly the kind of experience I love to create through my business, Clear Home Florida. I help busy moms streamline their homes and their lives, by implementing custom organization systems and offering full-service move-in support. I specialize in turning overwhelm into order and chaos into calm. Whether I'm decluttering a playroom or handling every detail of a family's relocation, my goal is the same: Create space so moms can focus on what matters most: Spending time with the people they love, doing the things they love.

From Shoebox Bins to Full-Service Systems

I always craved structure and organization; it's basically in my DNA. I grew up in a home where even the spices were alphabetized, and we had pantry bins before pantry bins were a thing. (They were shoeboxes, but still!)



As a kid, I was constantly rearranging the furniture in my room—much to my mother's chagrin—and always found joy in creating order. That love for organization stayed with me as I pursued a career in special education and psychology. While working with middle schoolers, I realized that it often wasn't a learning disability holding them back, but poor executive functioning skills, i.e., the inability to organize their thoughts, time, and materials. If you can't find your notes, you can't study. If your backpack is a black hole, it's hard to succeed.

When I moved to Florida, I decided to turn my passion for helping people into a business. I realized that for many, especially moms, organizing feels like a mountain they don't know how to climb. But for me, it's intuitive and enjoyable. I genuinely love creating spaces that work.

The most important thing to remember about organizing is that there's no one-size-fits-all approach.



Just like you wouldn't mop your floors once a month and expect them to stay clean, you can't organize once and expect it to last forever. Systems need maintenance, especially in a family home.

A Day in the Life

Every day looks a little different and that's part of what I love. One day, I might be at a client's house decluttering their kitchen, measuring pantry shelves, and labeling bins. The next day, I'm directing movers, unpacking boxes, folding linens, and placing framed photos exactly where they belong. Some days, I'm presenting to a group of fifty women at a community event or leading an interactive organization workshop for high school students, showing them how systems can reduce stress and boost productivity.

There's also the backend work: Responding to inquiries, sourcing products, planning layouts, attending networking events, and coordinating with vendors. But the heart of it all is the people: Moms who are juggling so much and just need support. Whether I'm helping someone make sense of a closet or settle into a new city, I always come back to this question: "How can I make this person's life easier?"

Organizing Tips & Tricks

The most important thing to remember about organizing is that there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Every home is different, and more importantly, every family is different. What works beautifully for one space or lifestyle might not work at all for another, and that's okay. When starting the organizing process, I always recommend beginning small. Choose one drawer in your kitchen, your nightstand, or even a cluttered entryway table. These small wins create momentum and help you avoid the overwhelm that comes from trying to tackle an entire room, or worse, the whole house, all at once.

One of the most common mistakes I see people make is buying bins or organizing products before decluttering. Always edit first. *Then* plan, and only *then*, shop. Sizing of products matters more than people

realize. For example, in closet organization, the difference between a twelve-inch-deep upper shelf and a fourteen-inch one can mean a drastic difference in which bins you'll want. *Always* measure your space before buying. And keep in mind: Bins that look amazing in one home may not be the right fit in yours, especially in smaller, city apartments where maximizing vertical space is essential. Think shelves up to the ceiling, stacking bins, and using door backs for extra storage.

I often recommend the Home Edit product line, which is available at both Walmart and The Container Store. These products are versatile and tend to work well across many types of homes and room layouts. When it comes to kids' spaces, one of my absolute favorite solutions is the "Our Box" line from The Container Store. These bins come with lids, which makes a huge difference in keeping them from becoming a free-for-all dump zone. I love how they strike the right balance: They're tricky for toddlers (ages 2–3) to open, which keeps messes down, but still manageable for preschoolers (ages 4–5), allowing them to participate in cleanup and responsibility. Both product lines are very similar in quality, but the pricing is drastically different, so shop smartly.

Turntables (also known as lazy Susans) are a total game changer in deep cabinets and pantries. They're especially helpful for items like oils, vinegars, condiments, and spices, things that often get shoved to the back and forgotten. A simple spin brings everything into view, reducing waste and making cooking more efficient.

