

CONGREGATION BETH JEHUDAH

# THE CBJ Conversation

## Tammuz 5780 / Summer 2020 CONVERSATIONS

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## A PANDEMIC OF A DIFFERENT KIND

RABBI MICHEL TWERSKI

I trust that longtime CBJ members will recall that throughout my rabbinical career I have discreetly avoided using the pulpit to voice political opinions. I have refrained from publicly endorsing candidates for elective office and eschewed airing personal feelings about occupants of governmental office.

My reticence was a product of several significant considerations. One was that my yeshivah curriculum did not include courses in political science. The second was that the pulpit has always been legally restricted from issuing political directives. Finally, I simply never had the luxury to immerse myself in all the relevant information that would have allowed me to feel confident in delivering my thoughts and recommendations to others.

However, it will definitely be remembered that I have often commented in my *drashos* on the implications of legislation and judicial decisions on our moral and spiritual well-being. To the extent that our culture ultimately reflects the ramifications of such conclusions, I felt it imperative to alert our kehillah to the perils of these decisions and urged caution in reacting to them with indifference. This article follows the aforementioned policies, and the interpretation of my remarks as an endorsement of any particular individual would be a grievous error. The topic I am about to address is not about individuals or candidates. It is everything about respect for office, position, and authority.

Perhaps my memory is faulty, but I do not remember a time in my younger



years when the occupants of high office in our country were subjected by the media to the kind of scorn, mockery, and contemptuousness that has become commonplace in our time. There seems to have been an understanding that such derision would not result so much in sullyng an individual, as it would the besmirching of the honor and prestige of our country itself. Indeed, when one burns the flag of the United States, it is commonly understood to be an expression of contempt for our country, not contempt for a colorful piece of cloth. No less so, when we deride our highest government officials, we diminish the dignity of America itself, in our own eyes and the eyes of the world. In recent history, FDR and JFK were not known to have halos or wings. Their indiscretions in office were left for political historians to expose, years after their demise. Our current historians, clearly, have no patience.

Would, that it would stop there.

However, our cultural march toward a no-holds-barred defamation of character has undermined respect for every office of authority in our society. Legislators, police officers, school principals, rabbis, teachers, and parents, have all felt the axe of homogenization fall upon

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## A PANDEMIC OF A DIFFERENT KIND *continued from page 1*

their necks. Anarchy, at every level, has become the ersatz definition of democracy, and has gained legitimacy in the eyes of many. It is interesting to note that the Talmudic description of the pre-messianic era asserts that before the ultimate redemption of mankind, "chutzpah" will proliferate. While our current escalation of chutzpah presages the imminent coming of Moshiach, I would urge that we, as a sensitive Torah community, dare not take that prophecy as license to join our culture's fascination with disrespect, or allow the current redefinition of democracy as, "everyone is equally entitled to be disparaged," to become our understanding.

We must teach our young to look up to us, their parents and grandparents. We must insist that they act deferentially to their rabbis and teachers. We must exhort them to answer respectfully to adults of every faith, ethnicity, and background. We must demand that they act respectfully to officers of the law. They must hear our pain when we learn of their hurtful behavior to their peers. And, in order to set the tone, we must model that which we want them to honor.

We are planning to add a regularly occurring "Ask the Rabbis" section. Please consider submitting *hashkafic* or *halachic* questions/topics that you would like the rabbis to answer, clarify, or discuss.

As space is limited, we will select those questions/topics that are generally applicable and appropriate for this forum. You can also let us know if you want your name included with your question or if you want your question published anonymously.

Email your questions to:  
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# TRANSITION

## REBBETZIN FEIGE TWERSKI

As I write this article, on the 29th day of Sivan, it is the day which marks the *yahrtzeit* of my mother-in-law, Rebbetzin Devorah Leah Twerski. My mother-in-law descended from an illustrious pedigree of preeminent Torah leaders. She was the daughter of the Kedushas Tzion, Rabbi Benzion Halberstam of Bobov, who was the leader of thousands of Chassidim in pre-war Poland, and the scion of great Chassidic dynasties.

My mother-in-law related to me that when the Nazis took her father out to be executed, he requested that he be allowed to put on his *bigdei Shabbos*, the special clothes that he wore on Shabbos, including his *shtrimmel*. The Kedushas Tzion desired to fulfill the mitzvah of dying *al kiddush Hashem* and meeting his Maker in the very raiment with which he greeted the holy Shabbos. The Nazis acquiesced, and robed in his Shabbos finery, the Kedushas Tzion and members of his immediate family gave up their souls to *shamayim*.

Rebbetzin Devorah Leah's maternal grandfather was Reb Shalom Leizer Halberstam of Ratzford, Hungary, a son of the renowned Divrei Chaim of Sanz, an acknowledged Torah leader of European Jewry in his time.

My mother-in-law often spoke of her grandfather, R' Shalom Leizer, with whom she enjoyed a very close relationship. R' Shalom Leizer was a person of consummate humility, who, for example, would enter the *Bais Hamedrash* through a back entrance, so that none of the congregants would feel compelled to stand up for him. He was deceptively simple, to the extent that few, except for the "greats" of his generation, knew of the depth and breadth of his Torah erudition.

My mother-in-law related that on one of her visits to New York, a man made an appointment to see her. The visitor introduced himself as a Holocaust survivor from the notorious Auschwitz death camp. He recounted that when a group of people, including her saintly grandfather R' Shalom Leizer, was taken out to the gas chambers, a Nazi officer



told the inmates to disrobe because they were going to be taking "showers."

The man continued that he ran over to the elderly Tzaddik, and said to him, "Rebbe, they are not taking you to the showers. These are gas chambers where you will die." R' Shalom Leizer turned back and put on his *yarmulke* and *tallis katan*. He then turned to the young man and said, "In the merit of the mitzvah you earned by enabling me to die in my *yarmulke* and *tallis katan*, you have my *bracha* that you will survive this ordeal."

The visitor noted that though he had many harrowing near-death experiences, he was always confident that he would survive the death camps. And indeed, he did.

Over the many years that my mother-in-law, Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, together with my esteemed father-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Twerski, served the Milwaukee community, it was eminently clear to all who encountered her that they were in the presence of spiritual royalty. She wore the imprint of the greats that preceded her.

Though the glorious world that was is tragically gone, we are fortunate that the legacy of these *kedoshim* lives on. While my husband did not personally know either his grandfather the Kedushas Tzion or his great-grandfather R' Shalom Leizer, he has proven himself to be a legitimate heir to their greatness. As a proud mother and grandmother, I am privileged to state that our son, Rabbi Benzion, and our grandson, Rabbi Chaim, provide exceptional leadership that make their venerable ancestors proud.

These coming weeks, culminating with Tisha B'Av, have historically been a period of sadness for our people. It is my conviction, however, that our fabulous community, that is ever on a greater quest—*mevakshim*, seekers of truth and ways to grow in Torah learning, *tefillah*, and acts of *chesed*—will very soon transform the painful past to a future of joy and gladness, spearheaded by the coming of Moshiach.



The Kedushas Tzion of Bobov (left)  
Rebbetzin Devorah Leah Twerski (center)  
Reb Shalom Leizer Halberstam of Ratzford (right)

## AN OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE THANKS

RABBI BENZION TWERSKI

On a recent Friday morning, while we were in New York for our son Motti's wedding, I davened shacharis in the Novominsker Bais Medrash in Boro Park. I chose this particular shul as it is a quiet, elegant shul where the pace of the davening is very similar to our shul in Milwaukee. As I was about to put on my *tallis*, a young man approached me. He introduced himself as Shlomo Obstfeld's son.

Allow me to reminisce. Almost 40 years ago, I was a young *bachur* in the dormitory in the Bobover Yeshiva in Boro Park. An older *bachur* by the name of Luzer Obstfeld sensed that I was lonely and having a hard time settling in. He reached out and took me under his wing. He showed me around Boro Park and taught me how to be in the right places at the right time. May Hashem send Luzer a *refuah shelaima* (he was in a Coronavirus-related coma and on a ventilator for many weeks).

