

THANK YOU HASHEM!



Nashim Tzidkaniyos

VOLUME 2 | TISHREI 5787 | תשרי תשפ"ז

Towards the Divine Embrace

FEATURING

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Shana Cohen | Liat Garelick | Shanny Gejerman | Ruthie Halberstadt
Fally Klein | Gitty Klein | Elisheva R. | Regina Mosenkis

SPECIAL! Interview with the mothers of the TYH Boys Choir

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to our second volume of the Nashim Tzidkaniyos magazine, printed with you in mind!

This volume is chock full of inspirational articles to enhance your Yamim Noraim, and can be enjoyed all throughout Tishrei. The contributors range from backgrounds, communities, and stages of life, from London, Israel, Toronto, to Teaneck and Lakewood. Each woman contributed to this project for the sake of sharing a perspective that we can bring with us into the season ahead.

The general theme that drove this publication is one of being **in relationship** with Hashem. To offer us a chance to approach these days not just with the sense of duty of an 'eved', or the contrition of a 'ben', but to step into the fullness of our relationship with Hashem, as His beloved. For He is ours, and we are His. When we, as Knesses Yisroel, step towards this space, we can look at the unfolding days as chances to reconnect, re-align, and reimagine everything that we can be for Hashem, actualizing the full potential He has in mind for us and our world.

I hope you enjoy this heart-driven project,

שושנה דבורה בהן

**Shana Cohen,
& The TYH Family**



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It's Okay Not to be Okay

Shana Cohen

I used to have a unique last name. The kind that people recognized, smiled at, and immediately referenced up at least one of my awesome family members. Now, I'm called 'Cohen', generic and unmemorable, with very little Jewish Geography potential. "Which Cohen are you related to?" I'm usually lost. "Uhhhh... the *Kohanim* ones?". I'd take this last name 1,000 times over though, because now I'm an *Eishes Kohen*. One of my most meaningful parts of my newfound connection to the *Kehuna* is going to shul on Yom Tov morning to catch *Birchas Kohanim*. It gets me emotional every time, and makes me yearn for when my husband and son will finally be able to do the *Avodah* in the *Beis Hamikdash* they were born to do.



*I was determined
not to be desperate.*

I never realized how much the wording of *Birchas Kohanim* was connected to my own personal journey with shidduchim.

For most of my time in the chapter of shidduchim, I was determined to 'not be desperate'. I chose to make myself happy, busy, productive, and full of life. I really trusted that Hashem would send my *basheret* when it was the right time. I didn't want to do any far-flung *segulos* or let myself plead with Hashem in any way. I had *emunah* that Hashem was orchestrating every single detail of dating life, and that He alone would send my husband at the right time. I did a normal level of *hishtadlus*, but even during the challenging, disappointing moments in the process, I kept my chin up high and didn't let myself get bogged down by much.

I thought I was acing the *nisayon*-filled chapter of shidduchim. On many counts, I was. But Hashem wanted something more from me.

I love to cook, and something struck me one day while I was randomly thinking about cooking up cute *shana rishona* dinners for my future unknown husband (am I the only one?). I was imagining a scenario where I make something delicious and sophisticated for my new husband, and after he eats it, he gives me a generic thank you. I imagined asking him, "Did you like it? Should I make it

By telling myself I was happy with everything, I was denying myself a deep connection to Hashem.

again?” and him answering with a bland smile, “Whatever you make for me is good. I’ll be happy with whatever you make.” I would feel a little deflated. “Tell me what you like, what are your favorite foods? I want to prepare you dinners that you will really enjoy.” In my imaginary faceless scenario, he consistently says ‘thank you’ for whatever I make him, and maintains that he’s happy with whatever I give him.

I knew that on some level, this imaginary guy can be considered a nice husband trying to make things easy on his wife. But I also realized that on a deeper level - him being blasé and content with whatever he receives is denying the ability for his wife to give to him in a personal, customized, loving way. Passively receiving whatever comes is denying the giver the opportunity to give of themselves in a meaningful way, thereby stunting a deeper connection.

This random cute dinner-daydream-gone-wrong clued me in on what was going on with my relationship with Hashem. By maintaining that ‘I’m happy with whatever you give me, whenever you give it to me’, I was showing up very passively in the relationship. I was denying myself the authentic connection to Hashem where I pour out from a deeper place what I really want. How much I really feel ready to be married. How much I really want to invest all of myself into building a *Bayis Ne’eman B’Yisrael*. How much I feel I was created for this next stage, and how hard it is for me to not be allowed entry. None of that was being communicated at the surface, and none of that was being responded to.

Sure, there is *emunah* in sitting back and trusting everything is from Hashem, and choosing to be ok with what Hashem sends your way. But there is a much deeper level, a higher

There are 4 levels of Emunah.

Most of us are familiar with the first three.

- 1 There exists a Creator.
- 2 The Creator sustains and takes care of creation with exact precision.
- 3 There is only One Hashem, and only He can truly help a person.
- 4 Hashem’s love for us is so great, and He will do good for us, even if we are not worthy.

According to the *Ohr Hachaim*, when the *Mitztriyim* were pursuing the Yidden in the *midbar*, the prosecution in *Shamayim* was saying “They both worshipped idols, why should they not both drown in the *yam suf*?” Hashem told Moshe to tell *Bnei Yisrael* that He has a chamber in *Shamayim* of extraordinary *rachamim gedolim*. To open the chamber they need to demonstrate a steadfast, unwavering *emunah* that Hashem loves them so much He wouldn’t forsake them, even if they’re not worthy.

When we go through our own experiences of *midbar*, in shidduchim, in finances, in *shalom bayis*, or health, we can rise to the level of *emunah* that says ‘I believe with complete faith that Hashem is preparing my *yeshua* from His treasury of unconditional gifts, and I’m already thanking Him for it.’ This opens the gates for this higher, mysterious *rachamim gedolim* to bring down *yeshuos* for us.

Adam needed to plead for rain. And when he did, Gan Eden grew.

form of relationship where I actively come into contact with my sense of lack, and I turn all of me to Hashem, and ask Him to fill that lack, and then trust that He will. That's so scary! That's so...vulnerable. It's much easier to trust that whatever Hashem is sending me is for my best. It's a lot scarier to say "Ummm Hashem. I really feel like there is something that is for my best, that I don't have now, and it's really hard for me, and I need you to give it to me."

What's easier? To say "Hey, the money you provide for me is exactly what I'm meant to have, and I accept that this *parnassa* is from you?" or to say "Hashem, actually, I really feel like I don't have enough *parnassa* for the life I want to lead right now. And this is all very uncomfortable for me. But I trust that you want to provide more for me. You are the *Baal Shefa* and you want to pour much more abundance to me. So I'm here asking you for it. What do I need to do in order to become the vessel that you are able to pour *parnassa* into?"

Simple, passive faith says, 'Hashem does what He wants, and I need to accept His will.'

But we can unlock something more by saying, 'Hashem is all good, and wants to bestow good, and His will is for me to connect and *daven* to Him for all the good that little old me thinks I need'. *Tracht gut vzein gut*, as the famous principal states, 'Think good, and good things will happen'.

But while I wait, it's uncomfortable.
While I wait, it's awkward.

While I wait, I notice the areas of my life where there

is lack, where I don't feel like Hashem is showing up as my 'all good, merciful Father' and I get to choose again.

Passive acceptance? Or stepping into relationship?

I want a true relationship, and that requires true communication. If nothing changes for me today, and I don't get what I want, I choose trust. I lean into *bitachon*, and can say 'Ok, it must be that for today, it wasn't meant for me. It's for my best that it hasn't happened yet, because you love me and only do good for me. But until you indicate to me otherwise, I'm still going to ask you for the things I need! Not because I deserve them; I don't deserve the air in my lungs! But because you want to give good, and even though I don't fully understand or deserve all the good you give, you designed my life in a way that tells me there is so much more I need! So I'm sharing with you what I feel like I need right now. And I'm turning to you, because you are the source of it all.' That's emotional intimacy with Hashem.

I started to *daven* to Hashem to send me my *basheret* "because *L'Kach Zeh Notzarti!* I feel I was created for this! Hashem, I need this. I know it in my bones. So the fact that I don't yet have it is painful for me. Something feels wrong. Please please please send him to me!"

To trust that Hashem is doing everything for your good is holy and favorable. To trust that Hashem needs you to talk to him about all the good you want is so much harder. Because now I'm in touch with my lack. And now I am in touch with the source of my lack. And now I'm in touch with the very entity that can deny me, and I'll still have to wait and want. And wait. And want.

It can be uncomfortable to walk the tightrope of *tefillah* and *Bitachon*. But that's exactly what we were created for.

Initially, Hashem created all the plants, fruit and vegetation and kept it all under the surface of the earth. Nothing grew at all until Adam was created so that he would *daven* for rain.



Imagine if Adam came to the world, saw no plant life, and said “Hashem, you’ve put me exactly where you want me to be. Everything is from you and it’s perfect the way it is.” Nothing would grow. No, the world isn’t perfect the way it is. Hashem created mankind to partner with Him in making the world a perfect place. Where we see lack, we need to do something about it.

Adam needed to be ‘not okay’ with the lack of vegetation and needed to turn his eyes to the Source and plead for rain. And when he did, Gan Eden grew.

We were created to be real partners with our Creator. To talk to Him and to acknowledge that everything comes from Him. That He has a plan for all of us, that it is a good plan, and that we are meant to be active partners in that plan. We can’t be active partners if we don’t show up, actively! With our personalities, our tastes, our sense of what is right and what is wrong.



I once asked our Rosh Kollel in Israel, R’ Yitzchok Berkovits, “I want to enjoy all the good things Hashem is sending me. But I always have this little feeling like He might take it all away. Like maybe

Hashem is giving me good now because He’s about to send a huge *nisayon* my way.” He laughed! And actually responded, “We’re all always waiting for the other shoe to drop.” He validated the feeling of nervousness that Hashem is going to send hard challenges, and brought up the *bracha* that Hashem commands the *kohanim* to give us.

Do you know what the translation of *Birchas Kohanim* is?

“May Hashem bless you and watch over you. May Hashem shine His countenance upon you and treat you with graciousness. May Hashem turn his countenance toward you and grant you peace”.

That’s how Hashem wants it to be! That’s how it’s supposed to be. He wants to show us *bracha*, and *chein*, and light and His face. We want to live in an existence where we feel Hashem is turning his ‘face’ towards us, and it is lighting up our world.

I want to illustrate this with a pregnancy-related



Did you know...

that we Jews *daven*, and Hashem Himself also *davens*. His *tefillah* is that He should be able to operate with His children from a place of *rachmanus* beyond what they deserve! (*Brachos* 7).

Hashem has two modes of operating. There is *hanhagas hamishpat*, which means operating within the laws of nature He established, and evaluating our worthiness in the *Beis Din Shel Maalah*. But He can also interact with us through *hanhagas hayichud*, which is when His great *rachamim* can flow freely, unbound. This *rachamim* that Hashem wants to give to us, comes from a high, deep place called ‘*Atika Stima*’ and

it’s a plentiful *rachmanus* that isn’t bound up by cause-and-effect and action-and-consequence.

How are we *zoche* to have Hashem operate with us from that place? The *Ohr Hachaim* instructs us to fully trust Hashem and interact with Him as though He is able to operate with us from His *Otzar Matnas Chinam*, from His place of free flowing love, *yeshuos* and gifts. Literally, by saying ‘I believe with full faith that you want to give to me from your *Otzar Matnas Chinam* even if we don’t deserve it.’ If we wholly truly believe it, we unlock it. *Tracht gut, vet zein gut*.

And if we don’t experience that, we work with what we have. We accept, we connect, and we align our *ratzon* with Hashem’s highest *ratzon*. And we ask for better.

“No thanks, I don’t want
shidduchim. I want shidduch.
Just send me the one.”



example. Whenever I am expecting, I am ecstatic (and exhausted) and grateful (and ill) and still grateful. And I also have a niggly concern “What if I miscarry?” That’s a very vulnerable sentence to write. That’s a very vulnerable feeling for a woman to have. It’s her worst case scenario, and it’s totally outside of her control.

Standard faith told me to respond to the nerves with “Shana, every day of pregnancy is a gift. Everything Hashem does is for the best. If Hashem wants you to miscarry, then that’s also for your best. And you will get through it”. Sounds strong, no?

But wait a second, the way Hashem originally created the world and gave it to Adam and Chava was without illness or fatalities.

Deeper *emunah* nudged me to the place of, ‘No Shana, Hashem doesn’t want you to miscarry. In a world where His Presence is fully manifested, women won’t miscarry. Hashem is good, kind, and merciful, and He doesn’t want you to miscarry. Trust Him. Let Him give you the good He wants to give

you. Talk to Him, tell Him about your nerves. Trust Him. And acknowledge that He is your good, kind, and perfect creator who is fully rooting for you and wants you to have an abundance of *bracha*. Even without you deserving any of it. And also Partner with Him to help His Shechina be fully revealed in the world.”

Hashem’s ways are mysterious. When things happen to us that are genuinely painful, we have ways to deal with the *nisyonos* from our role models in the Torah and our *mesorah*. We lean on *bitachon* and trust that Hashem had to send that to us for reasons that we don’t understand. But that He is good, and only does things for our good.

That applies to what was. The type of *emunah* being described here though, is a perspective towards the future. It shapes how we view what Hashem may send our way. We want to grow to have the *emunah* that Hashem is good and wants to give us good, and believe in that in our bones. It needs to permeate every cell. And it can unlock miraculous salvation, beyond what we deserve.





One particularly low point in my shidduchim journey stands out to me as the game changing moment for me. I was driving home from an awful meeting with a shadchan, and I was miserable. The whole time I felt like I had to impress the shadchan, and she kept trying to find out what tax bracket my family was in. I did not feel like she treated singles with dignity. To be perfectly honest, when I was in the car on the way home, I just started crying from how poorly I felt treated. To make matters more cliché, it was pitch dark and pouring rain. I said to Hashem “This is what you want for Bnos Yisrael? This is the *hishtadlus* we have to do to find our *zivugim*? When we’re only doing it for you Hashem, to do *avodas Hashem* as *Nshei Yisrael*. This is dignity? That’s it. I’m done. I’m drawing a circle in the sand. I am not doing one more ounce of *hishtadlus*. I’m not willing to play this game anymore. I am staying in this circle until you send me my *basheret*. Because its going to come from You alone, and I believe you want this for me, even more than I want it for myself.”

I kept driving, tears flowing freely, the windshield wipers working furiously.

I promise you, within a few minutes, my mother called me. “I just want you to know there are two boys looking into you right now, one is from Brooklyn, the other from Toronto”.

You can tell I was born with a lot of *chutzpah*, because after I hung up with my mother, I said to Hashem. “No thanks, I don’t want shidduchim. I want my shidduch. Just send me *the one*.” We ended up giving a yes to the Cohen boy from Toronto, and the rest is history.