Labeling is another key component, but it has to work for your personality and family dynamic. Some people thrive with micro-organizing, labeling bins as "quinoa," "rice," or "elbows," while others get overwhelmed by too much specificity. If you know you always buy elbows, label it elbows. But if your grain choices rotate week to week, stick with a more general label like "pasta" or "grains." It's not about the prettiest system, it's about the one that actually works in your daily life.

And perhaps the most overlooked part of organizing? Maintaining it. Just like you wouldn't mop your floors once a month and expect them to stay clean, you can't organize once and expect it to last forever. Systems need maintenance, especially in a family home. The goal isn't a museum-perfect house. It's a lived-in, functional space where memories are made and messes are welcome, but when it's cleanup time,



everything has a home and tidying up only takes a few minutes.

Ultimately, organizing isn't about perfection. It's about creating peace, flow, freedom, and a home that supports your life instead of creating stress in your life. And that's something every mom deserves.

Business Lessons from the Ground Up

Starting this business stretched me in ways I never expected. I was always on the shyer side in school, but growing a business meant going out of my comfort zone. I had to network, market myself, be assertive,

and speak with confidence. The surprising part? I discovered I actually enjoy it. I've met so many incredible women and made connections that inspire me.

Some key lessons I've learned:

- Don't wait to feel "ready." You'll learn as you go. Start now, refine later.
- Charge your worth. You're not just offering a service. You're solving a problem.

- Let your strengths guide you. What feels natural to you might be exactly what someone else needs.
- Delegate your weaknesses. It's okay to not know how to do something. Hire those who do.
- Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Growth happens outside your comfort zone and it's worth it.

One perspective that continues to guide me is the idea that *“a chossid is a mesudar.”* Growth in *Avodas Hashem* can only happen when there is seder— an organized plan with intention and consistency. And when we are *mesudar* in our *Avodas Hashem*, this trait spills into other areas of our life. This value is at the root of everything I do, from how I plan a pantry layout to how I organize a playroom.

Bais Rivkah Roots

When I think back to my Bais Rivkah years, what stands out most isn't just the tests or the textbooks, it's the way school gave us real opportunities to lead, create, and stretch ourselves beyond what we thought we could do.

One of the most impactful experiences for me was when I co-directed the school production, “Unmasked,” with my classmate and friend Miri (Slapochnik) Loebenstein. We were two girls with a vision, and the school gave us the trust and space to make it happen. From the creative direction to the tiniest technical detail, we poured ourselves into the show. We wrote, we planned, we negotiated with vendors for printing and music edits, and we coordinated dozens of moving parts. I clearly remember the feeling of sitting late at night, cross-checking lighting cues and music transitions, knowing that every detail mattered.

But more than anything, it was watching the girls shine on stage that stuck with me. That moment when someone shy found their voice in a solo, or a student who had never performed before stood confidently in the spotlight—it was electric. I realized then: I want to do work that helps people step into themselves, that helps them breathe easier, feel more in control, and confident in their own space. I didn't know it at the time, but directing production planted the seed for the work I do today.

Being the principal's daughter was its own kind of classroom. It taught me how to carry responsibility quietly, to lead with presence instead of pressure,

Don't wait to feel “ready.” You'll learn as you go. Start now, refine later.

and to understand that people notice what you do more than what you say. I learned from watching my mother as the principal that leadership isn't about being in charge. It's about showing up with consistency, kindness, and integrity, even when no one's watching.

My years in high school taught me to juggle and lead in different ways. Being part of G.O. in twelfth grade helped me flex my creative muscles through planning events and building programs. I learned how to think fast and solve problems on the fly. It was one of the first times I realized I loved the balance between creativity and structure, which is still at the heart of my work today. And believe it or not, my Spanish class with Mrs. Brook still comes in handy too! You never know which part of your education will follow you into the real world.

Life has a funny way of circling back: Today, I live just down the block from a Bais Rivkah classmate. I'm decades and miles away from those hallways, and yet somehow, still walking beside the same people who shaped who I am.

What Is Clear Home Florida?

Clear Home Florida offers two core services:

Professional Organizing: I create customized, easy-to-maintain systems for kitchens, playrooms, closets, and more, tailored to busy moms who need things to be functional and efficient.