After several weeks of our friendship, Luzer informed me that his older brother, Shlomo, loved having guests and that we should go to his home for *melava*

*malka*. That Motzaei Shabbos, we walked up the three flights to the Obstfeld home where Shlomo and his wife treated us to an amazing spread of food and inspiring *ruach*. This Motzaei Shabbos joy became a tradition which continued for years. Their home was always welcoming, and I felt at ease and part of their family.

Several years later, my wife and I returned to Milwaukee and lost touch with the Obstfelds. Ten years ago, I received word that Shlomo died in a tragic accident. I was struck with regret that I never thanked him adequately for his *chessed*.

Now, on this recent Erev Shabbos, Shlomo's son, Nuchem, appeared in the quiet Novominsker Bais Medrash and informed me that the coming Shabbos will be Shlomo's tenth *yahrtzeit*. He asked if I would be willing to join their *yahrtzeit seudah* and share a few words. I was thrilled that finally I would be able to express some appreciation for the *chessed* he selflessly did for me decades ago.

Shabbos afternoon, I joined this multigenerational Obstfeld family to share my sentiments. I told them about the kindnesses, the warmth, and the



generosity shown me by their parents and grandparents. I felt settled, relieved that I could finally say thank you. Most of all, I was overcome with appreciation to Hashem who brought together so many details to allow for this to take place. Hashem is always guiding His world with exquisite Divine providence. This time He allowed me to observe it.



Shlomo Obstfeld at a Hachnosas Sefer Torah.

Behind him are the Novominsker Rebbe Ztz"l (left) and the Bobover Ruv Shilita (right).

# CAPTURING THE RIGHT IMAGE

RABBI CHAIM TWERSKI

Last year on Grandparent's Day at Yeshiva Elementary School, I wanted some photos of my grandparents and parents spending time with my children. My Rebbetzin was not available to be there to take pictures, so I borrowed her camera, asked her which lens she recommended, and went to school. I spent a couple of hours taking pictures, excitedly awaiting the opportunity to upload the images. When I did, I was quite disappointed. I learned an important lesson: a good camera and a sharp lens are not all that is needed to create a good photograph. Like most other arts and talents, these are only tools of the trade that allow an artist to create, or in this case, capture, an image that tells the story.

I have since learned that much thought and process goes into creating a compelling photograph. That a scene can be shot from different angles to give the viewer a different perspective. That light and distance will change the tone of an image. That with the right knowledge, tools, and skill, a photographer can create a powerful image of the most ordinary scene.

The beginning of Parshas Shelach describes Moshe Rabeinu sending the *meraglim* (spies) to report on Eretz Yisroel. The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, provides an explanation for the juxtaposition of the passage of the *meraglim* and the passage of Miriam speaking *lashon hara* about Moshe Rabeinu that is mentioned at the end of the previous parsha, Parshas Beha'aloscha. The Midrash explains that having seen Miriam's punishment for speaking *lashon hara* about Moshe Rabeinu, the *meraglim* should have taken the lesson to heart and refrained from speaking ill about the Land.

This explanation, however, needs some clarification. When examining the prohibition of *lashon hara*, we find that it is forbidden to speak ill of people.

We do not find a similar prohibition of speaking ill of objects or other non-human forms of life. Why, then, would the *meraglim* have been expected to pay attention to the punishment of



Miriam who spoke ill of a person and refrain from speaking ill of the Land?

Perhaps the lesson to be learned from this Midrash begins before the actual violation of speaking ill. Miriam violated the prohibition of speaking *lashon hara* because she judged Moshe Rabeinu's actions in a negative fashion. She failed to search for a positive reason for Moshe Rabeinu doing what he did. Ultimately, Hashem explained the rationale behind the behavior and why what she interpreted as unjust was in fact appropriate for Moshe Rabeinu.

Similarly, when the *meraglim* returned with their report, they accurately described what they had seen. However, they failed to seek out the positive and complimentary explanation for what they had seen. They chose to focus on the negative interpretation and were thus subject to the same infraction as Miriam.

As we go about life, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships and the way we judge others' interactions with us, we need to carry many lenses. We need lenses of compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and hope. We need a flash of humility, humor, and understanding. We have the ability to frame and capture our experiences in a positive and uplifting way. We are the artists of our lives. We have the ability to find the angle that leads to the best image.

Dovid Hamelech says in Tehillim, "*Mi ha'ish hehofetz chaim, ohev yamim liros tov? Nitzor lishonicha mera usfasecha midaber mirmah.*" This is usually translated as the following question and answer: "Which man desires life, who loves days of seeing good? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit."

An alternative reading, however, may be, "Which man desires life? (One) who loves days of seeing good." We can choose to see the good in others, in their actions, and their interactions with us. If we do, our days will be filled with good, positive encounters. We are tasked to give others the benefit of the doubt. Before we choose an image that evokes negativity, we should really make sure we are accurately depicting the circumstance. We would not want our days to be unloving and darkened in error.

When we become artists of life by creating days filled with good images, we will find our tongues silent from evil. We will be void of negativity toward others and free to appreciate the beauty of one another. Let us gear up with the equipment and the skills the Ribbono Shel Olam has given us and capture the beauty of life.



## THE ERUV IS UP, BARUCH HASHEM!

RABBI AYSON GANELES  
THE ERUV RAV

Is the *eruv* up? This question is hopefully asked every week on Erev Shabbos in the many communities around the world that have an *eruv*, including ours.

Although carrying outside on Shabbos is prohibited by Torah law, an *eruv* provides a halachic construct whereby we are permitted to carry on Shabbos. It was instituted by Shlomo Hamelech and has two primary halachic requirements. The first requirement is to create a series of “halachic walls” around the community. Often, existing structures are used, and these take many forms, such as, embankments of a highway, train tracks, or fences around a cemetery. Our *eruv*, like many city *eruvim*, is made mostly from *tzuras hapesach*. These are halachic “doorways,” one after another, encircling the part of the city where the *eruv* is planned. We use durable plastic slats attached to the city’s utility poles. These represent the doorposts of the doorways. The utility wires above, extending from pole to pole, represent the doorway lintels. In some places, we created makeshift lintels from lengths of string, because there were no utility lines to rely on. Together, these doorways make up the enclosure that unifies the community’s physical domain.

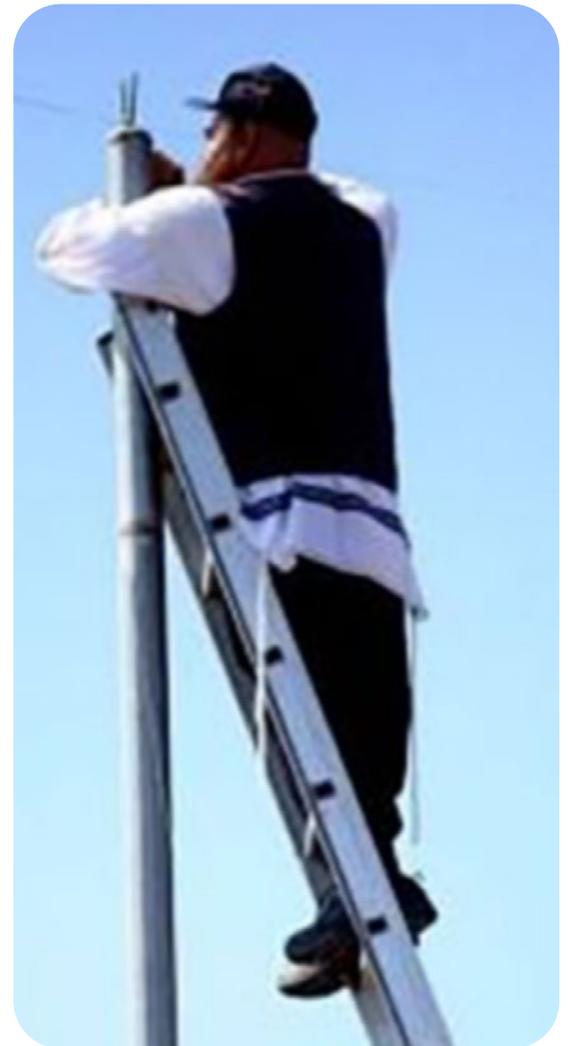
The second requirement of an *eruv* is to bind the many families and individuals together. This is accomplished with food. Once a year before Pesach, the Rav takes matzo and, through the act of *kinyan* (ownership) on behalf of the entire community, establishes it as everyone’s matzo. We are then, in effect, all one family through the food we communally own. Chazal say that, in fact, this makes it as if we all live in one home. (Fittingly, the matzo is usually kept in shul.) In

sum, with the physical boundary and the food in place, the Torah considers us one family under one roof.