It’s one thing to hear *birchas kohanim*. It’s another to receive it. To truly believe it and receive it. To trust that Hashem actually wants to give it to you, and to become a *kli* for Hashem’s countenance to shine towards. To be filled with the *shefa* and *bracha* that the infinite one wants to distill. The Infinite One wants to bestow, and to delight in our *chein*-filled relationship with Hashem.

Hashem, you made me worthy of marrying a *Kohen*. Please make me worthy of receiving the full *bracha* of the *Kohanim*. 👑

Shana Cohen is a grateful wife, mother, and teacher living in Passaic-Clifton, NJ. She connects deeply with Pnimiyus Hatorah, and co-runs the TYH Women’s division, devoting herself to initiatives that connect women and girls more closely with Hashem. She can be reached at shanac@tyhnation.com.



Our Complicated Relationship With Yom Tov

Shanny Gejerman, LaMFT

What happens to us when *Elul* starts the second week of August? How do we respond to that first call of the *shofar*? Could it be that we pull our swim dresses a little further over our knees as we sip ice coffee at the pool? Perhaps we are also too busy shuttling kids back and forth to camp or stressing out about how we are going to manage the three weeks of unstructured summer days to notice that it's *Elul*. When school starts and we can turn our attention to the serious matter of *Yamim Nora'im*, it is often in the form of the twenty-one multi-course meals we will prepare and the clothes we will buy, along with the associated feelings that accompany this. Somewhere in all of this is the thought of, *Oh yeah, hi Hashem. Please can I have a good year with everything I want?*

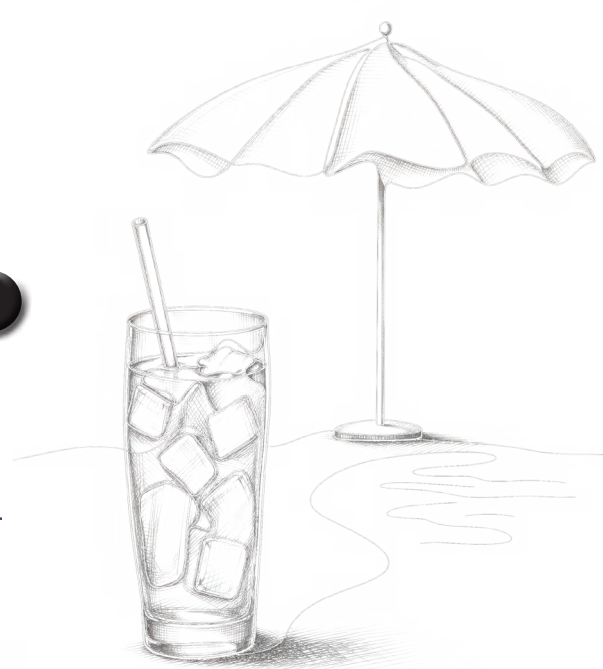
*OH YEAH, HI HASHEM.
PLEASE CAN I HAVE
A GOOD YEAR WITH
EVERYTHING I WANT?*

This is not our fault. Women have a complex relationship with Yom Tov. We want to *daven*, be inspired, and connect to our potential and grow. We also have a multitude of physical and logistical demands to meet, demands that we try to enjoy and meet in a creative and beautiful way.

The good news is that there is no contradiction between this reality and the *avodas Hashem* of women. The women's pathway to spiritual development, unlike men, has a more inward rather than outward orientation and does not need to take us away from our "making Yom Tov" efforts. Actually, we may have noticed that there are no shortage of personal development opportunities that arise from the concentration of family dynamics, parenting challenges, social interactions, and financial concerns that arise during the three weeks of our Yom Tov season!

But how do we make this feel like *teshuvah*? Should we be *mekabel* something? Make a *middos*

WHEN CHAVA WAS CREATED THE SATAN WAS CREATED WITH HER.



appearance of the letter *samech* in Torah. The letter *samech* is a reference to the *satan*, and we learn from here that when Chava was created the *satan* was created with her.

improvement chart? While both ideas are helpful, it is also important to clarify for ourselves what our primary spiritual identity is as women, and the core struggle around it, so we can recognize which behaviors bring us closer to our ideal self to be written in the *sefer hachaim*.

In the weeks before Rosh Hashanah we read *parshas Ki Savo*, which opens up with the topic of the *bikkurim*. The *pasuk* tells us that we should take from the first (*reishis*) of our fruits and put them in a basket (*teneh*) and bring them to Yerushalayim. The Baal Haturim comments on this *pasuk* that the *gematria* of *teneh* equals sixty, which teaches us that the required measurement of *bikkurim* is 1/60th of the crop. Because of this, the letter *samech*, which has the numerical value of sixty, is absent from the whole *parsha* of *bikkurim*. Rav Moshe Shapiro questions the reason for this. He compares it to another letter *samech* anomaly in the *pasuk* that describes the creation of Chava. ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה – Hashem took one of Adam's ribs, created Chava, and then sealed the incision with new skin. The *midrash* on this *pasuk* says that this is the first



Rav Moshe Shapiro explains that Hashem created two geometrical structures to represent two approaches to reality: the line and the circle. The line indicates a starting point (*reishis*) which begins with intention and continues towards a destination. The word *reishis* is also the first word in Torah, *bereishis*, for the sake of *reishis*, Hashem's will and purpose, was the world created. The line reminds us that everything in creation is here because Hashem wanted it exactly that way. When a *Yid* takes his hard earned produce that he toiled over with intellect and strength, and sets aside 1/60th of it because Hashem asked him to, he affirms his belief that the *bracha* of these fruits is because Hashem gave them to him, even if he applied his unique abilities in the process. This can be compared to the letter *yud*, the letter that is straight.

cont. on next page

THERE ARE TWO APPROACHES TO REALITY THE LINE AND THE CIRCLE

The circle, on the other hand, reflects a different view. Without a starting or ending point, it initiates itself where it wants and continues along the arc of its own will. The circle, or the *samech*, says “I’ll go the way I want to go”, whereas the line, or the *yud*, says “I’ll go towards the direction for which I was created.” For this reason, the Baal Haturim explains, we hide the *samech* in the parsha of *bikkurim* since it represents a threat to this declaration of the oneness of Hashem.

But wait a second, the basket that Hashem told *Klal Yisrael* to bring the *bikkurim* in is a circle! You can’t take away the basket, or the apples will be falling all over the road! Baskets and circular containers that hold the expressions of Hashem’s gifts to us are necessary and valuable, yet potentially misleading if they don’t attribute credit to the source. The takeaway? Lines need circles if they are going to be able to build anything substantial with the gifts Hashem intended for them, and circles need lines to go in the direction they are supposed to and ensure their creative efforts are aligned with Hashem’s will.

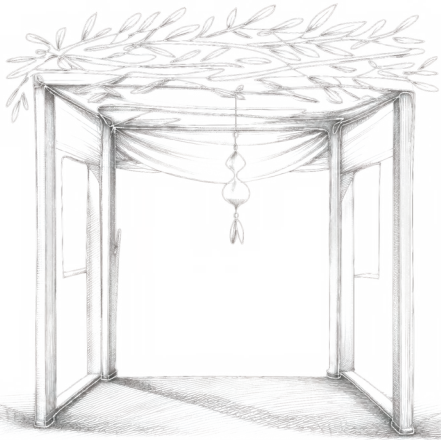
This is also the story of boy (line) meets girl (circle). Boys, like the *yud*, carry the intention and will that Hashem has planned for their family. And boys, like the *yud*, hover in the air seeking a way to actualize

this will in real time, hoping to find a girl who will be excited to receive (like the *samech*) and connect to this will with her own creativity and uniqueness. And then they live happily ever after. Except for the *satan*, who doesn’t want things to end here.

That *samech* that initiates its vision with beauty and desire, but then connects to the starting point of the *yud*, reflects the *bayis ne’eman b’yisrael*.

לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ זֹאת, a woman is called ‘*Isha*’ because she was taken from an ‘*Ish*’. A wife’s dreams of what is possible are sourced in the deep potential of her husband. She can choose to see him and the life they have together as the *reishis* of their shared destiny. Or, a woman can erroneously see her husband as getting in her way, not relevant to her needs, or otherwise falling short of her expectations. How can a woman make such a mistake when we know that women literally come from a bone from a man’s body?

Because Hashem covered up that surgical incision and there are no stitches! How cool would it be if when you are having a bad marriage day, you could just glance at your husband’s rib and see a scar that matched the exact shape of your head? Quick



AND THEN THEY LIVE
HAPPILY EVER AFTER.
EXCEPT FOR THE SATAN.

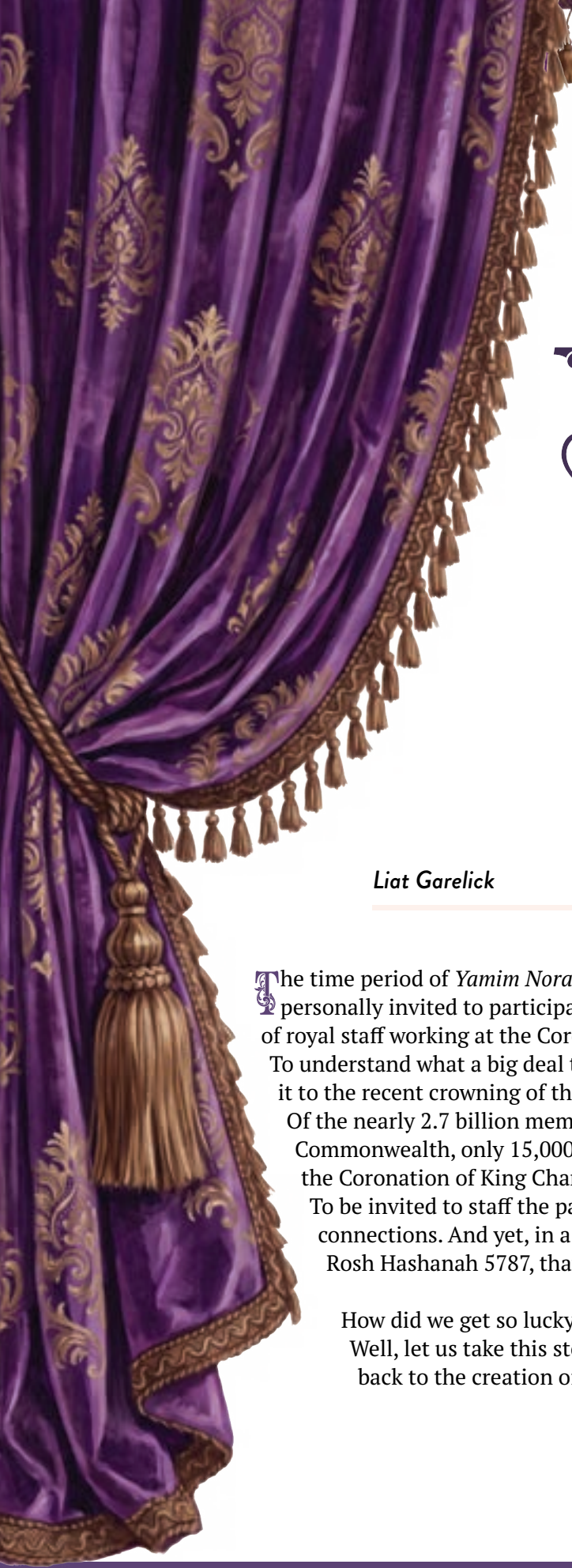
BECAUSE HASHEM COVERED UP THAT SURGICAL INCISION AND THERE ARE NO STITCHES!

reality check...Ok honey, I guess we are together in this for the long haul. But instead, there is the *satan*, convincing you that you are way ahead of your husband and he's cramping your style. The same *satan* that tells you that humans are the master of the apple orchards, and we don't need any heavenly help in that department.

Let's go back to Yom Tov. For three weeks we will spend time confronting all that Hashem has given us, reviewing it, engaging with it, *davening* about it. As we peer into our baskets, how do we feel? Hopefully grateful, but probably also annoyed, disappointed, smug, and judgmental. Like when Shira, who is appreciative that her husband can be sensitive and thoughtful, but not when he brings home four unidentified men from shul to be guests in their *sukkah* instead of four identified pieces of jewelry that she has been hinting to. Or, when Chani's husband magnanimously gives the kids the cotton candy he brought home from the *simchas beis hashoeva* at bedtime. Shuli gets stressed when her husband keeps going out to learn just when she needs his help, but Leah can't believe her husband is home to help at suppertime when *seder* is not over for two more hours.

These feelings of disappointment are not our fault either. It is a present from Chava who initiated our "circle" journey. She had big plans and desires, and a vision for how Adam would bring that about for her, like the *samech* that seeks the fulfillment of its own intention. Her *tikkun*, and ours, is to value, seek to understand, align and cooperate with the "line", the *reishis* that Hashem has chosen for us. When we allow ourselves to receive the input of Hashem's gifts (though they may not always feel as such) and apply our own beautiful individuality to it, we are expressing the *middah* of *malchus*, the feminine *middah* that all of *Klal Yisrael* aims to achieve on *Yom HaDin*. Women bringing the *geulah* is no joke. We represent and model "*malchiyos*" on every day of the year. We declare Hashem King and *reishis* and make space in our baskets for what He wants to pour in there. This doesn't mean that it is easy for Dina to embrace her husband's love of solitude and quiet time when she craves connection and socialization. It is difficult, but when Dina pictures scar tissue just under her husband's rib with her name written all over it, she's reminded that Hashem has a customized plan for her. She's got this. And so too, we've got this. 👑

Shanny Gejerman has been teaching women deep and personal Torah for decades. She is a Kallah teacher, Marriage and Family therapist, and beloved High School teacher. She gives classes and workshops on the Sefer Ohel Rachel, and lives in Passaic, NJ with her family.



I JUST WORK HERE

Liat Garelick

The time period of *Yamim Noraim* is one when we are personally invited to participate in the inner circle of royal staff working at the Coronation of the King. To understand what a big deal this is, we can compare it to the recent crowning of the King of England. Of the nearly 2.7 billion members of the British Commonwealth, only 15,000 staff participated in the Coronation of King Charles III in May of 2023. To be invited to staff the party, you had to have connections. And yet, in a couple of days, on Rosh Hashanah 5787, that will be us.

How did we get so lucky?

Well, let us take this story all the way back — back to the creation of the world.





FINALLY, A HUMAN CAME ALONG WHO PLUGGED INTO REALITY.

Hashem, the King of the World, the Master of Creation, created humans and hoped that they would see how much He loved them. He wanted them to see how beautifully He had set up this whole place for them, how every detail was there for their pleasure and their happiness, and wanted them to choose to love Him back. But Adam, the first of mankind, chose for humanity to prioritize ourselves and create distance from Hashem.