Moving Concierge: I take care of everything from packing to unpacking, including organizing, decorating, hanging art, making beds, and stocking the fridge, so families walk into a fully livable home from day one. It's a hands-on, white-glove service designed to reduce stress and bring clarity to every corner of the home.

Monthly Memberships: Life with kids is constantly changing. My membership program offers recurring monthly sessions to help families stay organized through every season, whether it's keeping up with toy rotations, seasonal clothing swaps, school papers, or just resetting the home as life evolves. Some clients choose to work room by room over time; others use it

for long-term support and peace of mind.

At the end of the day, it's not just about tidy drawers or color-coded closets. It's about giving moms the freedom to focus on what really matters. I believe that when your home is in order, your mind and heart have more space too.

If there's one thing I want other women to know, it's this: You don't have to do it all alone. Whether you're moving across the country or just want to stop losing your keys, I'm here to help.

Want more tips like these?

You can sign up for my free bi-weekly email newsletter filled with home organizing advice, favorite product recommendations, and seasonal tips. Just visit **clearhomeflorida.com** and look for the newsletter signup at the bottom of the homepage. It's a small dose of clarity delivered right to your inbox every two weeks. ■

Bracha Hurwitz

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A Taste of Bais Rivkah



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BOBBY STERN'S HONEY CAKE

This is a special family heirloom recipe from my grandmother, Zelda Stern, a"n'h. There was never a special occasion without her big, beautiful *lekach*.

We've shared this recipe with so many friends and family over the years, and I'm so happy to share it now with my new Bais Rivkah family.

INGREDIENTS:

- 5 eggs (separate yolk and egg white)
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup honey
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup boiling water
- 1 teaspoon coffee (dissolved in water)
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Beat egg whites with half of the sugar and yolks with the other half of the sugar.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients to the yolks and sugar mixture.
4. Mix gently with the egg whites and sugar mixture.
5. Pour into a loaf pan.
6. Bake for 1 hour.
7. When you take it out of the oven, flip the cake out of the pan right away.

Her advice to future Shluchos is simple: “Embrace the journey, even when it feels daunting. You’ll learn, grow, and see the incredible impact you can have. Never underestimate what you’re capable of.”

Ashkenazi Jews, the Allouches’ community is primarily Sephardic, with roots in North Africa. “Most of the people here are from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco,” Breindy explains. “Their traditions and cuisine are very different from what I grew up with in Crown Heights.”

Adapting to these differences wasn’t always easy. “My mother-in-law taught me how to cook Sephardic dishes like couscous and a spinach dish called *p’kaila*. But I also brought a taste of my upbringing—I introduced them to gefilte fish and *kneidelach*!”

A MESSAGE TO FELLOW BAIS RIVKAH ALUMNAE

As she reflects on her journey, Breindy emphasizes

the strength and confidence instilled in her by her Bais Rivkah education. “There’s something unique about us,” she says. “We carry a certain *chayus* that helps us overcome challenges and embrace opportunities.”

Her advice to future Shluchos is simple: “Embrace the journey, even when it feels daunting. You’ll learn, grow, and see the incredible impact you can have. Never underestimate what you’re capable of.”

A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMED

Today, La Celle-Saint-Cloud stands as a testament to the Allouches’ dedication and vision. What began as a small, skeptical community has blossomed into a thriving hub of Jewish life.

“Looking back, I’m amazed at how far we’ve come,” Breindy says. “From a place where people told us we weren’t needed to a community that’s vibrant and proud—it’s been an incredible journey.”

With a school, a *mikvah*, a kosher supermarket, and a strong sense of unity, the Allouches have not only transformed a town but also created a legacy that will inspire generations to come. ■

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Keepsakes

Bais Rivkah, circa 5730 (1970).

From the archive of the late Rabbi Pinchus Cunin, who was dedicated with all his heart and soul to Bais Rivkah.

Do you recognize anyone in the photos?

Let us know at history@bethrivkah.edu

Have photos of your Bais Rivkah experience?

Please let us know.



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