Every week, I check the *eruv* to ensure that the physical boundary—the miles of halachic doorways—is as it should be: intact and kosher. When my kids were younger, I would teach them about the *eruv* and bike the circuit with them on Fridays to make sure it was fit for Shabbos.

Over the years, I have had many interesting experiences. A common occurrence is finding that a plastic “doorpost” slat (often more than one) has been knocked down by a car and needs to be replaced. One week, there was an exceptionally heavy snowfall. The snow weighed the string down so low that a truck drove into it and pulled it right off the poles. On those occasions when the *eruv* is down, I have to figure out how to fix it in the few hours before Shabbos. If it is something close to the ground, I fix it myself. However, when it is the lines that are down, I call Tom, who works for the city. He dispatches workers to quickly repair the problem.

In the winter, it takes some tricky driving to check all the slats, as many are in unplowed alleys. At times, my car has gotten stuck and I had to dig myself out. As I drive through the alleyways after the non-Jewish holiday season, I see the disposed boxes from all the presents given in each household. I often get good ideas for what to give my own kids for their next birthday.



With all its halachic requirements, physical maintenance, and weekly efforts, I can report that with the help of the Ribono Shel Olam, in the 25 years we have had the *eruv*, there has not been one Shabbos that the *eruv* was down.

The *eruv* is up, Baruch Hashem!

# AN ORGANIZED MIND

GAVI SLUTZKIN

We are, without question, in an unprecedented and transitional time. There are no easy answers and the circumstances leave us with many questions about where we stand as humanity and how we can resolve our own and the world's problems. What can we do to help ease the inner/outer tension and disorganization of the mind?

Ultimately, it boils down to this: our internal dynamic. Our mindset is of our choosing and that is where our true power lies!

Take a step back with me for a moment and observe the cycle. I shift my perspective to an empowered one, creating a sense of calm or peace with what is, which gives me the sanity to keep up with my daily obligations and relate to others amicably. This, then, makes me feel better about myself and allows me to accomplish more. Now I feel even better, and my hopes and dreams seem closer than ever! And so, the wheel turns...a

positive cycle. Science has proven over and over again that even on a biological level, our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings will generate physiological and hormonal changes within us and thus directly affect our health and well-being.

One thing is clear to me: our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing are all intrinsically linked. Like a domino effect, when we get one aspect in check or throw one of them

out of balance, the whole system is affected.

"That's beautiful," you might say, "but easier said than done!" Okay, so let us get down to business. Here are a few suggestions based on what I have seen to be helpful:

1) Spiritually: Listen for the call of your small still voice—that intuition that tells you where balance in your life is or calls you to bring up and process a trauma. That wise voice, I believe, is Hashem's way, via your soul, of giving you direction and loving support.



2) Mentally: Being present in the NOW moment is another huge step toward a decluttered mind. Be fully involved in where you are, who you are with, and in what you are doing. This prevents you from being pulled in lots of different directions. You will find that daily practice is necessary to rewire the old habit of distraction.

3) Emotionally: At any moment, with your free will, you can choose to let go of negativity and victimhood and

instead create a more positive outlook. The power of GRATITUDE is always a great way to shift out of a negative belief. Additionally, so much of the time, the only thing stopping you is your own self-doubt or skepticism!

4) Physically: I have found the notion of organizing your external environment to help yourself function and feel better to be empowering. To that end, here are a few easy tips. Each object should ideally have its set place in the house. Next, when doing an activity, clean up as you go or right after you are done, so there is not a buildup. Also, the Marie Kondo method has become very popular and for good reason! When you have lots of items clogging up your home, it is akin to holding onto a bunch of energetic baggage that burdens your whole being. Get rid of what you do not use!

There are so many ways to improve on each level of being. My intention is that this serves as a quick reminder of some of them and releases

YOU in a moment of calm reflection amongst the chaos. I give you the blessing that you are able to see your strengths clearly, be in gratitude, and be empowered by all the good in your life. At the same time, you are able to acknowledge your weaknesses, thank them for the growth inducing role they have played, and then allow them to leave your system. Be an organized mind!

## ACCOMMODATING FOOD ALLERGIES

ARIELLE LUBCHANSKY

Much like *kashrus* (kosher food), dealing with food allergies and intolerances can be a daunting concept to those who are unfamiliar with it. It is difficult to understand and appreciate what it means to have a family member with allergies if you do not have one. Because of the potential severity of the situation, a mere misunderstanding can result in difficult and even dangerous circumstances.

Like other medical conditions, allergies can manifest with varying degrees of severity. Some people have a mild allergy to a food that is not particularly common, while others may have severe reactions to ingredients found in a majority of foods. Being diligent about allergies includes understanding how to identify offending ingredients, which may go by a variety of names, and scouring labels to find them in seemingly innocent foods. Companies reformulate their products constantly, and without notice, a food that was previously fine is no longer a safe option.

Learning to adapt to cooking with allergy awareness takes diligence and creativity. Sometimes less is more; going back to basics can be very helpful. There are different approaches to family food preparation, including choosing to cook separate dishes, or even separate meals for those who cannot partake in everything. Other families opt to formulate all of their cooking to accommodate everyone. Pesach can pose a particular challenge, especially for those with allergies to the Pesach staples of dairy, eggs, fish, and/or nuts. It may be extremely difficult to cook exclusively allergy-friendly during Pesach.

Allergies can also make hosting families for Shabbos and Yom Tov, or even for a *simcha* (joyous occasion), very tricky. It is difficult to make blanket suggestions for having guests that



include people with allergies. Some will appreciate invitations that include accommodations for the allergies, while others do not want hosts to change their menus or try to cook with their limitations. I would like to offer some insights into hosting guests with allergies.

First and foremost, it is crucial to ask potential company if there are any food allergies or intolerances that need to be considered. As mentioned, some guests will be eager to accept an accommodating invitation. If you feel up to the challenge, but are not sure how to execute it, ask for tips. They surely have strategies to work within their limitations. You can ask them to walk you through the meal, what they normally make, or for ideas about what to serve. Others may offer to bring all of their own food, or a dish that everyone can enjoy.

After hearing the intricacies involved in having a family over, it is acceptable to say that you do not feel able to accommodate them. Honesty is the best policy, especially in a situation like this, where there can be harmful ramifications. It is also important not to pressure any guests. Even if you made the effort to make a special dish for them, do not be offended if they do not partake of it. Also, do not assume that if someone has one allergy, they have more allergies, or that they are also allergic to nuts.

Here are some practical ways to accommodate common food allergies and intolerances:

**Gluten:** Challah and bread products may be difficult to adjust. Otherwise,

any *non-gebrokts* recipes for Pesach are acceptable. Be careful of what you put in your cholent. Rice can be substituted for barley, as can quinoa or millet.

**Eggs:** There is an abundance of vegan products and recipes easily available (for pareve eggless cooking). Common egg replacements for baking include chickpea water (aquafaba), applesauce, banana, vegan mayonnaise, milled flax seed, or a powdered egg replacer. Beware that even some candies contain egg whites.