For ten generations, Hashem waited for humanity to come back to its senses, to come back to Him. But we did not. We got further and further away, corrupting ourselves and the physical world so badly that Hashem wiped the world clean and restarted with one good man, his family, and a bunch of animals.

After Noach, Hashem was ready for everyone to have learned their lesson and to simply stay good,

connected, kind, happy people, but they did not. Soon, they had forgotten all about Him and even tried to rebel against Hashem by building a tower to reach Him and fight against Him.

It was only when our grandfather, Avraham, showed up on the scene — ten generations after Noach — that things started to change. The Maharal, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, Chapter 5, explains that Creation became finally complete with Avraham; up until then, the world was in a sort of spiritual development and maturation stage. Finally, a human came along who plugged into reality. Finally, a human arrived, and chose to spread awareness of Hashem to the world. Finally, Hashem had a loyal employee in His Palace.

Now the story of the world could really begin. Hashem hoped that the world would no longer



ON ROSH HASHANAH, WE HAVE THE CHANCE TO WAVE THE FLAG, JOIN THE CHOIR, AND MARCH IN THE PARADE.

self-destruct. He had an agent in the world who could represent Him and His will to a world that clearly could not be left to its own devices.

Avraham Avinu taught the men and Sarah Imenu taught the women. Those were our grandparents.

Their strength and choices — through the tests Hashem set up for them to test their loyalty — got carved into the spiritual DNA of all their descendants, forever more. Their children got the indelible insignia of the King and the eternal privilege to work in the palace. That's who He wanted. Me and You.

And so it is. Since that day, we have been loyal staff of the King. We have the awesome task of showing the world how He wants things done. We have the great honor of emulating His behavior — *vehalachta bidrachav* — and showing the world that although there is a natural way of being, it's much better to strive to be super-natural.

And we have the great privilege of knowing that, ultimately, when the world does come to its senses, it will have been through our blood, sweat, and tears, for the honor of the King.

On Rosh Hashanah, we have the chance to wave the flag, join the choir, and march in the parade that reminds the world that there is a Creator, and that He keeps this place ticking whether the world acknowledges it or not. On Rosh Hashanah, we get the *zechus* to proclaim: "I work for You! You are my Boss, and I am so proud! I am in pain over a world that doesn't yet see Your greatness like I see it, and I pray for the day when they do."

Rabbi Leib Kelemen would regularly suggest that if one has trouble tuning into what is happening on Rosh Hashanah, they can watch the coronation of a real, live king or queen and see what the day looks like. If you do, you will be among the over 2 billion people who watched the Coronation of King Charles III. A more baffling statistic is the number who watched the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II — over 4.1 billion people! That is half the world's population!

May I suggest that humanity's intrigue with the royal family may be coming from a deep spiritual desire to





IT WILL HAVE BEEN THROUGH OUR BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS, FOR THE HONOR OF THE KING.

connect to *Malchus*. Maybe the world is ready to connect to real *Malchus*, and we are their only real access to it. As fellow co-workers in the palace of Hashem, this is the perfect time of year to ask ourselves: How can I bring more Hashem-consciousness into the world? Can I do my job, with the resources I have, any better?

I leave you, and all of us, with a *bracha* that we figure those questions out — on a personal and a communal level — for our sake, for the world's sake, and ultimately for the King's sake. 👑

Liat has worked in Jewish education and outreach for 20 years. She is the founder of The Toronto Sem and Olami's Seriously Souled (now known as Souled) an online learning and mentorship community for women across the globe. She was the Director of the educational branch of Mikvah USA called My Gift of Mikvah, and is the incoming Limudei Kodesh principal of Tiferes Bais Yaakov. The Garelicks live in Toronto and have 7 yummy kids.



PATHWAY TO RABBEINU

Faigy Blumstein

I'm on my way to Uman. Not because I have any specific travel plans to go. Because I'm journeying to Rebbe Nachman.

I had wanted my husband to go to Uman for years. Every Rosh Hashanah I secretly hoped this would be the year. There was something so captivating about Rabbeinu that I could not quite explain. Long before my husband ever packed a suitcase, Rebbe Nachman had quietly found his way into my life.

It all began in 2020 when I learnt one of the stories of *Sipurei Maasiyos*, The Story of the Lost Princess. I could not get enough. I read and reread it and eventually found myself hosting a Breslov book club. There was something about Rebbe Nachman's Torah that felt timeless, almost as if he was

speaking directly to our generation. His words did not simply teach ideas. They taught a practical way of life that applied to the ups and downs of our existence. They awakened something inside me.

So when my husband and his brothers finally left for Uman this past Rosh Hashanah, I stayed home with our six children, and the yom tov cooking, guests, *davening*, carpools, and all the other beautiful Uman wives who somehow turned yom tov at home into its own kind of pilgrimage.

When my husband returned, I could not quite describe what had changed. He carried back a certain calmness. A *menuchas hanefesh*. A quiet. There was something about Uman that seemed to linger long after the flight home, and I found myself wondering what exactly Rabbeinu had given him. I wanted to taste more of it. I still do.

My own journey with *Chassidus* had begun a few years earlier. I had immersed myself in the deepest waters of Chabad *Chassidus* through learning and teaching *Tanya*, the sefer from the first Chabad Rebbe, the Alter Rebbe. It arrived at exactly the moment I needed it most.

I often joke that *Tanya* turned me into a *Baalas Teshuvah* even though I grew up frum. It introduced me to an entirely new language. Suddenly, I was living with words like *Nefesh Habehamis* and *Nefesh Elohis*. I discovered the breathtaking idea that every *Yid* carries a *chelek Eloka mima'al mamash*, an actual spark of Hashem within. I learned about



MY HUSBAND CAME BACK A CHANGED MAN, AND I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT EXACTLY REBBI NACHMAN HAD GIVEN HIM.



Dirah B'Tachtonim, that Hashem's deepest desire is not found somewhere in Heaven, but right here, within this world that often feels so ordinary.

The Alter Rebbe taught me that *moach shalit al halev*—the mind has the ability to guide the heart. He taught that thoughts can actually reshape emotions, and that hidden inside every Jew lies an *ahavah mesuteres*, an eternal love for Hashem that never disappears, no matter how deeply buried it may seem. Those ideas completely transformed me.

My favorite part was the meditations. Thinking deeply about how Hashem fills all worlds and surrounds all worlds. How creation is renewed every single second. How every mitzvah reveals another piece of His garden. Slowly those lofty concepts stopped living only in my head and began trickling into my heart. And one day I realized something. I liked how Hashem felt in my heart. I had spent years learning about Him. I understood creation more deeply than ever before. I understood mitzvos differently. *Halacha* became alive. The world itself felt more purposeful and I was discovering the incredible architecture of creation.



I HAD SPENT YEARS SPEAKING ABOUT HASHEM. NOW I WANTED TO SPEAK TO HIM.

But somewhere along the journey I found myself quietly asking a new question. I know so much about Hashem. But do I actually know Him? I had spent years speaking about Hashem, now I wanted to speak to Him. I wanted Him beside me during school pickup. While sitting in traffic and cooking supper. During the ordinary moments that quietly make up a life. I did not want Hashem to remain the greatest idea I had ever learned. I wanted Him to become my closest companion.

Around that time, after completing *Tanya* for the second time with our *chaburah*, I asked my Rav, Reb Yussi Zakutinsky, what we should learn next. Without hesitation, he answered *Yichud HaHisbodedus*, a *sefer* by R' Kluger based on the teachings of Rebbi Nachman. Looking back now, I smile because my husband had actually bought me the *sefer* years earlier. I had opened it several times, read a few pages, and quietly closed it again. It simply was not my time yet. Now it was.

The Baal Shem Tov came to reveal that Hashem is present everywhere. The Alter Rebbe explained how that works. Then Rebbi Nachman, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, gently asks us one simple question. "If He's already here... have you spoken to Him today?" That question changed everything.

Rebbi Nachman dreamed of restoring *Chassidus* to its original heartbeat. Not simply learning about Hashem, but living with Him. Discovering that Hashem is present not only in the *Beis Medrash* or during moments of inspiration, but inside the messy, beautiful, complicated details of ordinary life.

And then Rebbi Nachman gave us perhaps the most revolutionary gift of all. Hashem is not only *Avinu*.¹ He is not only *Malkeinu*. He is also your closest Friend. Now, I turned forty this year. At forty you start realizing how precious genuine



friendships are. They are built through daily conversations, through sharing the ordinary and checking in simply because you care.

And suddenly I wondered... What would happen if I treated Hashem like that? Not just Someone I *daven* to. Not just Someone I learn about. But Someone I can not wait to tell about my day. Someone I want to invite on every beach walk. Someone who already knows every thought in my heart but still delights in hearing me say it aloud.

Rebbi Nachman teaches that setting aside an hour for *hisbodedus*, preferably in nature, has the ability to transform a person's entire life. To build a relationship with Hashem that is *panim el panim*—face to face. At first, an hour felt impossible. So I started with five minutes. Five honest minutes. No polished words, no perfect *kavanos*. Just conversation. Some days I thanked Him. Some days I cried. Some days I laughed. Some days I simply sat quietly because I did not know what to say. And somehow those five minutes began changing the other twenty three hours of my day. And I felt how applicable Rebbi Nachman's teachings are two hundred years later.

HASHEM IS NOT ONLY AVINU. HE IS NOT ONLY MALKEINU. HE IS ALSO YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND.

It's incredible how Hashem sends the *refuah lifnei hamakah*, the remedy before the challenge. Months earlier, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Rebbi Nachman's birthday, I had begun saying *Tikkun HaKlali* every day without fully understanding why I felt so drawn to it. I kept copies everywhere—my nightstand, my minivan, tucked inside my siddur.

Only later did I realize that Rabbeinu had already been preparing me for this next chapter. Maybe that's why his Torah feels so alive today. He wasn't writing only for the Jews of two hundred years ago. He was writing for us. Sometimes I think we are standing at the very end of history. But Jewish time isn't linear, it is circular. The place that feels furthest away somehow becomes closest to the beginning. Perhaps that's why Rebbi Nachman's fire burns even brighter in our generation. When the world feels darker, when loneliness is louder and anxiety has become the language of an entire generation, his messages are almost startling in their simplicity. Never despair. There is no place empty of Him. Keep talking. Keep searching. Keep walking. Keep beginning again.

As Elul quietly approaches and the words *Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li* begin echoing through my heart once more, I realize something beautiful. For years, I wanted to understand Hashem. Now I simply want to know Him. Maybe that's what journeying to Uman has really meant for me.

Not simply waving goodbye while my husband boards a plane to Ukraine, but beginning my own journey toward learning from Rabbeinu.

Learning to speak to Hashem like the truest Friend I have ever known.

One whispered conversation, one "ABBBBBBBBBBA..." at a time. 👑

Faigy Blumstein is not a lecturer, but she loves to share. A passionate educator and school psychologist, she is dedicated to living a Hashem-centered life. As part of the Thank You Hashem Women's division, Faigy draws on Chassidic teachings and the light of the Baal Shem Tov to inspire others. Her heartfelt approach helps women deepen their connection to Hashem, integrating spirituality into everyday life in a meaningful and modern way.

INTERVIEW *By Shana Cohen*

WITH THE MOTHERS OF THE TYH BOYS





BEHIND EVERY AWESOME JEWISH KID IS AN AMAZING JEWISH MOTHER.

Come with us for a rare treat to hear the perspectives of the five incredible mothers behind the viral music sensation, the TYH boys.



MEET THE MOMS



SRULY'S MOM:

AHUVA ROSENBLATT grew up in Brooklyn, but for the early years of her marriage, she and her husband raised their kids in Norfolk, Virginia, before settling in Far Rockaway. She is currently a math teacher in Bnos Bais Yaakov and runs Orah Day Camp. Her favorite drink is plain old hot coffee, enjoyed in the mornings before anyone wakes up :)

Ahuva's relaxation is to read before she goes to bed. She loves Sukkos because everyone gets involved, men women and children. They love to all put up the *sukkah* and try to figure out how to fit in the indoor furniture.



SHUA'S MOM:

ATARA HEIMOWITZ is a mom of five living in Cedarhurst, NY. She is a school social worker and maintains a private practice in Lawrence. She loves iced coffee & iced tea, and likes listening to Meaningful People. Atara enjoys reading historical fiction (specifically WWII era books) and for her, self-care is going out with friends, exercising, and thrifting. She loves Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for their beautiful davening, and Sukkos because of the fun family time in the *sukkah*.



RONI'S MOM:



ROYA SAMUELS is a pediatrician and mom of four living in Great Neck, NY. She originally grew up in a Persian Sephardic home in Houston, and married an Ashkenazi man from Cleveland. The Samuels family lives in Great Neck now. Roya loves to drink iced coffee in the morning. Her favorite book is 'Maybe you should talk to someone' by Lori Gottlieb because it sheds light on the importance of self-awareness, and the power of accountability and growth. For Roya, self-care is playing tennis and mahjong with friends!

Her favorite part of the Yom Tov season is having her family around the table enjoying her classic Chag recipes, including red lentil soup and Persian-stuffed grape leaves.



RUDY'S MOM:

LEAH ROSENZWEIG grew up in Miami Beach and now lives in Lawrence. She juggles being a mom of eight, while also working at AAW Capital Services, and helping out behind the scenes with lots of TYH related projects! Her favorite drink is definitely coffee, and while she doesn't have much time to read, she does love listening to Tanya with Faigy (TYH's Best!). Her top two self-care moves are running and clearing her head, and also a good massage. Leah's favorite Yom Tov is Chanukah because she enjoys how it is cozy and not stressful.



ZEVI'S MOM:

YONINA KAUFMAN is a mom of six, living in Woodmere, NY. She works as a LCSW for the NY Department of Education, and as a clinical coordinator at A TIME. She also teaches social work as an adjunct professor and has a private practice specializing in maternal and reproductive health.

Her favorite drink is coffee, and for her, self-care is running, exercising, baking sourdough, and working on crafts.



In general, what is your family's relationship like with music?

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: We have music blaring at all times in our house! Some of my kids like to fall asleep to soft, soothing music, while others wake up to loud, upbeat music to get them going.

ROYA SAMUELS: My kids are frequently walking around humming tunes and singing songs, and they know a tremendous number of lyrics to all kinds of different songs, which always really impresses me. Two of my kids play instruments: my daughter Eliana plays piano and guitar, and Roni plays piano.

AHUVA ROSENBLATT: We always have music playing whether we're cooking for Pesach or it's just a Friday afternoon; putting something on just helps with the mood! My older sons were also in choirs, and I was in all the school choirs growing up.

YONINA KAUFMAN: Our Zevi grew up in a very musical home. His father is Shloimi Kaufman, who is a veteran in Jewish music. And he has an older brother, Nachi, who as a young boy was also featured in many productions. Zevi was brought up surrounded by recordings and rehearsals and performances. And he really learned from a young age the power of music as a way of coming closer to Hashem.