**Dairy:** When substituting for dairy products, be sure that there are no other allergies, such as soy or nuts.

**Fish:** There are many kosher candies, such as gummies and marshmallows that may contain fish gelatin.

**Soy:** This requires extra investigation. There are many products which contain soy that we may not be aware of. Be careful to read labels.

**Nuts:** Nut allergies may or may not contain peanuts and vice versa. Because of the prevalence of these allergies, products are usually well labeled; however, because of the severity of nut allergies, it is crucial to double check.

There are many other allergies not discussed here (like sesame, corn, carrots, fruits, and numerous others), so be sure to seek clarification if a different allergy comes up.

Remember that there are MANY delicious foods that can be enjoyed, even with food limitations.

# THE HASHGACHA, HALACHA, AND EMUNAH OF RUNNING ROBBINS ACRES

SHMUEL AND ROCHEL ROBBINS

Our front yard is proudly distinctive in the neighborhood, and, for that matter, so is our back yard. During peak growing season, the garden, which we term "Robbins Acres," approaches something near glorious—if we do say so ourselves—not to mention the several hundred pounds of excellent and healthy food produced annually. In the back, a flock of chickens of various colors and breeds lays eggs, thrives, and roams. All of these things being wonderful, they are also just the surface of it. What follows are some of the less obvious, yet more impactful, elements of the operation. We did not arrive at this overnight; we have been working on this for about eight years now. We are no prairie pioneer family. Nonetheless, we do believe that the sustained effort has paid off for us in numerous ways, and that payoff is very accessible. It may even pay off for you, too!

## Seeing Hashem at Work

A first topic to start with is the active consciousness of Hashem's presence

and creation in action. "Sure," you say. "Obvious," you say. We all know how amazing it is to see a tiny seed sprout and grow. From our perspective, however, that is really a very small element of the whole, amazing though it is. We see many of the other things we are going to mention below (e.g., the nature of seasons, weather, overcoming loss, striving to improve, interacting with it all with faith, etc.) as a part of the larger, deliberate whole of *hashgacha* (divine providence). When these things are a part of our everyday lives, the impression, or discussion, of Hashem's mastery and genius takes on a lot more depth.

## Everything has a Season and Life is a Cycle

It takes about 20 weeks for a chick to begin laying eggs. The growing season in Southeast Wisconsin starts in mid to late May and not before. These are facts, and there is nothing we can do to change them. Linking our lives more to the cycle and pulse of Hashem's creations, as opposed to the near 24-hour nature of

our otherwise modern lifestyle, produces more patience, consideration, and comfort with long-term thinking.

## Challenge and Loss, Care and Kindness

We have lost whole crops and had fatal animal attacks. Those events have strengthened us and inoculated us in small ways against loss and setback, which are natural and expected parts of life. After the worst animal attack, our fairly young children leaped out of bed at 6:00 a.m. without histrionics and hurried outside to tenderly care for the wounded and dying. That sounds like less than fun, but to some degree they have internalized the idea that setbacks are to be expected at some point, and our role is to meet the challenge as best we can. We think of that as a big win.

## Common Halachic Topics

*Tza'ar ba'alei chayim* (suffering of living creatures), practical laws related to Shabbos (very often tzod - trapping), issues of *treifus* and *kashrus* (kosher status of food), *kelayim* (mixing of different seeds, plants, etc.), *shvi'is* (the agricultural sabbatical year), *peah* (the corner of the field), etc. all come up for discussion at our table in a very practical way. When Torah topics are immediately and practically relevant (not academic or theoretical) they take on obvious interest and dimension. The way the kids learn in school is much effected, as well. We collectively learn, and our Shabbos discussions are enriched.

*continued on page 11*



## A SPECIAL SHAVUOS TREAT

SARA PERLMAN

"Hashem gave us a present, do you know what it was? He gave us the Torah and we must keep its laws." This is what I heard my five-year-old singing as a Sefer Torah was brought through my door.

For nine weeks we had been bereft of shul, minyan, and Torah reading. Our houses became makeshift shuls, kollels, yeshivos, and schools. We spent nine weeks working on the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho* (love your fellow as yourself) while being in close quarters with our entire families. We learned to coordinate our learning, working, teaching, and playing so everyone had a place and time to fulfill their duties, as well as their desires. Shabbos morning taught us to appreciate what we were missing. Although we could daven at home with a "chazzan" and hear *leining* (the weekly Torah reading) from a Chumash, there was nothing that could prepare us for the phone call inviting us to have a minyan in our backyard.

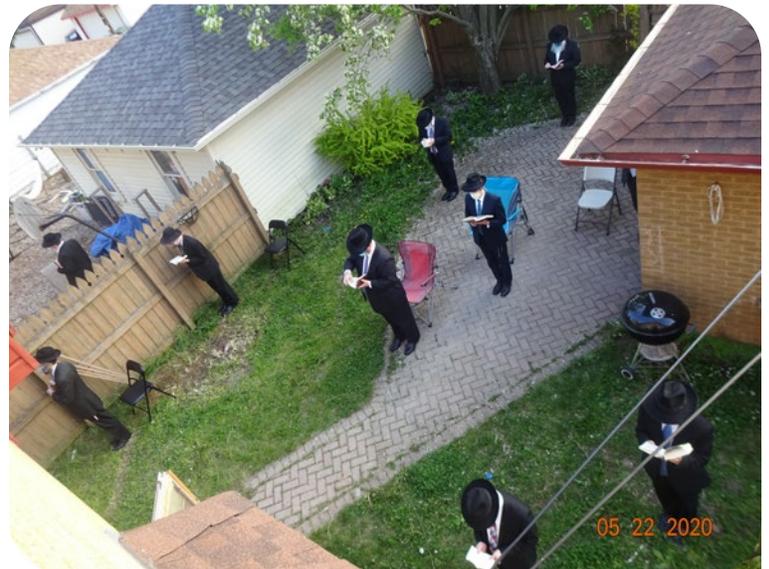
We received a call at 6:30 p.m. on a Wednesday evening asking if we would be interested in accommodating a minyan in our backyard. With a resounding "yes," my husband asked if we could begin the following day in order to prepare our yard for this holy endeavor. But our kids would hear nothing of it; minyan would happen in an hour! We would clean the yard and turn it into a shul worthy of the *kedusha* (holiness) we were being offered to embrace. And in under an hour, the yard was devoid of sticks and debris. Garbage made its way to the bins, and the lawn was mowed. All we needed was people.

Unfortunately, our excitement was premature, as many of the men that would be needed to fill our quorum were yet to be contacted. This did not mar our joy. We watched our own menfolk use the new "shul" to

daven *b'yichidus* (without a minyan). With their introductory *tefillos* (prayers), we had the opportunity to visualize what our yard would need to accommodate a minyan. The next day, a tissue box found its way to an empty planter. The following day, a table was placed outside for tallis and tefillin bags. And of course, the ever-handy bottle of hand sanitizer was available for use.

Our first minyan was mincha on Erev Shabbos. We were all ready for Shabbos but it was still too early to *bentch licht* (light Shabbos candles). We relished in the *kaddish* and *kedusha*. We appreciated the *bracha* (blessing) that was offered to us in the form of our house being the conduit for *tefilla b'tzibur* (davening with a minyan) to be reinstated in Milwaukee. We partnered from a distance with "new shuls" on each block opening to re-establish this mitzvah that had been sorely missed from Purim, all through Pesach, and near to Shavuos. With the windows open in order to hear the minyan from inside, I *bentched licht* with tears in my eyes as *kabalas Shabbos* began outside. For so long we had yearned to be together, and finally here we were, in my yard.

However, shacharis was a stark reminder that this was a temporary shul, that this was only a stepping stone in the



right direction to the privilege of being able to rejoin all the backyard shuls into one building. Because as shacharis concluded, mussaf commenced without *leining* Parshas Bamidbar. True, my husband and son would *lein* it later from a Chumash, but our shul was not complete, because although the men could daven together it was still missing an integral part of our *tefilla b'tzibur*, a Sefer Torah.