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: My kids know all the words to all the songs out there and are always singing together! My kids all have 24Six's and they're constantly going. We've always encouraged a love for music and start our kids early with musical instruments; Shua plays guitar.



Your son is obviously a huge shaliach right now for Klal Yisroel, bringing simcha, passion, and pride in Yiddishkeit – what are your thoughts and feelings about this whole journey?



ATARA HEIMOWITZ: We feel lucky that he is able to have this experience, taking something he loves and getting to be in the forefront bringing these fun, relatable songs to others and having the best time with it. I think the messaging of the songs is meaningful and instills a feeling of pride and greatness in every kid who listens!

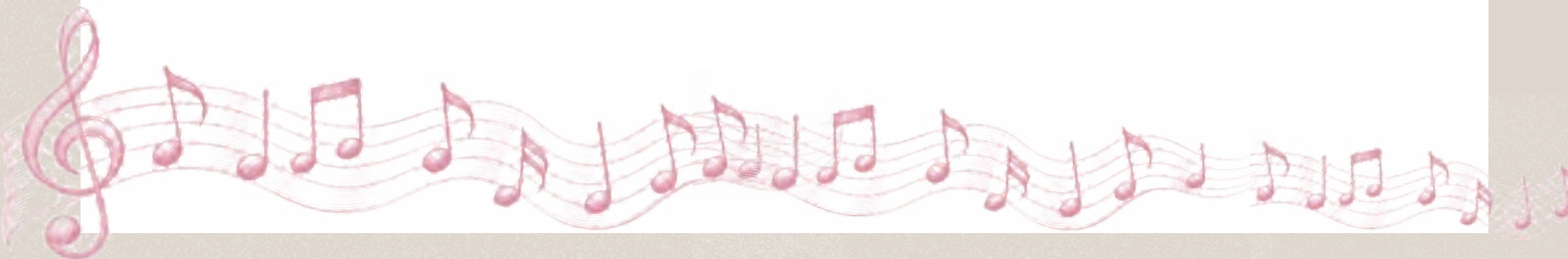
AHUVA ROSENBLATT: I am incredibly proud of Sruly not just because he sings beautifully! He's always been full of life and energy, and this has channeled so much positivity into his life. I love when I'm out with him and he meets people who tell him how much of a difference he's making. As a mother, there's nothing more meaningful than seeing your child use his talents to bring joy and strengthen other people. Sometimes he doesn't even know what to do with himself; BH, he doesn't get puffed up about it. Of course, we know this choir isn't going to last forever, his voice will change, and so on, but I'm sure it will leave him with memories for a lifetime. He's made such strong friendships with the other four boys in the choir. There are just so many good people involved, with good *middos*, and the boys spend a lot of time with them. I thank Hashem that these role models are such good and special people, and that they all share the same message and the same goal.

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: The fact that the boys are *zoche* to spread light and love at all times to whomever they come in contact with is such a bracha, and we're so grateful and blessed to be part of it. The boys feel it too.

ROYA SAMUELS: We really view it, and he views it, as a tremendous privilege, and as the ability to be part of a unique experience with an organization that is full of light, brightness, kindness, and giving, and that spreads only positive messages into the world. That's very much in tune with the values we've instilled in our children, and in Roni in particular.

Every message that Thank You Hashem puts out in its songs strikes a familiar chord with our whole family, because it's how we already live and how we already teach our children to have an *emunah* and *bitachon* that Hashem is guiding and directing us, that everything happens for a reason even when we don't see the bigger plan, to approach *Yiddishkeit* and learning Torah with passion and love, and to be kind, thoughtful, and generous to others, always coming from a good and giving place. So we really see this as an incredible opportunity to be part of an organization that spreads messages that are already so embedded in who our family is and what we believe. It's been an extreme *zechus* to be part of it.

YONINA KAUFMAN: Watching Zevi bring so much to so many and strengthening their connection to *Yiddishkeit* is really tremendous *nachas* for us. And, with that being said, he's still a kid. And we really try to minimize whatever the major impacts and make sure that he lives a childhood that is steeped with responsibility and accountability. And, just allow him to be a kid.



It's one thing to sign up for a choir, it's another to become the viral sensation that the TYH boys have become – what is different here? Why do you think Hashem is giving the boys extra *siyata dishmaya*?

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: We had no idea what to expect! We sent in a clip of Shua singing “borei refuos” by Yossi Hecht, he got invited for a callback and the rest is history. I think even TYH couldn’t have dreamed of what it ended up becoming. I think the viral quality comes from the catchiness of the songs, the *simcha* filled positive pride-filled messages in a world where being a Jew can sometimes feel scary. Of course, the fun music videos and the amazing crew managing them and taking care of all the details helps too. I think the *siyata diShmaya* that the boys have may come from their music having the ability to replace what kids and families might otherwise be viewing and listening to, which could be a *nisayon* in this day and age. Having the TYH music is the antidote; they have songs and entertainment that bring positivity and a frum perspective.

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: I think it really boils down to the fact that Hashem knew this is exactly what *Klal Yisroel* needed right now: boys who would bring *simcha* to everyone, which is exactly what they do, and they love doing it.

Yonina Kaufman: This is something that we really have thought about in terms of trying to understand why it became so successful. And I guess our finding was that children really do need a sense of purpose and connection. The songs resonate beautifully and inherently in boys and girls all around the world.

AHUVA ROSENBLATT: Because their goal is genuinely to make people happy, spread positivity, and inspire pride in *Yiddishkeit*. They're not doing this to be cool or to make money. In fact, our kids don't get paid. I think Hashem gives a special *bracha* to efforts that are truly for His sake, and we've seen that reflected in our own lives.

ROYA SAMUELS: We really didn't have any expectations of this. Roni had been a part of the Miami Boys Choir before he tried out for TYH Boys, and when he was accepted to TYH Boys he had to decide whether or not to join. We had some real conversations with him; it wasn't an easy decision for him to make. But there was just something about the TYH movement and the organization as a whole, how they've been able to accomplish so much and reach so many people. They spread Torah in a way that's relatable, accessible, fun, and appealing to children. When you're teaching kids it needs to be delivered in a way they can actually hop onto. I think Thank You Hashem has been wildly successful in communicating in a way that resonates with the masses, and especially with children. It's been an amazing experience being part of the larger TYH movement, as our puzzle piece in the choir that's geared toward kids. They've branched out, they even have a Thank You Hashem Women's division because they really understand the needs of different demographics in the frum world, and they're able to fill those gaps and make things accessible for different groups of Jews.

And especially living in such difficult, dark, and challenging times, it's a breath of fresh air to have an organization whose messages are clean and wholesome, a real pick-me-up, especially now, when children and adolescents are struggling so much with social media and feeling down, depressed, and anxious. Thank You Hashem goes back to the basics, back to the roots by sending messages of happiness, positivity, kindness, growth, and goodness. It's just going back to what we need to help our children maintain *emunah* and *bitachon* and a happy existence.



**All mothers daven for their children.
Can you share with us some of the things you
davened for for your kids in general? Have you had
any specific tefillos for your son?**

ROYA SAMUELS: I *daven* for my children to be healthy and happy and successful, that Hashem shower a lot of *mazel* on them, that they find their right spouse at the right time, that they be successful in their studies and future work, and that they stay true to themselves and to the values of a Torah guided life that we raised them with. I *daven* that Hashem guides them and answers all their heart's desires for the good.

Nothing specific for Roni beyond that, just that he also be rewarded for all the hard work he puts in, and that he be successful in all of his endeavors.

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: We always *daven* when it comes to things like our kids' surroundings and who they're associated with. We're so blessed and grateful to Hashem that Rudy has such a close relationship with these four really good friends in the choir, who have become like family to us. We're grateful that he has such wholesome friendships, that he's able to just be himself at all times, and that he's constantly surrounded by only the best people.

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: We *daven* for the success of our children in *Yiddishkeit*, for them to have a relationship with HKBH, to be happy and well adjusted children, to do well in school in all areas.

AHUVA ROSENBLATT: I *daven* for all of my children every day. I always daven that they should be healthy, that they should remain humble despite their talents, and that they should have success in everything they do, and that they should always see the good in people and in life. These feelings haven't changed because of the choir — they've just taken on even more meaning as Sruly's platform has grown. I'm happy that he remains humble through it all. Sometimes he meets people and doesn't quite know what to do with himself, and I tell him, 'they just want to say hi, all you have to do is say 'thank you.'

YONINA KAUFMAN: First and foremost, I *daven* that my children are healthy, physically and emotionally, psychologically. But more than anything, we *daven* that our children remain connected to Hashem, that they build and develop good *middos*. They make wise choices, become the person that Hashem created them to be. For Zevi specifically, I *daven* that if Hashem gave him this platform, he should also be able to give him that humility, the strength, the heart to use it for the right reasons. We *daven* that the success should not become his identity. His identity should always remain that he is right now a child in Hashem's army, and that he should just continue to be who he is in every capacity. He's an amazing kid, by the way.



Has your parenting had to change at all since your son joined the TYH boys?



LEAH ROSENZWEIG: It's been pretty consistent. Nothing has changed drastically. I still have to remind him, 'Okay, you've got homework, you need a normal bedtime' but I feel like that's true for all kids these days.

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: I've tried to keep my parenting style the same, he might be a household name now but he's also my little 10 year old boy who has to go to sleep on time (practice permitting), do his homework, wake up for yeshiva and follow house rules! We definitely focus on keeping him grounded and emphasizing that this is a gift from Hashem but who he is and how he acts as a son, sibling, friend, student, etc is the most important thing.

YONINA KAUFMAN: Our values haven't changed. Maybe some of our conversations have changed. We hone in on being humble and having responsibility, balancing commitments and remembering what truly matters. We do try to protect his childhood which is important to us. We focus on the fact that he is a regular kid with regular responsibilities and that fame is pretty temporary, but his character is going to last forever. Additionally, we do talk about the fact that he represents what a *Ben Torah* is - what a TYH boy is. And we think it is important the way he holds himself, talks, and connects with other kids. I guess these are the conversations that have changed.

ROYA SAMUELS: We've worked hard, and Roni himself has worked hard, not to let any of this get to his head. Thank God, he's a pretty humble kid; he's always been an old soul, mature, and he keeps everything in perspective. He knows this ride won't last forever, since these boys' choirs only go on for so long, so he knows to really enjoy every moment. He's been lucky to meet wonderful people along the way, and he's made great friendships with the other four boys. We've all become like a family, all the parents helping each other out with carpools and driving. Since we live in Great Neck and not in the

Five Towns, our schedules have gone a little upside down because of all the driving, but it's been a total pleasure, because of what this has done for Roni's sense of self and self-esteem.

He loves recording, and he loves just hanging out with the boys and singing together. Something that people may not know about is that the boys reach out to kids who are sick in the hospital and to special-needs kids, just to spread positivity and cheer. I think that's a really big part of this group, being a *shaliach* to help other kids feel good about themselves.

So no, it hasn't changed our parenting; it's given us the opportunity to keep shaping Roni into who he was already on a path to become: a humble, kind, generous kid who loves to sing, loves being with other kids, and loves spreading goodwill and important messages to the world. It's been a real opportunity and privilege for us.

AHUVA ROSENBLATT: We like to do what's best for each individual child because what works for one doesn't necessarily work for another. We also don't make decisions based on what everyone else is doing; if something is right in the eyes of Hashem and aligns with our family's *hashkafa*, that's the path we choose. We also remind Sruly, and all of our children who have different talents, that those gifts are from Hashem, to help them stay humble and grateful at the same time. We've always tried to build our children's confidence and independence, even when they were little. I remember taking them to the playground before they could even walk yet, and putting them on the bars to try to climb, always standing right behind them. Some of my friends would say, 'What are you doing? They can't climb, they're going to fall.' And I'd say, 'They're not falling — I'm right behind them. They need to explore.' I've always wanted my children to grow up believing, 'I can do this.' It helps them grow, and it helps their talents, when you let them explore.

How have the other siblings reacted to all of this?

AHUVA ROSENBLATT: Honestly, my other kids are excited for him. People will say, 'Oh, you're Sruly's brother,' or 'You're Sruly's sister,' and they think that's exciting. They love watching him perform, listening to his music, and watching the music videos. They love being with him when he meets people, and hearing about the experiences he shares with them afterward. It's really been a positive experience for our whole family.

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: My older son definitely does a lot of good natured ribbing and likes to poke fun at the songs- though we'll usually catch him singing them when he thinks no one's listening! My girls absolutely love it, they love being able to have sneak peeks for the songs and videos and telling their friends which part is their brother singing. My baby is obsessed with 'I wanna be like Zusha' and loves clapping and dancing to it. They are definitely proud siblings!

ROYA SAMUELS: Our oldest daughter, Daniella, is actually the one who inspired us to have Roni try

out for the Miami Boys Choir in the first place — we joke that she's Roni's agent. He's the youngest of four, the baby of the family, and his siblings are constantly cheering him on and telling him how fantastic he is, which really pumps him up with positive energy.

YONINA KAUFMAN: Our kids love it. They're so supportive. They're just genuinely proud of him. They love that they have the inside scoop. One thing that we do say is that one child's accomplishments doesn't necessarily define our family.

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: My other kids are great — they love it for Rudy. He's always been a performer, always singing and dancing around the house, and he's just so comical. My other kids love it too, from my little ones all the way up to my older kids — they think he's so cute. One funny story: someone actually tried to pass himself off as Rudy's cousin. Rudy met a basketball player who told him, 'My name is Rudy Rosenzweig too — not the Rudy Rosenzweig, but I'm his cousin, we're named after the same person.' Totally not true, but we thought it was so funny!



What's a message you would like to share with the readers, mother to mother?

AHUA ROSENBLATT: Let your children develop the talents Hashem gave them. Don't squash them. There are so many different ways to use the different talents Hashem gives each child — just build them up, encourage them, believe in them, because they really shine when we do that. Every child has unique gifts — let's help them channel them.

ATARA HEIMOWITZ: Point the spotlight in the places where your kid shines and treat every kid like a star. Another thought is to have trust in your kids ability to meet and exceed expectations when faced with things that are outside their comfort zone. You'll be surprised how they can rise to the occasion, I know I was way more worried for him performing than he was for himself and he was great!

ROYA SAMUELS: As a mother of four, and also as a pediatrician whose life's work has been the health and well-being of children, here's what I've learned — and I actually learned this from watching another mother cultivate a talent in her own child, which is what inspired me to do the same with Roni: pay attention to your children. Pay attention to what they're interested in, what makes them tick, what they're good at, and cultivate that talent. Every child has tremendous potential, and it's our job as parents to know our children so well and so deeply that we know what they're good at and what makes them tick, so we can put them in a position to succeed and hone their skills — so they can feel truly accomplished and proud of themselves.