Wednesday night, Erev Shavuos, we got word that a Sefer Torah was available to us from Yeshiva Elementary School. And that is how my kindergarten daughter welcomed the Eli Torem Sefer Torah to our home with a song that she would

*continued on next page*

have sung with Morah Torem, had she been in school.

On Erev Shavuos, our “shul” was decorated in honor of Shavuos with flowers. We added a makeshift washing station that would be needed for our Levi to wash our Kohen’s hands before *Bircas Kohanim*. We chose tablecloths to cover our *aron kodesh* and *shulchan*. Our shul was ready for Shavuos and the Sefer Torah was the final touch.

Our Erev Shavuos minyan was enhanced with the ability to *lein* the portion of Parshas Naso read on a weekday. We awaited the *brachos* with bated breath, both the men outside, and the rest of us inside. And with “Barchu es Hashem hamvorach,” a huge smile formed on our faces. What an introduction to the celebration of *Kabalas Hatorah* (receiving the Torah) on Shavuos!

We did not have a minyan for *shacharis* on the first day of Shavuos, as our shul combined with another block’s shul to daven *vasikin* (at sunrise) in Rabbi Benzion’s backyard. But we listened from the *ezras nashim*

(women’s section) in the kitchen on the second day of Yom Tov. We were honored to have the Sefer Torah present for Yizkor, not just for the men who needed it but for the wife of one of our members who davened outside the fence.

It is our pleasure to merit having been chosen to keep up the mitzvah of davening *b’tzibur*. It is a privilege to store and protect such a holy item in our home. However, we look forward to returning the Sefer Torah to its rightful home amongst its friends at school when we safely return to be amongst our friends at shul.



## THE HASHGACHA, HALACHA, AND EMUNAH OF RUNNING ROBBINS ACRES *continued from page 9*

### The Food (!)

We eat tons of veggies and fresh eggs—and both grown-ups and kids generally love what they eat! It is the work of Hashem, helped along by our invested effort, and it is better quality than what you will get at the store!

### Sharing

We eat really well, especially during the season. We also end up giving away a lot, and the exercise of giving and sharing as Jewish values, in and of themselves, are worth the whole project. Poor neighborhood strangers have knocked on our door at season-end asking to pick green tomatoes. We give to friends and neighbors, and occasionally to strangers walking by. We make a point of making the kids part of the giving by sending them to deliver food to a neighbor to increase *shalom* (peace and harmony).

### Stretching Ourselves

At Robbins Acres, Shmuel became a builder and Rochel became a certified master gardener. The kids have become chicken care experts. We all have taken on new roles in the family project and grown through them. Notably, we started out with a base of experience and education in these matters near zero. By grown-ups and kids being willing to try, fail, and learn, we have all come farther than we could have expected.



## A WEDDING OF THE TIMES

R' YITZCHAK FOX

"So, where's the *chasunah* going to be? How many people are you allowed to have?"

For weeks, the response was set on repeat. "We don't know. We don't know."

Maybe it would be in Pennsylvania, maybe with barely a minyan. Thankfully, neither of those things ended up happening.

The two sides of this *shidduch* have been familiar with each other for many generations. Reb Motele Hornosteipler's rebbetzin was Reitzla, the daughter of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz. Their grandson, Rav Yaakov Yisroel Twerski, and their great-granddaughter, Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, the eldest child of the Kedushas Tzion of Bobov, married before moving to Milwaukee to strengthen Yiddishkeit in what was perceived as the American "wilderness." And now, Motti, their great-grandson, was marrying Riva Wachsman, the great-granddaughter of the Bobover Ruv, R' Shlomo Halberstam zt"l. The Bobover Ruv had great admiration and affinity for our Rabbi Benzion, and the unique and deep bond they shared is well-known. Undoubtedly, this *shidduch* would have been a source of immense joy and pride for the Bobover Ruv.

The *kallah's* grandfather is the *rosh yeshivah* of the Bobover Yeshivah in Brooklyn, and the entire family is cherished by their *kehillah*. Had coronavirus not been a factor, two halls would have been required for the *chasunah* to accommodate all the guests and well-wishers. Now, however, attendees would have to be strictly limited to immediate family only, totaling just 150 people.



that others could join in the *simcha*. We did not need to be told twice. Tickets were booked and off we went.

For those of us from "out-of-town," attending a Twerski wedding in the big city can sometimes feel like being in a foreign country. We know the parents and grandparents of the bride or groom, but the other 1,000 people are total strangers. This *chasunah* was different. While I am sure the *baalei simcha* would have preferred to make a *chasunah* that could accommodate all their extended family and wide circle of friends, for us it was perfect. Half the guests were like family, and it was wonderful to see them. We felt like our presence meant so much more at this uncharacteristically and relatively "small" *chasunah*.

In a word, the *chasunah* was beautiful. It was worth the trip if only to see the faces of our beloved Rabbi Benzion and Rebbetzin Chanie glowing with *nachas* as they married off their sixth child *ka"h*.

The glass that is broken at a *chuppah* is a somber reminder that even our

greatest *simchas* are incomplete until such time as the Final Redemption is upon us and we are returned to the *Bais Hamikdash*. As the traditional words of *Mi Adir* were masterfully sung to the Rebbe's *niggun*, *Ana Avda*, I was struck by the very tangible feeling of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's absence. The Rebbe and Rebbetzin could not travel to be at the *chasunah* and we know how much it pained them to miss it. Joyful we were, but our *simcha* was not complete.

But, the holy Baal Shem Tov taught that one exists where his thoughts are, and as Chassidim always say, one can be close yet far and one can be far yet still very close. Of course, this is primarily a spiritual concept, and perhaps it is accurate on a psychological level as well. Tonight, though, it would be reinforced by a manifestation in the physical. Our Rebbe has always been one to find the bright side of modern technology, and thankfully, the videographer was able to livestream the entire *chasunah* to the comfort of his study. Certainly, the fact that they were

able to virtually attend the *chasunah* is a modern miracle never conceived of in the times of their holy ancestors. Dressed in their Shabbos finery, the Rebbe and Rebbetzin participated from afar. The Rebbe's *niggun* served as their emissary to the *chuppah* and knowing that they were able to watch and that we were all in the same place in thought and spirit made the experience more whole, albeit incomplete.

There were many precious moments throughout the evening. From singing the Kedushas Tzion's *niggun* to the words of Mishlei (1:15): "B'ni, b'ni, b'ni (my son, my son, my son)..." as Rabbi Benzion girded the *chosson* in a prized *gartel* he received from the Bobover Ruv *ztz"l*, to dancing to the Rebbe's *T'kah B'shofar* with all of the Milwaukeeans.

Traditionally, before the Rebbe's *mitzva tantz*, he will say *l'chaim* and give *berachos*, an intimate and lofty highlight of every family wedding that the Rebbe attends. I was already disappointed that the Rebbe would not be dancing *mitzva tantz*, and not being able to wish *l'chaim* to the Rebbe at that special moment was a bitter pill to swallow. Once again, Hashem sent us the marvels of modern technology. To my surprise, a crowd suddenly formed around Motti; the Rebbe was on FaceTime *bentching* the *chosson*. The phone was passed around and a few of us were able to wish the Rebbe and Rebbetzin a personal *l'chaim* and receive a *beracha* of, "Im yirtze Hashem bei deine kinder" (May it be by your children). Nothing can compare to the Rebbe's *mitzva tantz* but hearing the sound and energy of his voice was revitalizing.

Much could be said about messages gleaned from this particular wedding, but we must allow the following to suffice. One of the things that assures the continuity of a *mesorah* is the steadfast adherence to principles and the stalwart championship of its ideals in the face of any and all tides and storms. "Even if all the winds of the world blow upon it, they cannot move it from its place" (*Avos* 3:22). By the same token, we are taught that *m'darf leiben mit di tzeiten*, one must live with the times. The Torah is ancient yet timeless and eternal, and it is incumbent upon us to adapt as Torah Jews in a modern world that is less than thrilled for us to still be occupying it. We must always uncover new ways to ensure that Torah retains its voice and relevance, that it can meet the challenges of the generation, all without compromising even one iota.

A wedding is between individuals. This one was between scions of Hornosteipel and Bobov, old vessels faithful to every nuance of their *mesorah*, yet carrying a new and vibrant voice that can guide us through tumultuous times toward the greeting of Moshiach, the ultimate *simcha*.

But a marriage can be made between seeming opposites: the flourishing of Torah and Chassidus in a modern America full of distractions, spiritual blessings in the merit of holy ancestors transmitted by way of FaceTime and Zoom, and a life that is brimming with effervescent joy even as we navigate the challenges and concealment of the last frontier of *galus*.

For me, the evening was representative of the authentic, relevant, and balanced Yiddishkeit that the Rebbe urges us toward, and that our community is known for. *Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu!* How fortunate we truly are!

The *chasunah* was momentous, it was fun, and I can't wait to go to another one.

Where's Shea?

“The holy Baal Shem Tov taught that one exists where his thoughts are, and as Chassidim always say, one can be close yet far and one can be far yet still very close.”

## PARENTING DURING QUARANTINE

FAYGIE HELLMAN

I recently completed a parenting series titled, "Parenting During Quarantine." The series was based on skills from Love and Logic and their application during the unique circumstances surrounding COVID-19 and Wisconsin's safer-at-home order.

Some of the topics we covered were the importance of staying calm and using empathy with our children; talking in a way that will result in healthier children and increased compliance; guiding children to process conflict and manage their own problems with parental support; the concept of the "Uh Oh Song"/ recovery process; and finally, *shalom bayis* and how to best manage the stressors and opportunities that this situation presents to our families.

Last week, I had an epiphany. Although I had been training and offering Love and Logic parenting classes for 13 years, a new perspective evolved as I presented the skills this time around. I had always thought of the "empathetic response" as something we do to avoid a power struggle. The more I explained empathy as the solution and foundation to most of what I teach, I realized that it is not only the solution but also the intervention. Allow me to explain.

When a child does or says something that frustrates the adult, Love and Logic advises the use of empathy to stay calm

and respond. Some examples include saying "Oh no!", "This is so sad!", or just saying, "Awwww!" As I described the power of empathy and how it helps the brain move from survival/protective mode into thinking mode, I started to realize that the more we do that, the more we are preserving our relationships and helping the oxygen stay in the prefrontal cortex, thereby keeping our kids emotionally safer! What good parent would not want to do that?!

are delivered with genuine empathy, they are received. It is almost magical. Empathy creates a holding place for another person's emotions, regardless of the emotion. Most moods and strong emotions pass and when you have someone in your life who genuinely empathizes with you, your stability is anchored. You are like a maple tree in a hurricane...you feel rooted, accepted. Our current situation has us holding on to a lot of stress, anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Many have lost family members, financial security, and the luxury of daily structure.

Activities that we took for granted like grocery shopping, visiting the dentist, and buying new clothes are now major events. The one ingredient we can all bring to the scenario is empathy.

Empathy is free. It looks and sounds like this: "Wow, that's sad, let me know if there's something you need." It is so simple yet can feel unnatural at first. Practice. Practice. Practice. To quote Brene Brown, "If you put shame in a petri dish, it needs three ingredients to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you put the same amount of shame in the petri dish and douse it with empathy, it can't survive."

This journey is complex. Let us try to fuel connection with empathy... And let me know if there is something you need.



All humans crave empathy. Empathy heals. Empathy provides acceptance. Empathy is free of judgment. Empathy builds a child's character and self-confidence. We all need empathy. The realization about the infinite power of empathy in all relationships developed when I prepared for the final class, "Shalom Bayis and Parenting." I always get this question: "Can I use this with my spouse?"

My answer is: YES...as long as you are using EMPATHY! When words

# WALK IN LIKE YOU OWN THE PLACE

RUTH BRYSKIER

*In memory of Yosef ben Pinchas HaLevi*

Flying home cross country from a trip visiting my father, in a sparsely populated plane wearing an N95 mask, I had plenty of time to think. The call had come in Motzaei Pesach.

"We didn't want you to hear it from anyone else in the family; we wanted to tell you ourselves," said my stepmother. Dad was also on the phone, but he did not say much, as had been the case more and more the past number of years since he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. "Dad is enrolling in hospice. The doctor said his heart is only functioning at 15% and he doesn't have more than 6 months."

These words started a determined effort to get a difficult-to-obtain COVID-19 test and N95 mask, as well as a flight to Fresno, California Sunday morning. Frum from Fresno? How did that happen?

When I was little, I was Daddy's sidekick on the college campus where he was a chemistry professor. As I trotted after him, I saw how he interacted with people and how he got things done. He was a driven and determined man, with 17 books and approximately 3,000 published academic papers to his credit. Daddy would stroll behind various reference and service counters at the university library to get what he wanted. I could see the signs admonishing library patrons not to go beyond this point. "Staff Only!" the signs proclaimed.

"Daddy, how do you just walk in and get what you want?"

"Walk in like you own the place," he stated simply.

My parents raised me "Observant Reform." Shabbos dinners with *Shalom Aleichem*, *Eishes Chayil* in English, Kiddush, etc. On Pesach we stuffed all the *chometz* in one closet and ate matzah with peanut butter. As I had been told that keeping kosher was "something they did in the old country"

and was a thing of the past, I was puzzled by the little OUs I saw on some packages. Why were those there if no one kept kosher anymore?

Later, my father told me they raised us with an awareness of Judaism on the advice of some friends of my Oma and Opa. This they advised, because their own children were angry at them for having raised them without a Jewish experience. My father, however, never committed to faith. And yet, a spark ignited in me.

How did my father's strident strength of character and ideas about how to get things done mesh with the self-yielding Yiddishkeit I chose to live these last 30+ years? I have to admit it often worked. But can confidence and humility truly coexist?

We learn from the example given to us by Moshe Rabeinu, the humblest of men. Moshe led *B'nei Yisroel* out of *Mitzrayim*, he spoke to Hashem *panim el panim* (face to face), and he was a great leader and teacher. How could he also be such an *anav*, such a humble person? It was his interaction with, and recognition of, Hashem, and the constant realization that all his *ma'alos*, all his fine attributes, were given to him by Hashem. As such, he felt obligated to use them to the fullest. He had to act decisively when it was called for, not because he prided himself in his abilities, but because he could see and appreciate them, and at the same time know they were Divinely gifted. True perspective comes from this kind of awareness. Yes, frum and from Fresno.



So, thank you, Daddy. Even if you appeared puzzled by my embracing a Torah life, you taught me not only to have confidence in myself, but also to understand Ben Zoma when he says in Pirkei Avos, 4:1: "Who is wise? He who learns from everyone."

Please consider sharing your delicious recipes with the rest of the CBJ Community!