It could be anything — a child who loves to draw getting into art classes, or a child who's excellent at tennis getting onto a tennis team. Find that passion, and if it isn't there yet, help them find it. We are their

guides in life, and we're here to help them reach their maximum potential and feel good about themselves. That's the advice I'd give parents: pay attention to your kids and help set them up for success in any way you can.

YONINA KAUFMAN: Please don't compare your child's journey to anyone else's. Every family has its own journey. Every family has its own story and narrative. We're raising children who know that they're loved, who love Hashem and who strive to become the best version of themselves. And so, success is going to look different for every child. Sometimes that's standing on a stage, sometimes that's quietly doing the right thing when nobody is watching. And both are just as beautiful. And so, we just keep believing in your children. Remember that Hashem is writing each and every one of our stories exactly as they're meant to unfold.

LEAH ROSENZWEIG: By nature, Rudy is a more shy, timid kid when it comes to leaving the house. This experience really broke him out of his shell — he's still a little shy, but I think as parents we always need to encourage our kids to just fly. Keep flying, because you've got this, you're amazing — and just encourage them to do what they enjoy and love doing. Rudy loves playing basketball, and he loves singing and dancing. That encouragement is what kids need to perform and do better. They need that encouragement and love from their parents at all times, and to know their parents back them no matter what — and then they really become something huge.

👑 **THANK YOU HASHEM!** 👑





Postscript:

Ever since the TYH Boys became the singing sensation that they are, I had an itch to include their mothers in the Nashim Tzidkaniyos magazine. I knew that behind these five adorable boys oozing with chein, there must be a secret sauce that comes from their mothers.

I was so delighted to interview these five incredible women, and see how refreshingly normal, down-to-earth, hard-working and invested they are. To me, these five mothers are reflective of being an 'Eim B'Yisroel' - mothers of Klal Yisroel. Women invested in their families, imparting values for their kids, with healthy balanced attitudes, along with gratitude, humility, and living with emunah that everything is from Hashem. Like so many of us, these women are tremendously busy and juggle so much on their plates! It was beautiful to hear how they answered each question thoughtfully, personally, and honestly - with their own emunah, passion for Yiddishkeit, and chein coming through :)

SHANA COHEN 👑



ALWAYS LISTENING



Elisheva R.

A man steps into a courthouse notorious for harsh sentences and unforgiving judges. Everyone in the waiting room is visibly terrified, knowing there is little chance of a positive verdict for them. The man sits on a wooden bench to await his turn, humming calmly as the time slowly passes. Humming does not work well with nerves, and finally, the man next to him explodes. "Will you stop humming?! Why in the world are you so calm? We are all going to have harsh sentences at the end of today!" The man smiles and explains, "I'm being tried in courtroom number three." His seatmate blinks. "And?" "And the judge in courtroom number three is my father."

IF YOU ARE HAVING A HARD
TIME TALKING TO HASHEM,
TELL THAT TO HIM.

A father will always search for a reason to find his son not-guilty. He loves his child and will do anything to make things good for him. As we head into the *Yamim Noraim*, we have the awareness that everything is at stake along with the confidence that the judge is also our Father. Hashem does not just judge - He searches for excuses to forgive us. What kind of king searches for an excuse to pardon someone who broke the law? Only the *Av Harachamim*, a Father, who loves His children so much, who is *זוכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים*. He is *Avinu Malkeinu* - before Hashem is our King, He is our Father.

So how do we get into Hashem's courtroom? According to Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein ztz"l, when you have a relationship with Hashem, He says, "Oh, that one? That one's mine, he's my kid."

If so, how do we build that kind of relationship with Hashem? A good place to start is with a *yesod*

from Rav Uri Zohar. Rav Zohar was an influential celebrity in the secular Israeli world before becoming a Rav who impacted thousands. He explains the *pasuk* from *Ashrei*: קרוב ד' לכל קראיו, לכל אשר יקראהו באמת.

"Hashem is close to all who call out to Him; to all who call out to Him in truth." Rav Zohar points out that the *pasuk* specifies באמת. To the one who calls out with truth. With honesty. With authenticity.

To be real in a relationship is to say how you really feel – and you are allowed to, He is your Father. But you have to be real.

We live in such an externally-focused world we hardly remember what being real is. A person can go their whole life without having to think about why we are here. They can say and do everything right on an external level, but *rachmana liba bai* – Hashem wants our hearts, He wants our authentic

selves to show up. In a world where you can be anything – be real. This means that if you are numb, if you can not *daven*, if you do not feel the relationship with Hashem – then tell Him. If you are having a hard time talking to Hashem, tell that to Him. And when you call out to Hashem *b'emes*, He is listening to every single word – even the ones you do not say. A father can not ignore the cries of his son – and He does not want to. We often struggle with *tefillah* because we do not believe in our own greatness or in the love that Hashem has for us even when we feel far from greatness. Hashem waits all day to hear from us. You can imagine a chosson waiting and waiting to speak to his kallah. When she finally calls, he is so excited to hear from her! Talk to Hashem, because He just wants to hear from you. Hashem wants to hear how you are doing. Remember: Hashem made you, He made your situation, He knows exactly what you are going through – He is the One that put you there! Ask Him for help. And if you feel like you can not *daven*, tell Him. Being honest is a pathway to connection and closeness with Hashem.

Hashem is a מלך חפץ בחיים - He wants us to live. He is on our team. He wants us to do *teshuva*. That seems easier said than done... but not really. Sometimes just believing in the power of *teshuva* is the hardest part. Often, we do not really think our *teshuvah* matters or that it works. But it is so simple – *ki karov eilecha hadavar meod*. Many times, we think that if we need to do *teshuvah*, grow, or become better people, it is all on us. Like it's our fault that we messed up and it's up to us to fix the mess we made all by ourselves. But that isn't true. We can even ask Hashem for help to do *teshuvah*.

In fact, my favorite *tefillah* on Yom Kippur is this exact concept. After we finish *viduy*, where we list all the ways we have sinned, we stand before Hashem, and from this humbled place we continue: Hashem, even before I was born I was not worthy, *kal v'chomer* now – *harei ani lifanecha kichli malei busha v'chilma* – here I am, standing before you like a vessel filled with shame and humiliation. It is at

HASHEM, YOU MADE ME LIKE THIS.

this climax that we ask honestly, “יהי רצון מלפניך ד’ אלקי ואלקי אבותי שלא אחטא עוד Hashem, please help me not sin again.” It’s that simple – we just have to ask Hashem for help.

When you look for it, you will find this request for help everywhere in *davening*. We ask at the end of *Shemonah Esrei*: **Kadsheinu bimitzvosecha** – Hashem, make me *kadosh* with the mitzvos that I do, help me want to do mitzvos. **Sabeinu mituvecha** – There is so much stuff out there that we turn to in order to fill the holes in our lives – Hashem, satisfy me with Your good, I do not want to turn to the other things. Let a life of Torah be enough, that I do not feel the need to look elsewhere. *Mituvecha* – Your good is so good, I just do not know how to feel it – help me feel *kedusha*, help me know what Your good is. And then we ask: **Vetaher libeinu li’avdecha b’emes** – Hashem, please make my heart pure so I can serve You *b’emes*. Again, we see this concept of serving Hashem from a place of *emes*. Hashem, please take away all the things that are blocking my heart, all the things that are stopping it from being *tahor*, the things that are stopping me from serving You and only You *b’emes*. We can ask Him to give us the motivation, the strength – or even ask Him to remove the *taiva*, the pull of a certain thing. We forget, maybe because it is so basic, to just say “Hashem, You made me like this. You made me

want that, or fall when it comes to this area. Please help me work on it and grow out of it.”

We all have lists of things that we want; it is not hard for Hashem. Nothing is too impossible. Of course, we have to know that not everything is good for us; when we *daven*, sometimes our Abba says no. Singles in shidduchim live this reality every day. As Rachel Burnham, who waited many years for her *zivug*, puts it: “Hashem – I love You when You bring me my *shidduch*, and I love You when You do not.” And this applies to anyone waiting for something: Hashem, I love You when You bring me my *yeshua*, and I love You when You do not. But I know that You could, and I know that You will when it is right for me. Nothing is too hard for Hashem, and everything He does is with the endless love and *rachmanus* of a Father.

And when you have this, when you can confidently say that Hashem is your Father, your King, and your best friend, then you have everything. And at the end of Yom Kippur, when the gates close – they are going to close with you inside.

Elisheva is a singer-songwriter living in the tri-state area. She speaks and sings for various organizations and high schools, leading kumzitzs and sharing inspiration.



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I am Yonah

Folly Klein



I have spent much of my life running. I ran by becoming useful, capable, productive, and needed. I ran by filling every silence, carrying what was not mine, and building lives around truths I wasn't yet ready to face.

I am Yonah Because I run.



I have spent much of my life running. I ran by becoming useful, capable, productive, and needed. I ran by filling every silence, carrying what was not mine, and building lives around truths I wasn't yet ready to face. But no one can outrun Hashem's plan.

The Yonah story is a powerful analogy for people who run. While most of us don't run off to Tarshish with a suitcase in hand, we run into work, relationships, caretaking, achievement, spirituality, even healing. We call it responsibility. We call it loyalty. We call it survival. And sometimes it is.

BENEATH ALL THAT MOVEMENT
IS A TRUTH WE MAY BE KEEPING
HIDDEN FROM EVEN OURSELVES.

But beneath all that movement is a truth we may be keeping hidden from even ourselves. How many of us are trying to put distance between ourselves and the life, voice, mission or calling that already knows our name?

The story of Yonah begins with a name. Yonah ben Amitai.

Yonah, the son of Amitai. The son of *emes*. The son of truth.

The Vilna Gaon famously reads Yonah as a metaphor for the soul. His story is not only about a prophet running from Hashem. It is the story of every *neshamah* sent into this world with a purpose, every soul that hears a call and discovers how terrifying it can be to face what that call requires.

The story begins not with flight, but with identity. Yonah comes from truth. Perhaps we all do. But how many of us can face the truth when it calls us by name?

I am Yonah

Because I have been called.



The truth about who we are, what we know, what must change, the life we have outgrown, and the life asking to be lived.

And so we run.

Does everybody receive a call?

I believe so.

To be called is to trust that our presence here is not incidental. That beneath the accidents, choices, losses and strange turns that shape a life, there is something the soul came here to meet. Something it came to learn, repair, reveal or give.

In the *Gra's* reading, Nineveh is the great city of embodied life, the complicated human world into which the soul descends to complete its work. The call to Yonah is therefore not only an instruction. It is a mission.

You come from truth. You came here to bring more of it into the world.

A calling is not always glamorous. Sometimes it arrives as a reality we cannot avoid. The wound that keeps asking for attention. The pattern that follows us into every interaction. The truth that refuses to be silenced.

Sometimes the work of the soul grows from precisely what we would never have volunteered to endure.

I see this in the people I work with, who believe their purpose is hidden outside them, waiting to be found. But it is more often revealed as a thread already woven through relationships, bodies, fears and gifts, asking the same question in a hundred forms; Where do I abandon myself? What truth do I keep wrestling with? What have I survived that is asking to be transformed?

Calling is not always a voice from heaven announcing the next step.

Sometimes it is the growing inability to continue living in a way our souls already know to be false.

When I follow that thread through my own life, it leads me through places the younger version of me could never have imagined. She would not have imagined the sleepless nights, the mornings filled with dread or the hours spent crying on the bathroom floor. But she also would not have imagined a life filled with Torah, raising my children, teaching, and devoting myself to breath, truth and transformation.

I didn't choose most of the experiences that taught me how to enter those worlds. I would never have called them preparation while I was living through them. But over time, the pattern became impossible to ignore. The very experiences that wounded me were also shaping the questions I would spend my life learning how to answer.

The very fires I ran from became the furnaces in which I was forged.

**THE VERY FIRES I RAN FROM
BECAME THE FURNACES IN
WHICH I WAS FORGED**

The Yonah story brings to mind an old joke my father loves. A man dies and asks God, "Is it true that we are Your chosen people?"

"Yes, My child. You are the Chosen People."

The man hesitates. "Well, would You mind choosing someone else for a change?"

Even as a child, I understood the pressure in accountability. There is a part of us that longs to know





we are special. And yet, to be chosen is to be loved into responsibility. Perhaps this is why being chosen feels as frightening as it does sacred. A calling asks something of us. It demands that we grow large enough to hold what has been entrusted to us.

TO BE CHOSEN IS TO BE LOVED INTO RESPONSIBILITY.

And some of us run from the very mission our soul was crafted for, gifted and tasked with accomplishing. We run from the blessings we have prayed for, for fear that in the process of receiving them, we might be forced to break open what our limited vessels can no longer contain.

Yonah fled. As I have fled.
He sought out a vessel. So did I.

We are always choosing vessels. Bodies. Marriages. Identities. Professions. Communities. Practices. Some vessels help us carry the soul's assignment. Others carry us away.

The question, then, is not only about what we are called here to do, but whether the life we have built can hold us while we do it. Whether our bodies can remain present. Whether our nervous systems have the capacity to stay with what is. Whether our relationships can survive the expansion required when the soul begins to take up more space.

Much of what I explore in my course, aptly called *Vessel of Truth*, is how to build that kind of life: one capable of holding what we once fled from.

The tragedy is not that Yonah needed a vessel. Souls need vessels.

The tragedy is that he asked the vessel to take him away from himself.

I've also built vessels hoping they could be an escape. Hoping they would take me where I wanted to go rather than to where Hashem wanted me to be. Consciously and unconsciously.

And like Yonah, I paid the price.



I am Yonah

Because I have paid the price.

Yonah is only four chapters and forty eight verses, yet every word carries weight.

ויקם יונה לברח תרשישה מלפני ד' **וירד יפו** וימצא
אניה באה תרשיש **ויתן שכרה, וירד בה** לבוא עמהם
תרשישה מלפני ד'.

And **Yonah rose** to flee Tarshish, away from Hashem. **He descended** to Yaffo, and found a ship going to Tarshish, **he paid the fare**, and **descended** onto the ships with the others to flee from Hashem, to Tarshish.

Borrowing from the *Gra*, I have learned to read the text as a map of the soul's journey, allowing each descent, each silence, each strange turn to speak beyond the story itself.

Vayakom - he rose.

Vayered - he descended.

Vayeetein sechara - he paid the fare.

Vayered ba - he descended again.

He descended. He paid the fare. And descended again.

I know that movement. I have told myself I was rising even as I began to fall. I have chosen vessels and convinced myself they were carrying me somewhere necessary, while moving further from what I already knew.

There is always a price. Sometimes it is obvious; a relationship, a home, money, time, health. Sometimes it is more subtle, appearing as the distance between who we are and who we pretend to be, in the exhaustion of maintaining a life our soul has outgrown or tolerating abuse in the name of loyalty.

We do not only pay for the choices we make.

We pay for the truths we postpone.

We pay for every year spent asking the wrong vessel to carry us toward the right life.



I am Yonah *Because I sleep.*



This sleep rarely looks like laziness. Often it looks like competence.