Email your recipes to [thebjconversation@gmail.com](mailto:thebjconversation@gmail.com)

## IF I COULD ONLY SEE THE REBBE

HOWARD W. KARSH

*This short poem is about Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Twerski, our previous Rebbe, the father of Rabbi Michel.*

*I am saddened that we have not found a way to keep his memory alive within our community.*

*Because his presence was felt in the consistency of his "walk" rather than his talk alone, the means has evaded us. This poem will not solve the problem.*

*Years ago, a prominent attorney in Milwaukee proposed to fund a biography about the Rebbe. The Rebbe noted that because counseling was his primary work in the community and much of this information was guarded and confidential, writing about it would be very challenging. He suggested to the attorney that he should get in touch with me as the writer.*

*We met, the Rebbe told us about one family's dilemma, and the project was put on permanent hold. It was impossible to write about it devoid of detail.*

*The Rebbe was, in fact, in every regard a treasure. But to write even a single word about him seemed to limit who he was.*

*I found a place in the poetry we used in our annual CBJ dinner publication. And since I was the editor, I had no problem with inclusion.*

*This is one of the poems I liked best.*

*The Rebbe's yahrtzeit is on the 10th of Av.*



if I could only see the rebbe dance once more  
that gentle dance  
he danced on simchas torah  
as we sang that special niggun  
and  
even though the hall was  
in confusion  
it  
was suddenly still

if I could only see the rebbe just once more  
at the tisch  
at shala shudis  
and watch his face  
serene  
as motel cohen sang  
strongly out

if I could only touch the rebbe one more time  
standing there  
at the front of the shul  
with eyes that beckoned all  
to come and greet him  
and watch his head tilt back  
to peer through his eyeglasses

if I could only watch the rebbe just once more  
smiling at his grandchildren  
or  
protectively guarding the energies of his children  
or caring for the comfort of his wife

if I could only see the rebbe dance once more  
that gentle dance  
he danced on simchas torah  
if I could only see the rebbe just once more

# A LETTER: CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS

SARAH FRANK



Sivan 5780

Dear Rabbi Michel and Rebbetzin Feige Twerski, Rabbi Benzion and Rebbetzin Chanie Twerski,

It was 30 years ago this month that we made our firm commitment to Torah and mitzvos and moved into your community. I think back and recognize that my life up to that point was like a liquid being poured into a large funnel, streaming towards Yiddishkeit. Hashem could have placed us anywhere. I am filled with such deep gratitude that He led us here – into your kehilla: an incubator for growth in learning about Shabbos, shalom bayis, chessed, ahavas Yisroel, tzedakah, and chinuch. Three decades of gleaning the pearls of wisdom that are available from your insights. A generation of watching your examples of raising children and grandchildren. I thank the Ribono Shel Olam every day for these blessed gifts.

I love living in our “out of town” community. We have what we need: the most basic and treasured ingredients for living. You created our environment with a thriving day school, an enriching Kollel, and our beloved Shul. You supported the growth of our esteemed high schools. We have dozens of families who appreciate all of this as I do. We have raised our children together while you nurtured us every step of the way. Now our children are raising kinderlach of their own.

The arms of our community stretch very wide as our children take on their own roles in Klal Yisroel, all thanks to your strong and balanced leadership. We pass on our mesorah, kindled from your light, to the next generation. I hope they understand from whence they have come. I pray that they have received a wellspring of emunah and bitachon to carry them through their lives. May they hold onto the profound knowledge that, put simply, “Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere.”

Please accept our love and gratitude for pouring so much of yourselves into us. You have created our thirst for learning and doing more. We have nourished ourselves on your Torah teachings. Our hearts are full of awe when we think of all that you do for Yidden everywhere. We have been honored to walk in your ways and to bask in your presence. It is our prayer that you continue to do your heavenly work until beyond the end of days, and may we all merit together to greet Moshiach!

Gratefully yours,

Sarah (and Jay) Frank

## THE VACATION CALLED *DEEP WOODS OFF!*

SHAYNA HUNT

I was temporarily insane to have considered going on the family camping trip! I'd had minor surgery only four days before, and I should've spent the whole week "resting." I have asthma, and plant life of all kinds seem to trigger me breathless. I'm not an overly outdoorsy type. *What had I been thinking?*

Probably, poetically romantic notions of a tranquil sojourn from hectic city to quiet nature-ridden forest, where cute woodland creatures abound. I envisioned my family having priceless quality time, sitting around the campfire roasting marshmallows, making s'mores, laughing, and sleeping in the great outdoors.

Before we left, I joked with friends, "Well, off I go to bear country!" The State Park we were headed to didn't have bears.

"I hope our wagon train doesn't get ambushed by wild Indians!" I knew full well we'd be taking our minivan and the only wild anything we'd encounter would be my 12-year-old, if she forgot her bag of candy.

"I hope I don't get stranded in the wilderness having to forage for food until a dingo abducts me!" *Okay, enough already!* America isn't even home to Australian Dingoes!

After setting up the tent the first night, we grilled dinner, made a roaring fire, roasted marshmallows, and ate s'mores. It was lovely, despite the grumpy, tired bickering! We managed best we could with the nearest running water 75 feet away, and smelly "pit" toilets. *Oh how I missed the simple flushing sound!* It got dark, and the lights we'd brought weren't enough to really illuminate anything well, except really large flying bugs!

Bedtime was freezing, and my air mattress was located on an incline. I had to sleep on my side, hanging on to the edge for dear life, else I'd roll onto the next mattress, causing a domino effect, and collapsing the tent on all of us in the pitch dark!

I managed to nod off but was awoken to a strange rustling outside.

I screamed bloody murder!

"What?!" yelled four panicked voices in unison. The yell was not located in the tent with me!

"There's a bear!" I screamed.

"It's only us," cried the voices. "We're heading to the toilets." We weren't being attacked!

"Wait for me!" I cried.

Walking back after the "pit" stop, I glanced up into the inky night, to see a twinkling sight we don't see in the city. Stars! Thousands of beautiful, mesmerizing stars! We stood in the dewy grass, staring.

"You'll never believe what time it is!" exclaimed one of my daughters.

I was hoping it was at least 5 a.m. so we'd only have another hour of tortured sleep!

She groaned, "It's only 1 a.m.!"

*Uhhggg!* We had hours yet to go!

Back in the tent, we reluctantly slept. The next thing we knew, a loud woodpecker woke us. Then I saw them! Large, red, familiar, puffy, itchy spots, lining my legs. Years ago, our cat had introduced us to the wicked world of fleas.

It took an exterminator months to rid our house of those pesky critters. I'm highly allergic to their bite! My legs felt like they were on fire, and more bites were swelling up! I was now in a full-blown panic. Not only was I in agony, I was terrified we'd be infesting our house again when we came home! Everyone found me sitting on my air mattress, crying, as I rocked back and forth to soothe myself!

With sullen faces, they offered to go home.

"No," I said horrified. "Don't ruin your fun! Drop me at a hotel, finish the trip!"

I was blissfully left in the luxury of civilization, a flushing, clean-smelling bathroom, with running hot water! *The joy!*

Later, reclining in air-conditioning, on clean bedsheets, propped up against fluffy pillows, ice packs soothing my legs, I realized what good came of this. Perhaps it was the drug-induced haze of Benadryl, but I got emotional when I thought how thankful I was to Hashem for the simple blessings in life I had taken for granted. I said a prayer of thanks for houses, indoor plumbing, clean sheets, appliances, and technology that enable me to live in a convenience filled world. Upon returning home, I said an even more heartfelt prayer of specific thanks for washing machines, takeout kosher restaurants, interior car washes, and last but not least—exterminators!



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# RABBI ANSHELL, THE ANSWER MAN

A SHORT STORY BY HOWARD W. KARSH

He stands six feet, four inches tall, his face framed by a full, white flowing beard. His place of operation is a wooden shed on a busy corner in Yerushalayim that once had been a shoemaker's shop. He took possession of it at some forgotten time.

He stands majestically just inside his "office," greeting the seemingly endless flow of people seeking answers to their questions, from simple to profound.

The least of his accomplishments is his knowledge of every street in Yerushalayim and how to get there. Cab drivers in the city stop by his office when their GPS can't direct them to where they need to go. He knows every bus line, and each of the stops with their times. And while he is giving you the directions, he is writing them out for you, in your language. No visitor has ever told of a language barrier between himself and the sage.

He easily answers every question about Jewish life and Jewish lore, his memory unailing. There is a different answer he gives when he senses you are trying to take a shortcut in learning. Then you earn a wide smile that says sensitively, "Have a blessed day."

No one knows exactly where he lives. People who have tried to follow him home agree that it is in the neighborhood of Geula, but he seems to disappear into its labyrinth of alleys. Is he married? Does he have children? Where is he from? Where did he learn? All unanswered questions.