A woman manages the home, anticipates everyone's needs and remains endlessly useful while sleeping through the knowledge that she has disappeared from her own life. A facilitator regulating every nervous system in the room while refusing to notice the panic beating in her own chest.

We can remain remarkably productive while spiritually unconscious.

It is amazing to me how the text tells us that as the storm ravaged, our protagonist was deeply asleep. Sleeping while a storm emerged specifically to wake him up, to redirect him, to shatter his illusions and bring him back on track.

**AS THE STORM RAVAGED,
OUR PROTAGONIST WAS
DEEPLY ASLEEP.**

I am careful about naming the purpose of anyone else's storm. I only know that some of mine eventually showed me what I had been unable to see in calm weather.

Perhaps that is what it means to be Yonah. A storm does not always come to destroy the life we have lived. Sometimes it sends us directly back into it. This time awake.

How many storms have I slept through? How many wake up calls were not enough when I stubbornly insisted on clinging to sleep?

It is an outsider, the captain, who finally rouses Yonah, urging him to "Call upon your Hashem!" All along our storms ask for one simple thing.

Wake up.
Talk to Hashem.
The Eternal Hashem.
Come back to the conversation.





I am Yonah **Because I have been swallowed whole.**

Every storm has demanded a surrender. Possessions. Dreams. Relationships. Friendships I still grieve. Cherished memories now disfigured, parts of myself I have had to release into the raging sea.

I have drowned before in my life. I have been consumed to the point where I wondered, like Yonah, whether I would ever again gaze toward *Heichal Kodshecha*, Hashem's holy place.

משמרים הבלי שוא חסדם יעזבו.

"They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare."

I have always been amused when an English translation accidentally seems to call my name. In one rendering of Yonah's prayer, the words "empty folly" appear, and I hear Fally.

There is a Fally who was long ago emptied of anything vital. She was built from coping mechanisms and inherited stories that once helped her survive but no longer help her live.

Still, I have clung to her, trying to force myself back into the broken vessel of who I had been, a fully formed self attempting to return to a womb that can no longer contain me.

I know I'm not alone in this. Feeling as though we are drowning, we reach instinctively for the person we used to be. The woman who tolerated more. The mother who needed less. The wife who withered away to keep a marriage whole. We mistake the familiar for solid ground, even when it's little more than driftwood.

We believe we're fighting for our lives, while

expending all our strength on a shattered vessel that can no longer keep us afloat. And from inside the struggle, it's not easy to know whether we're fighting for air or fighting against the transformation that might finally carry us to the shore.

**THEY BELIEVE THEY ARE SAVING
THEMSELVES, BUT THEY MIGHT BE
EXPENDING ALL THEIR ENERGY ON
A SHATTERED VESSEL THAT CAN
NO LONGER KEEP THEM AFLOAT.**

But the body usually knows first. The breath becomes shallow. The nervous system goes on high alert. The same conflict returns. The same grief rises. The same truth emerges from the depths.

The lots we cast come up with the same name over and over again.

We cling to empty things because those vessels were once full. A role once gave belonging. A offered protection. A relationship once felt like shelter. A coping mechanism meant life.

Survival strategies don't always know when their work is complete.

The belly of the fish is the place where Yonah can no longer outrun that truth. There's nowhere left to go, nothing left to prove and no old identity large enough to contain who he's becoming.

Only darkness and the terrible mercy of coming face to face with himself.

I am Yonah Because I pray.



There were years when it was hard for me to pray.

I struggle to read Hebrew fluently, and prayer carries the baggage of my childhood. The fear of mispronouncing a word, taking too long, losing my place, hearing my voice falter.

And beneath all of that, the fear that I might finally find the courage to ask and Hashem might still say no.

So I withheld my words. Not trusting my voice enough to offer them. Who wants to hear a voice this hesitant, this fractured, this unsure?

"I do," Hashem has answered, patiently, consistently, lovingly.

The Hebrew word *lehisparallel*, to pray, is reflexive. It has long been understood as an act of self examination. Prayer asks us to face ourselves, to stand before Hashem without the stories and carefully constructed versions of who we think we should be.

Perhaps this is where healing and prayer meet. Both begin in the moment a person is finally able to look inward and tell themselves the truth.

I have called from the darkness, from places where the distance between myself and Hashem felt immeasurable, even when I knew that I had participated in creating that distance. Yonah,

WHO WANTS TO HEAR A
VOICE THAT IS HESITANT AND
FRACTURED? "I DO," HASHEM
HAS ANSWERED.

too, was instructed to use his voice and fled instead. Only when every other avenue of escape disappeared did his voice remain. And what a voice it became.

Yonah's words are halting, visceral poetry. A prayer from the belly, from the murky, wordless, seat of intuition. In the belly of the whale, Yonah is finally able to hear himself.

I know something about that. I have felt the pounding of my heart become so loud that it drowned out everything else. When there was no other sound left to follow, I began to hear the voice within me that was no longer arguing with His.

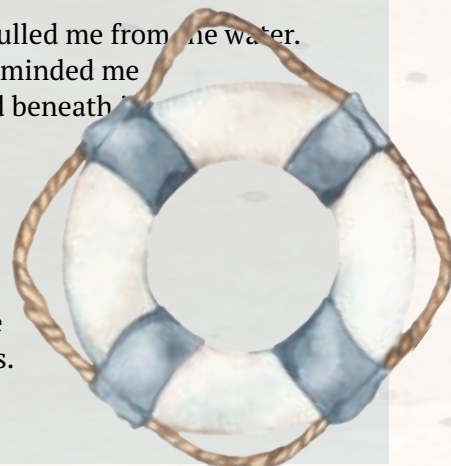
Somewhere beneath Yonah's terror, the truth he reaches is gratitude. Gratitude that even there, he is still in conversation with Hashem.

I do not remember much of my twenties. But I have spent most of my thirties on my knees, praying for escape, rescue, relief and change.

Lately, I have begun to thank Him too. Even while crying on the bathroom floor. Even while hiding from my children because I cannot bear for them to see how close to the surface the drowning still feels. Even while the circumstances remain unresolved.

Gratitude has not always pulled me from the water. Sometimes it has simply reminded me that I have not disappeared beneath.

I am still breathing.
Still speaking.
Still heard.
Still loved.
And sometimes, that is the first form deliverance takes.



I am Yonah

Because I have been given another chance.

ויהי דבר ד' אל יונה שנית לאמר

Hashem speaks to Yonah a second time.
Yonah is a story of second chances.
A reminder that Hashem's word is eternal and His plan for us is great.

In the *Gra's* reading, the second call is the soul being sent again to complete what remained unfinished. Whether we understand this as *gilgul* across lifetimes or recognize smaller returns within one life, the pattern is familiar.

The same truth returns. The same wound appears in another relationship. The same boundary asks to be drawn with a different person. The call arrives wearing different details because the work is still ours.

I have watched students believe their hesitation disqualifies them. They imagine the call belongs to someone more confident, aligned or perfect.

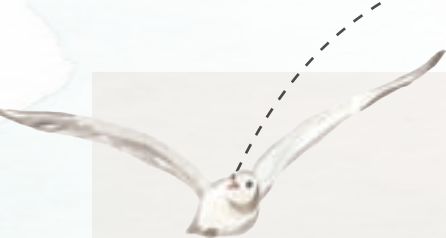
But Hashem's second call to Yonah is almost identical to the first.

The assignment is not withdrawn because the prophet was not ready.

"I'm still here," I have felt Hashem say.
"Whenever you're ready, the mission is still yours."

I have sometimes wished Hashem did not believe in me this much. But there is nothing more humbling than getting up off the bathroom floor, facing my tear streaked reflection, and understanding that while the mission has not changed, I have.





I am Yonah

Because I have Found my voice.

Another forty days.

These are the words Yonah carries through Nineveh, a city so vast it takes three days to cross, with a message so brief the text records only five Hebrew words:

עוד ארבעים יום ונינוה נהפכת

Another forty days and Nineveh will be overturned.

I know what forty days feel like.

How many forty day cycles of Nishmas have I completed?

HOW MANY FORTY DAY
CYCLES OF NISHMAS
HAVE I COMPLETED?
IF YOU MUST KNOW,
TWENTY TWO.

If you must know,
twenty two.

Because every time
I finish one, a voice
inside me says the
same thing.

עוד ארבעים יום



You can do one more.

One more morning. One more prayer. One more chance to continue the conversation.

Perhaps this is the miracle. When a person who believes her world is ending commits to another forty days of prayer; determined to imagine herself forty days from now, still praying, thanking, beginning again.

Yonah enters Nineveh and speaks. The text gives us no polished sermon or extended theology. Only five words.

And the city listens.

We imagine impact depends on perfect language. We labor over wording, delivery and timing. We believe we must become confident enough, articulate enough and healed enough to speak.

But perhaps the power of Yonah's message is not in its sophistication.

Perhaps it is in the fact that the messenger has finally stopped running from the message.

And perhaps, if I may take my amateur and irreverent reading one step further, say "Nineveh"

aloud and tell me that Nineveh overturned doesn't sound like "heaven."

A heaven created when a city becomes willing to turn itself over. When people examine the violence in their hearts, step down from their soapboxes and make a change.

Yonah warned that Nineveh would be overturned.

And it was.

But not destroyed. It was transformed.

Maybe that's what heaven looks like in this world. A life willing to overturn itself before destruction becomes inevitable.

The voice Yonah once refused to use becomes the catalyst for an entire city to reconsider.

I have witnessed cities overturn. Families. Marriages. Classrooms. Diagnoses.





I HAVE WITNESSED CITIES
OVERTURN. FAMILIES. MARRIAGES.
CLASSROOMS. DIAGNOSES.

I have watched a client say, “I cannot keep living this way,” and make the decision that changed the course of her life. I have watched students confront the places where fear had compromised their integrity and change how they practice. I have watched mothers stop disappearing inside their families and begin teaching their children what it looks like to remain whole.

Transformation sometimes begins with a handful of words, in a voice that shakes.

The power was not in the perfection of Yonah’s voice.

It was in his willingness to finally use it.





I am Yonah

Because I still question.

The *Gra's* reading does not end when the city changes.

It would be nice to end there. The soul receives a mission, resists, descends, prays, returns, fulfills its purpose and is redeemed.

But Yonah is not redeemed into certainty.

The prophet delivers the message. The city overturns. The people listen. Hashem has mercy. And Yonah is distressed.

In the *Gra's* telling, the soul has finally accomplished the work for which it was sent. It has returned, completed its correction and fulfilled the mission it once tried to escape. But it is still pained by the fate through which it had to accomplish it.

I understand this too.

I know what it is to see suffering become meaningful and still refuse to call the suffering good. I know what it is to recognize the wisdom I have gained while wishing I had been allowed to learn it more gently. I know what it is to watch other people receive something valuable from the trials I have endured and still ask Hashem why so much of life had to hurt.

Purpose does not always reconcile us to the price. The work, impact, and gratitude can be real. And the question can remain.

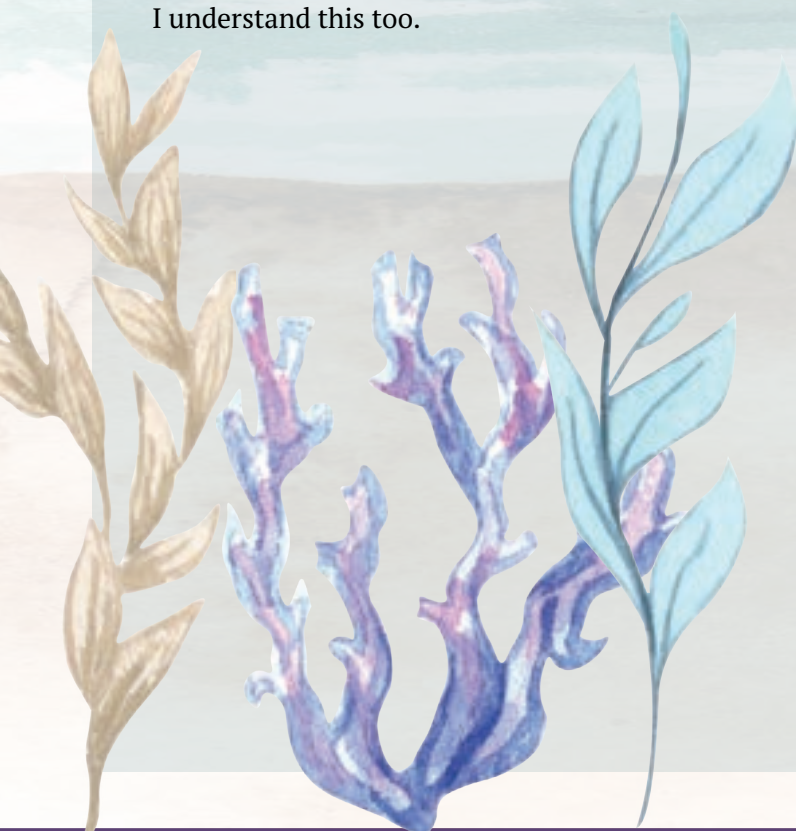
Yonah leaves the city and sits outside it, waiting to see what will happen. Hashem causes a *kikayon* to grow over him, offering shade from the sun. Yonah is delighted. Then, almost as quickly as it appeared, it withers.

Once again, Yonah is left exposed.

The calling, the storm, the fish. The mission, the mercy, the *kikayon*. The sun, the shade, the wind. Again and again, Yonah encounters elements of a life he cannot control.

I have spent years believing that if I answered the call correctly, perhaps the shade would remain. That enough prayer, enough courage, enough work and enough willingness to serve would earn me some form of lasting shelter. A marriage. A home. A reprieve. A version of the future I thought I had finally secured.

But the *kikayon* is not salvation. It is temporary shade. Real and beautiful while it lasted, but unable to promise permanence.





Hashem asks Yonah whether he is right to grieve the plant so fiercely. Yonah says he is. And then Hashem asks the question with which the entire book ends.

“You care about this plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow, which appeared in a night and disappeared in a night. Should I not care for Nineveh? Should I not have compassion for a city filled with human beings who do not know their right from their left?”

Yonah does not answer. The narrative simply ends.

There is no final surrender, no perfect lesson and no climactic moment in which Yonah admits that Hashem was right all along. There is only the unanswered question.

Perhaps the final stage of the soul’s journey is not certainty. Perhaps it’s the capacity to remain in relationship with Hashem while the question stays open.

Can I accept that redemption may look nothing like the ending I predicted?

Can I grieve what I hoped would last a lifetime while honoring that it never could?

Can I fulfill the mission and still tell Hashem the truth about what it cost?

This is the Yonah I know best. The one who believes and still argues. Who obeys and also resents. Who speaks for Hashem and yet questions Him. Who fulfills the mission and remains deeply, painfully human.