What is known is that he is there at his office very early each morning and very late each night, though of course not on Shabbos or Yom Tov. And one more thing, although many would like to leave him money to support his efforts, all of the offers are directed to an oversized charity box from a Jerusalem soup kitchen. While the kitchen staff at this institution can give you no personal information, they do tell you that every day a different cab driver drops off the canister, heavy with coins. Under questioning, the personnel of the soup kitchen add that he is their biggest patron. No one knows anything more.

One of his other services is the granting of blessings. You are not surprised to hear that for him, this is not just an automatic gesture. The seeker writes his name on a paper on the small shelf, not necessarily in Hebrew. There are, after all, non-Jews who have been told about him, and come seeking his blessing. They report that when they ask for a blessing, he graciously replies, "Of course! We are all G-d's children."

Somehow, he does Jewish outreach from this little booth, and it is widely suggested that his success is of the same magnitude as that of the late Rabbi Meir Schuster z"l. Both had a habit of seizing each opportunity, where appropriate, by posing a question. Our mysterious rabbi would softly ask, "Where are you in your life at this moment in time?"

That was oftentimes the first of many questions.

At about 11:00 p.m., the question line begins. There are queries about *shidduchim* and marriage, issues of general health, special issues about babies wanted but not received. And on some occasions, he'd pause to make a call to one of his many doctor-acquaintances, who all take his calls even that late into the night, and then fit the new patients into impossibly tight schedules.

There are people who come seeking guidance on whether or not to proceed with a certain *shidduch*. In such cases, the prospective couple must arrive together. The young woman is told to sign her name at the top of a small note pad and underline it, and the young man writes his. Then, when it is their turn, he looks at them both. In some instances, he wishes them a Mazal Tov; in the others, he quietly says, "Not at this time." As they look on with distraught faces, he asks them why they came to someone they did not know, whose place is a shed on a corner in this Holy City, and are now dismayed at his reservation. What can this mean?

He directs them to an empty bench to sit and talk to one another and to return if they have questions. It is said that no young couple has ever come back to question him further, but some often do in a different situation in the future.

Such is this man, Rabbi Anshell.

And that is all I know and nothing more.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE THREE WEEKS

MORAH ATARA LIBBER

### For Children Ages 2-6

- Build a Kosel on your door, wall, or fridge. Every time your children show ahavas Yisroel, put on another brown brick. Try to finish the whole Kosel shape before Tisha B'Av.
- Make a Kosel picture out of brown squares of paper and green tissue paper. You can make this large or small and add details like clouds, people, etc.



### For Children Ages 6-10

- Make a Mizrach Foil Art. Print the word MIZRACH on a paper. You can also add a design showing the walls of Yerushalayim under it. Cover a piece of cardboard (like the back of a cereal box) with heavy duty foil. Tape the paper on top of the foil. Use a skewer or pencil to push the MIZRACH design onto the foil, then pull the paper off. The foil should now have an etched design on it. Color it with permanent markers.
- Make your own Bais Hamikdash Puzzle. Draw a large picture of the Bais Hamikdash onto a poster board. Color it. Then cut it into puzzle pieces for a sibling to do!

### For Children Ages 10-16

- Make a Stained Glass Yerushalayim Picture. Use a glass picture frame. Put a template (white paper with the word Yerushalayim and a simple outline of the walls of Yerushalayim) behind the glass. Use puffy paint to trace the lines of the design onto the glass. When the puffy paint is dry, turn the glass over. Use colorful permanent markers to color in the design. Put the glass back in its frame. Hang near a window.
- Make Shmiras Halashon Posters. Design signs with slogans such as, "Zipper your lips! Don't say Lashon Hora!", "Think before you speak!", "How would that make me feel?", and "Lashon Hora Free Zone!"

# LIFE EVENTS

## Mazal Tov wishes to...

### Births:

Rabbi & Mrs. Dovid Shmuel and Elisheva Milder on the birth of their son Yitzchok

Rabbi & Mrs. Dov Ber and Chaya Gitty Smith on the birth of their daughter Sivan Miriam

Rabbi & Mrs. Yaakov and Chava Israel on the birth of their daughter Yocheved

Mr. & Mrs. Shmuel and Tani Stein on the birth of their son Yaakov Zev

Mr. & Mrs. Shmuel Yitzchok and Esther Eisenberg on the birth of their daughter Chaya Tova

### Bar Mitzvahs:

Rabbi & Mrs. Shlomo and Ahuva Jarcaig on Yisroel Meir's bar mitzvah

Rabbi & Mrs. Lezer and Nava Cooper on Shmuel's bar mitzvah

Mr. & Mrs. Danny and Bracha Strassman on Tzvi Kalter's bar mitzvah

Rabbi & Mrs. Hirsh and Elisheva Hiller on Moishe's bar mitzvah

Rabbi & Mrs. Yerachmiel and Nechi Anton on Shlomo's bar mitzvah

Rabbi & Mrs. Yerachmiel and Chana Kittner on Shmuel's bar mitzvah

Rabbi & Mrs. Daniel and Beth Meister on Avrohom's bar mitzvah

### Engagements:

Rabbi & Mrs. Yerachmiel and Nechi Anton on the engagement of their son Yehudah to Miriam Chaya Yagid from Lakewood, NJ

Mr. & Mrs. Jim and Yaffa Meyers on the engagement of their son Elias to Sheva Keleman from Silver Spring, MD

### Marriages:

Rabbi & Mrs. Yosef and Yonina Schluskel on the marriage of their daughter Chani to Menachem Kovitz of Far Rockaway, NY

Mrs. Terry Miller on her marriage to Mr. Howard Schohl of Chicago, IL

Mr. Jess Bernstein on the marriage of his daughter Esti to Moshe Kovel of Cleveland, OH

Rabbi & Rebbetzin Benzion and Chanie Twerski on the marriage of their son Motti to Riva Wachsmann of Brooklyn, NY

Mr. Tzvi Werther on his marriage to Judith Prais of London, UK



## We reach out to...

Mrs. Ruth Bryskier on the loss of her father Dr. George B. Kauffman

Mr. Nathaniel Hoffman on the loss of his brother Allan Hoffman

Rabbi Dovid Kossowsky on the loss of his father Rabbi Dr. Zalman Kossowsky

Mrs. Gavriella Lechter on the loss of her father Mr. Peter Kuchlik

Mrs. Terry Miller Schohl on the loss of her father Mr. William (Bill) Lehman

## May they and their families be comforted.



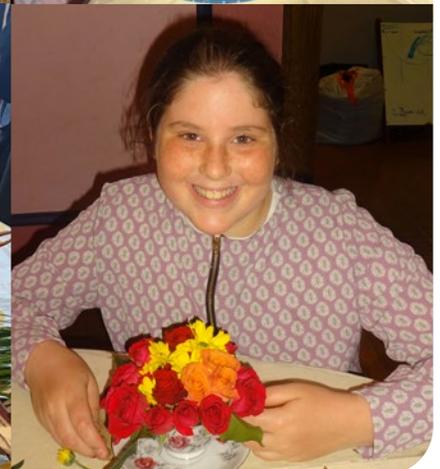
Yaacov Strickon, WITS graduate, will bezt"H attend Yeshivat Migdal HaTorah in Modi'in, Eretz Yisroel.

We wish him much hatzlacha!

# SHAVUOS CREATIVITY

With all of us stuck at home, there were more opportunities to get super creative with Shavuos preparations and decorating! The creativity was off the charts and we have some wonderful photos sent in by CBJ families of various projects and decorations which were used to enhance this one-of-a-kind Shavuos.

Thank you to all who shared their photos!



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1. EVERYTHING COMES FROM GOD
2. EVERYTHING GOD DOES IS FOR THE VERY BEST
3. GOD DOES EVERYTHING FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE

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A NEWSLETTER FROM  
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