Fally Klein is a teacher, facilitator, and founder of Azamra Breathwork. Her work helps participants access the wisdom of the body, breath, and soul; returning to the truth already held within. Her courses can be accessed at fallyklein.com.

I do not think Hashem’s question is evidence that the soul has failed.

Perhaps it is evidence that it is still listening.

I do not have answers that make every chapter of my life beautiful. But I have a relationship. An ongoing conversation. I am held by Hashem, who does not end the story by silencing Yonah, but by asking him to look again, widen his compassion and loosen his grip on the need for closure.

To consider that Divine mercy may be larger than his understanding of justice.

The Book of Yonah ends without his answer because perhaps the answer was never meant to belong to Yonah alone.

It belongs to every soul who has heard the call, run, descended, prayed, returned, spoken, watched the world change and still found itself sitting outside the gates with questions.

It belongs to me.

I am Yonah because I run.

I am Yonah because I return.

I am Yonah because I still question.

And perhaps I am Yonah because, after every answer and every argument, Hashem and I are still in conversation. 👑



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THE GIFT OF CHATZOS

Sara Faygie Berkowitz

What if I've been Preparing for
Shabbos all wrong?

How one child's bold statement sparked a
revitalization of an age-old concept, and connected
me to a Bubby I never met.



Twenty years ago, a superwoman named Azriella Jaffe, mom, wife, college professor, author of more than two dozen books, business owner, and seminary teacher, was told by one of her children, "I hate Shabbos." It's every Jewish mother's worst nightmare.

Thankfully, Azriella quickly realized her daughter didn't hate Shabbos at all. She hated Fridays, the lead-in to Shabbos. She hated the chaos, the time pressure, and the stress in her home on what should have been a calm, joy-filled day anticipating the arrival of Shabbos. So Azriella changed the way it had always been done.

She began implementing the concept of being ready in time for *chatzos* Shabbos by spreading preparations throughout the week and leaving very little for Friday afternoon. The change in her home was so dramatic that she started writing about it and sharing what she had learned with others. People were enthusiastic to try it! A website was launched to answer questions and provide information. She created a chat group for peer support and encouragement, and sent out emails with stories, practical ideas, and inspiration.

People who made an effort to be mostly ready for Shabbos by midday Friday noticed all sorts of

unexpected changes. Improved "indoor air quality" was perhaps the most notable. Friday afternoons felt calmer. Adults and children experienced Erev Shabbos differently. People asked the newly dubbed "Chatzos Lady" every imaginable question. Can you do *melachah* on Friday afternoon? (Yes, of course.) What if I work on Fridays? (Then you need this more than anyone.) How do I serve fresh food? (Season or marinade ahead of time, bake it on Friday.) Little by little, people figured out what worked for their own homes. They shared their struggles, celebrated their accomplishments, and reassured each other that pulling a dessert out of the freezer once in a while was not, in fact, a sign of spiritual failure.

Several years later, while working on Atlanta's Shabbat Project, I stumbled across Azriella's website. "What a concept," I thought. Like many women, I was convinced that if I did not run myself ragged on Friday, work up until (or maybe into) the 18 minutes, and add one more dish when we had more than enough, it was not proper Shabbos preparation. This took a toll, it was not the ideal way to greet Shabbos, and deep down I knew it. I started with one commitment: no more adding something on Friday afternoon. Then I began shifting tasks a little earlier in the week. It was not just calmer Fridays I was after, there are also *brachos* and *yeshuos* associated with being more prepared for Shabbos.

This concept was so simple and yet so groundbreaking and life changing that I had to tell everyone I knew. I started an email group where I shared time-saving ideas, practical tips, *divrei Torah*, and encouragement. When the Chatzos Lady was ready to step back from her mission, I stepped forward happily, knowing this concept was changing lives.

"Chatzos Yidden" started to notice all kinds of unexpected improvements in their Erev Shabbos.



It's Not Just About Time Management

Lest you misunderstand - this is not just about when you do what, and being more organized. Chatzos Shabbos is about *kavana*, putting meaning into what we do and giving ourselves room to breathe on Friday so we can anticipate Shabbos instead of simply making it to candle lighting in one piece.

In a recent Zoom meeting for 'chatzosers', Yaffa Palti summed it up beautifully: "Shabbos is a destination, not a finish line." That sentence had a huge impact on all who heard it. How often do we spend Friday trying to cross everything off the list, only to arrive at candle lighting physically present, but mentally somewhere between the load that was left in the washer and wondering if the chicken is fully baked?

To quote Yaffa again, "We prepared Shabbos, but did we prepare ourselves for Shabbos?" When we shift even a few tasks earlier in the week, something much deeper happens than simply becoming more organized. We create space. That breathing room allows us to feel the transition into calm on Friday afternoon. To sit with a cup of coffee before candle lighting and spend time with someone special in our lives. To feel excited about the arrival of Shabbos, and grateful that it comes every week to give us a true rest. That's what Chatzos Shabbos is about.

The Family Weighs In

I'll share an ironic story which may not be the best marketing, but it was a good reality check for me. After I became a chatzoser, Friday afternoons

Shabbos is a destination, not a finish line

looked very different in our home. No more counters cluttered with small appliances and people reaching over one another to finish cooking. Instead, it was quiet, calm, clean, and the kitchen was relatively empty. I was pretty proud of this accomplishment. (I may even have stood in the kitchen a little longer than necessary admiring all that clean, visible counter space.)

A few weeks later, one of my teenage daughters came to me. "Mommy," she said, "I miss the frantic rush. It was so much fun when we were all in the kitchen together, the music was playing, and things were flying everywhere. I'm not sure I like this quiet Erev Shabbos." Well. That was not the response I was expecting.

But it taught me something nuanced. The goal is not just to remove the chaos. It is to replace it with something even better. So we talked about what Friday afternoons could look like instead. Music? Definitely staying. We could sit and chat, exercise, take a walk somewhere pretty, or call a relative. Sometimes we would simply enjoy the novelty of doing light prep tasks for Shabbos, like making salad or setting lights, without feeling rushed. We are all still figuring it out.

Chatzos Shabbos is not *halacha*, and it does not



It's bringing more kavod to Shabbos while reducing the unnecessary pressure



look the same in every home. The goal is not perfection. It's bringing more *kavod* to Shabbos while reducing the unnecessary pressure that so many of us have come to accept as normal. For many households, that means setting the table on Thursday so everyone sees that beautiful visual when they walk into the dining room. For others, it may mean making one less side dish or doubling a recipe on Tuesday so there is something in the freezer for a busy week. For someone else, it means moving shopping one day earlier and deciding that no new projects begin after *chatzos* on Friday. Small changes have a way of changing much bigger things.

A Growing Movement

It has been just over a year since I launched Gift of Chatzos as a nonprofit, and the growth and impact has been incredible. What started as a local Atlanta WhatsApp chat with 25 women is now a global community of more than 400 women - all ages and backgrounds, all stages of life-supporting each other in this initiative. Thousands of homes have been introduced to Chatzos Shabbos through social media, word of mouth, fireside chats, and community programs. Businessmen and women are limiting their Friday work hours, and some have made the bold move to stop working and close their businesses at *chatzos*.

The beauty of this initiative is that it is customizable. No one method works in every home. Some people discover Chatzos Shabbos and seem to master it almost immediately. Most of us take on one commitment at a time and move on only after we have mastered that step.

Regardless of how many steps you have taken, Fridays very quickly begin to feel very different.

A Legacy Rediscovered

Shortly after the conversation with my daughter, I called my mother to excitedly share this new

initiative I had taken on.

Her response?

"My mother was always ready by *chatzos*!"

Wait, really?

My maternal Bubby, whom I never knew because she passed away at just forty years old, was a *chatzoser*?

That realization deepened my commitment to continue her legacy - and the legacy of so many of our ancestors - by helping bring the calm, the *bracha*, and the anticipation of Shabbos back into Jewish homes around the world.

Final Thoughts

As we prepare for the *Yamim Noraim* and think about how we want to improve in the coming year, perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is a calmer, more meaningful Erev Shabbos. You can do it to lessen the chaos, to bring more *bracha* and *shalom bayis* into your home, or to merit the *yeshuos* that many *tzaddikim* associate with honoring Erev Shabbos and being ready early to anticipate its arrival. Or simply because this is how your grandparents did it, and you are continuing their tradition. Whatever your reason, taking that first step is what counts. May each small step we take bring us closer to the day that will be *yom shekulo Shabbos*. 👑

Sarah Faygie Berkowitz is the founder and director of Gift of Chatzos, an educational nonprofit that helps individuals and families thrive through the concept of chatzos Erev Shabbos. A speaker, editor, and nonprofit leader, she spent two decades in publishing, communications, and marketing before launching the organization in 2025. You can learn more at www.GiftofChatzos.org, or email info@giftofchatzos.org

What does it mean to make Chatzos Shabbos?

The goal is to have a calm and more peaceful Friday, maybe even to light candles a few minutes early – and to be dressed and ready for candlelighting instead of being a frantic mess.

Start by divvying up tasks to spread Shabbos prep through the week in small increments, which can look something like this:

Sunday - Bake challah, make a Shabbos menu. Shop for non-perishables.

Monday - Bake and freeze dessert (double up for a busy week).

Tuesday - Make two dressings or marinades.

Wednesday - Prep veggies for soup and entrees, order/buy meat, chicken, fish, prepare dips.

Thursday - Cook side dishes and soup, marinate (or actually cook) proteins, set Shabbos table.

Friday - Put up cholent/soup, cook pre-marinated proteins, make salads.

As you prepare, say, I am doing this to get ready for *Shabbos kodesh*. While you cook, knead dough, spice your food, etc.... you can pray for those who will be eating your food, and infuse it with physical and spiritual nutrients!

When do I start?

Today! Regardless of what day it is, there is always something small you can do to prepare for Shabbos.

Even if Shabbos just ended... as soon as you have recited *havdalah*, do one small task for the upcoming

Shabbos, like setting up the candles. Then enjoy *melava malka* to hold onto Shabbos and nourish your *luz* bone.

Why would I take this on?

So glad you asked. Either you have a system and it works, or you do not have a system and you have no hope of changing it but you have survived until now and no one starved. So why are you still reading? Clearly you are a deep thinker, and willing to reconsider the way things have always been done.

Take a look at these messages from some of our *gedolim*:



The Imrei Emes says that getting ready for Shabbos early is a special merit and *segulah* to help children who have gone off the *derech* return to Torah.

Rav Rachamim Attiya, ztz'l told his children to receive Shabbos as early as possible, as if anticipating royalty, “If you want Hashem to shower you with blessing, be exceedingly careful with the honor of Shabbos. Set the table already on Wednesday, and spend your whole week preparing for Shabbos, which is the very source of *bracha*.”

Reb Aharon Leib Shteinman, ztz'l, said that there is one solution that can save a person from all troubles – to be *mechazek* (strengthen yourself) in *shmiras Shabbos*. “Be prepared early in anticipation for *Shabbos kodesh*, it is a tried and tested *segulah* that works.



Gift of Chatzos is a global movement helping Jewish households transform pressure and chaos into calm, connection, and greater joy around Shabbos.

I AM THAT I AM



Regina Mosenkis

A few years ago, during school break, my husband, children, and I traveled with friends to the Berkshires for some winter activities. One day, we decided to go snowshoeing through the forest. The experience was a true delight, but it also became a foundational moment in how I would come to understand myself, others, and our relationship with the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. While our older children became enthralled with building a snowman and our baby fell asleep in a sled, I wandered deeper into the snowy, foggy woods and made one of my first intentional attempts at *hisbodedus* in nature. At the time, I was contemplating a major decision—one that would require a significant investment of time, energy, and resources. I genuinely didn't know which direction was right.

I pleaded with Hashem for guidance: What is my *tafkid*? How can I best serve You with the *kochos*

You have entrusted to me? Is this the path I should pursue? The only thought that arose was: “I Am That I Am.” I didn't understand it as an answer. I simply experienced it as a mantra—a way of connecting to pure beingness, particularly in the stillness of nature. In the months that followed, without receiving the clarity I had initially asked for, I decided to take the leap. I chose to invest in myself and in the process, hoping that it would ultimately be *l'shem shamayim*. I chose to begin a professional training program in personal and executive coaching that began with a three-day in-person immersion.

I IMMEDIATELY EXPERIENCED THIS AS A DIVINE WINK

I PLEADED WITH HASHEM FOR GUIDANCE: WHAT IS MY TAFKID?

Within the first three minutes of the opening seminar, the lead instructor introduced the foundational premise of the program: “When Moshe met Hashem at the burning bush, Hashem spoke to him saying, ‘I Am That I Am.’” Mic drop. Wait. What?!

To me, this was a Divine wink—a *haskamah*, a loving affirmation from Hashem that He had heard me. It reminded me that Hashem answers in His own time. In order to preserve our *bechirah*, our freedom to choose, He doesn't always reveal the path beforehand.

Sometimes, after we have already taken a courageous leap of faith, He pulls back the veil of *hashgacha pratis* and lets us know: I am here. I see you. Keep going.

The program taught that the words that follow “I am...” shape our experienced reality. Lasting transformation occurs at the level of identity: before we can change what we do, we have to encounter who we believe ourselves to be. We learned to “coach the person, not the problem”—to explore the place where one's identity lives before focusing on the how and what of change.

This struck me as profoundly connected to the spiritual work of the *Yamim Noraim*. Rosh Hashanah is not only about crowning Hashem as King. It is also about remembering and returning to who we are essentially: an *etzem Elokim*, a soul spark of Hashem Himself. The etymology of identity is “repeated beingness”. The more deeply we identify with and live from our essential self—our *atzmus*—the more capable we become of instantiating Hashem's *Malchus* within the world and living our purpose.

The Baal Shem Tov radically deepened our understanding of *tzimtzum*. Hashem did not create the world and then withdraw from it, watching from a distance. He is present within both the revealed and concealed, within the details of our lives and within our own hearts. He desires to be revealed within the concealment—to have a *dirah betachtonim*, a dwelling place in this world.

We were brought into existence not accidentally, but through Divine desire, *cheshek*. We are deeply wanted. More so, *chassidus* teaches that Hashem desires to be encountered—to be seen, heard, known, acknowledged, and revealed within the very constraints, *meitzarim*, of our lives. In our joys and our struggles, in the light and in the darkness, He is here, ready to be met by us—His beloved.

And yet, one of the biggest barriers to our internalization and full experience of this truth is our self-concept. So many of us struggle with a fundamental sense of not enoughness: I'm not good enough, smart enough, capable enough. Or perhaps its closely related opposite: I'm too intense, too sensitive, too demanding, too much.

These are different expressions of the same rupture: forgetting who we are at our essential core. Perhaps one of the most powerful strategies of the *yetzer hara* is not merely convincing us that our actions are flawed, but convincing us that we are flawed—that there is something fundamentally wrong or defective with our being. When we operate from this place, sometimes unconsciously, our capacity to flourish, to receive, and to become true partners with Hashem remains limited.





WE GET CONVINCED IT'S NOT JUST OUR ACTIONS THAT ARE FLAWED, BUT WE OURSELVES ARE FLAWED

Hashem is lovingly willing us into existence in this very moment. And this one. And every moment in the eternal NOW. The mere fact that we exist is already, in and of itself, a testament to our essential worth.

If we are rooted in the ever-present awareness that our life force is completely generated by Hashem's will, then *emunah* and *bitachon* cannot ultimately exclude healthy self-belief and self-trust. Self-transcendence, *bitul*, requires healthy self-worth. While we are indeed infinitesimally small before His greatness, we must remember that our essence is His. Even as we are being judged during the *Yamim Noraim* and invited to examine our *zechusim* and *aveiros*, perhaps we must first remember the place from which the judgment is taking place: within the *rechem*—the womb—of Divine compassion, mercy, and longing. We are being assessed by a King who fundamentally wants us, believes in us, and delights in our partnership.

Chazal teach that *teshuvah* preceded the creation of the world (*Kiddushin* 39b), suggesting that the possibility of return was woven into reality from

the very beginning. Growth was never meant to be linear. It unfolds through *ratz v'shov*—running and returning, advancing and retreating, falling and rising—the Divine pulse and dance of creation itself. As the verse teaches, “A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises” (*Mishlei* 24:16), the falling is not a detour from the process; it is part of the process. Our missteps are not a glitch in the Divine design, but features of it and the material we are here to work with. It is often through struggle itself, and through finding the strength to rise again, that we become all we are capable of becoming.

We see this archetypally in Yaakov Avinu's all-night struggle with the mysterious *ish*. He emerges wounded, transformed, and with a new name: Yisrael—a name associated with wrestling, striving, and prevailing with the Divine (*Bereishis* 32:28–30). His transformation did not occur despite the struggle, but through it. The encounter itself became the doorway through which his ultimate identity was revealed.

Perhaps this is one of the deepest truths of *teshuvah*: we do not return to Hashem by becoming



אני-הוא-הוא-אני I AM THAT I AM

someone other than who we are. We return by allowing every struggle, rupture, and return to reveal more deeply who we were created to become. The invitation is not to strive for perfection, but to commit to a continual process of refinement and revealing Hashem's presence through it all. The work of *teshuvah*—*tashuv hei*, “returning the *hei*”—is the continual returning of the lower *hei* of Hashem's Name, associated with *Malchus*, back to the *yud-Hei-vav*: tracing the multiplicity of all of our lived experience back to its singular Source.

When we recognize His *Malchus* and understand ourselves as an aspect of His creation and

expression, we can step more fully into our ultimate mission. We become clearer conduits through which His light can be revealed in the world.

During the *Yamim Noraim*, we are given a profound opportunity to encounter Him intimately, *panim el panim*, as loyal partners in creation—to turn toward Him, to remember who we really are, and to recommit ourselves to the extraordinary covenant for which we were created. May Hashem grant us the ability this Rosh Hashanah to reveal His presence within this world, to engage in complete *teshuvah*, and, together with Him, participate in the glorification and unfolding of Hashem's *malchus*. 👑

THE KING FUNDAMENTALLY
WANTS US, BELIEVES IN
US, AND DELIGHTS IN OUR
PARTNERSHIP.

Regina Mosenkis and her husband host a chassidic shtiebel in Teaneck, NJ. They are making Aliyah at the end of the year l'y"H. Regina is a personal development coach supporting individuals in harnessing their Divine potential. To connect, reach out to OstrovRegina@gmail.com

Fallings Upwards

Gitty Klein

The time period of the *Yamim Noraim* defines our true purpose in this world. What better preparation is there than to understand the immense gift of growth and *teshuvah* that we have been given? When it comes to our relationship with Hashem, growth is almost never a straight line upward. In fact, quite the opposite. When a person needs to rise from one spiritual level to the next, that ascent is often preceded by a sudden descent, an experience of *katnus* - smallness. That experience of disconnect, constrictedness and loss of perspective can be so demoralizing, specifically because it comes right when a person feels they are doing well. *Katnus* feels like "I was holding on level one, and now I've fallen, so I'm on level minus-one."

But our *tzaddikim* teach us that the reality of *katnus* is "I was holding on level one, and now I'm on the precipice of level two. So this fall of mine is only a feeling I'm experiencing relative to being right on the cusp of level two." When it comes to growth, there is level one, and then the level right before level two, (which feels small) and then up to level two, and then the level right before level three, which feels like a fall again.

I WAS HOLDING ON LEVEL ONE, AND NOW I'M ON THE PRECIPICE OF LEVEL TWO.

This is why it is forbidden to give up hope, because hope is essential to the *teshuvah* process. Without it, the person stays stuck in the 'fallen' state, unable to propel themselves upwards. The *tzaddikim* teach that *teshuvah* - returning to our true source - was created even before the physical world itself. It is 100% part of the plan and the natural cycle of life to grow, fall, to grow again, and to feel like you are falling again. A person should never become discouraged or fall into the trap of looking negatively upon themselves. When we make a sincere decision to try again, even our past failures are transformed into merits, because they become the stepping stones we build upon to grow higher.

We see this idea from Shlomo HaMelech in *Mishlei*, "For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble into ruin." What truly differentiates a righteous person from a *rasha*? It is not that the *tzaddik* lives a life free of failure, error, or flaws. Rather, the *tzaddik* feels himself falling repeatedly, but he chooses to get back up every single time. The *rasha* on the other hand, falls down, loses hope, and decides to remain stuck in his bad habits. Falling is a totally natural part of being human. Getting back up is where our true spiritual character is built.

Hashem wants our effort, our desire, and our active participation in life. True inner connection with

IT IS 100% PART OF THE NATURAL CYCLE OF GROWTH TO GROW, FALL, TO GROW AGAIN AND TO FEEL LIKE YOU ARE FALLING AGAIN

Hashem requires bringing our good intentions out of our thoughts and translating them into concrete, practical actions.

As a woman, the Yom Tov season is full of concrete practical actions. We don't get to stay connected to Hashem in an exclusively intellectual or emotional space. We are busy with doing *chessed* for our families, helping facilitate the *mitzvos* of the day, and often running the complex, logistical operation that is the home - the concrete, practical vehicle for *avodas Hashem*. When we bring our choices and actions into active alignment with Hashem's will, we achieve a genuine sense of spiritual harmony and peace, despite the external 'hecticness' of the season.

Every single human being wishes to experience true peace and happiness in life, but we often struggle to achieve it. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, shares the exact same root as *shleimus*, meaning wholeness and completion. When a person lives with clarity, connecting their daily actions to the One who created them, they begin to experience an inner calm and wholeness that cannot be shaken by external noise.

The calmness of faith rests on the awareness of the Oneness of Hashem. When we are aware that *Ein Od Milvado*, everything is Hashem, we are more centered and calm. Complexity and anxiety begin whenever we stray from that unity and let the noise around us take over. The closer we attach ourselves to the One, the more tranquillity we feel. We reach this state through simplicity - by avoiding unnecessary inner conflict, taking life one step at a time, and breaking large, intimidating challenges down into small, manageable pieces. Along with simplicity,

**WITH EVERY MASSIVE WAVE
THAT CRASHED TOWARD HIM,
HE SIMPLY LOWERED HIS HEAD.**

cultivating genuine joy takes real daily effort, but it is absolutely essential for our spiritual survival. Joy is not merely a pleasant feeling when things go well; it is the energy that fuels our courage, clarity, and resilience. Without joy, even small hurdles feel insurmountable. With joy, we gain the strength needed to navigate life's greatest tests.

There is a story about a storm at sea that sank a large boat. Only one passenger managed to survive. When he was later asked how he stayed afloat while everyone else drowned in the turbulent water, he shared his simple secret: he grabbed hold of a solid block of floating wood, and with every massive wave that crashed upon him, he simply lowered his head, let the water pass completely over him, and then lifted his head back up. We are all living in the turbulent sea of life, and the waves of stress, worry, and hardship often threaten to overwhelm us. The key to our emotional and spiritual survival is learning when to bow our heads in humility and allow the waves to pass over us. We have One Father and One King. When we bow our heads toward Him with pure simplicity, standing before Him as our loving King, we can withstand any storm that comes our way.

May Hashem gift all of us *Siyata DiShmaya* to see the truth clearly, giving us the strength to make the right choices that bring us closer to Him. May our heartfelt preparation for these Days of Awe bring us days of true peace, inner unity, and an unbreakable love with our Father, our King. 👑

Gitty Klein grew up in Toronto and now lives in Yerushalayim with her family. Her husband publishes the Sea of Wisdom English publications of the teachings of R' Itche Meir Morgenstern. Gitty writes weekly on topics of personal growth, emunah, and inner peace, and through the encouraging and uplifting Torah insights, she helps others find calm and purpose by drawing closer to Hashem. She can be reached at g3229561@gmail.com.

Insisting on The Light

Rebbetzin Ruthie Halberstadt

Certain *nisyonos* feel enormously challenging. It is normal to feel "This is too big for me, I just can't go on." Difficult challenges take us to the very limits of our endurance, and sometimes beyond.

Rivka Imenu's pregnancy, for example, was unusually painful. She says: "*Im kein, lamah zeh anochi* — If this is so, why me?" Rashi says this means: "If this pregnancy is so difficult, why did I *daven* and want it so much?" Ibn Ezra says she asked other women who had given birth if they had experienced this intensity of pain, and they said no. She then wondered: "*Lamah zeh anochi?* This is not normal, why is it happening to me?" The Chizkuni brings down that she was saying: "If this is the extent of the pain of pregnancy and childbirth, it may be easier to die." Ramban adds that it can also mean: "*Lama zeh anochi – Lama zeh anochi ba'olam. Halevai eineni* – Why am I in the world? I wish I did not exist."

This is not normal, why is it happening to me?"

Rivka Imenu is very real about how hard her challenge is, but she does not stop there. Instead, her primary response to this experience is: "*Vatelech lidrosh es Hashem.*" She goes to seek Hashem. The Maharal says her quest was not "Why am I alive?" Rather, Rivka's question was centered on the feeling of 'Hashem gave me life, so there must be a purpose to my existence.' "Why is this me?" meaning, "Why am I being given this experience? I must seek Hashem! I must seek the root cause of this and its connection to *Anochi* – to my essence."

When we experience pain, we have a choice. We can say, "Why is this happening to me?!" in protest, or we can say, "Why is this happening to me?" as a deep inquiry. Pain and discomfort are catalysts for self-searching and spiritual development. We learn the empowered response to challenges from Rivka. She searches for a spiritual cause and an explanation of what this means to her and what she must do now.

The question to ask during a nisayon is: How can this propel me to greatness?

The question to ask during a *nisayon* is: How can this propel me to greatness? The Gemara (*Brachos* 5a) says that if something happens to a person, he must examine his ways and change. When a person understands that something has happened for a reason, pain and negative emotions diminish significantly.

When we are going through a tough time, we often naturally think, "It's not fair! Why me?" Instead, we can try to ask ourselves, "What can I learn and how can I grow from this?"

Rabbi Moshe Shapira zt"l said the *pasuk* "*Tzion sadeh techaresh* — the field which had once been the site of the Temple was plowed" is describing the depth of the destruction. But, as Rabbi Akiva could discern, this was also the beginning of the redemption. The field is plowed, preparing the ground so new foundations can now be laid. This is destruction, but on the other hand, when the ruins are cleared, you can build. Rabbi Simcha

Wasserman used to point out that plowing is the preparation for planting.

Huge, challenging experiences can be unnerving because it is completely new territory for your self-development. The old rules do not apply here; you need new ones. You can hold onto the "old you," or you can acknowledge that this is beyond anything you have experienced, but now that you are here, Hashem must want you here, and there must be a message in the challenge— something to be gained when you make peace instead of fighting it.

Hashem is challenging you because He knows what you are capable of. You may not sense that until you arrive. It is like standing on a ladder; on your present rung, you are stable. You know that standing on the rung above you will be safe too. But taking your foot off this rung of the ladder to get to that next rung is scary. However, if you allow yourself to try, you will find Hashem is there and holding you tight, bringing you higher than you could have planned or envisioned. Hashem wants you to get to a place way beyond your present level. He knows what you can achieve, and He is inviting you to strive for it. Transition and transform!

Pain is an invitation to grow. Hashem is challenging you to find Him, to trust Him, and to embark on a





deep and intense journey. Your journey to yourself. This is where Hashem is to be found: "Ani" – "I" is one of Hashem's names. Your access point to Hashem is through your essential self. Hashem is right here, right now, in this experience with you. This may not be intuitively true – pain is very isolating – but if you naturally felt connected to Hashem, you would get no credit for finding Him.

I remember Rabbi Falk zt"l in Gateshead Seminary teaching us about checking lettuce for bugs. He said there are two ways you can check leafy green vegetables. One approach is to say, "Let's see if there are any bugs here." That is not the correct approach. Leafy greens are usually highly infested. He taught us the correct attitude is to check the greens with the motto, "There are bugs here, and I'm going to find them!" In situations of challenge, we should adopt the attitude that "There is light here, and I'm going to find it!"

Hashem is challenging you
because He knows what you
are capable of.

Hashem is the parent holding the child through a painful but lifesaving procedure. *Yisurim memarkim* – suffering cleanses, however we do not invite challenges. *Chazal*, our Sages, despite knowing the great levels of spiritual cleansing that can be achieved through pain, said to Hashem, "*Lo hem v'lo s'charam* – keep the pain and keep the reward!" But if Hashem has placed you in this, you can and must find the light in it. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* says, "*Ve'emunascha baleilos* – and Your faith by night." Our faith is challenged when things are dark, during the night of our life, but it is precisely then that faith can be strengthened, and that will carry us through.

In Egypt, on the final midnight on the eve of redemption the Jews are instructed to offer the *Korbon Pesach* and celebrate with a *Seder*. But they were still in Egypt – celebrating the Exodus while still in the confines of the place of their exile. Why not leave and then celebrate? Surely the redemption is only complete when Egypt is well and truly behind them? There is a profound lesson here from Rabbi Nissan Alpert. The Jews were physically in Egypt, but emotionally and spiritually they were already miles away. They were celebrating the future as if it was already present. Their faith in the reality of the redemption was so real that the redemption was



“There is light here, and
I’m going to find it.”

tangible; it was "now." They celebrated Pesach "*al shem he-atid*." We celebrate Pesach "*al shem he-avar*" – to commemorate the past, but they were celebrating what had not happened yet. This is the message we need to hear; to be strong and persevere through our challenge with Hashem at our side. To connect to God here and now, and be able to say, “There is light here, and I’m going to find it.” 👑

Rebbetzin Ruthie Halberstadt was born in South Africa and grew up in Israel. She is a student of her father, Rabbi Akiva Tatz, and Rabbi Mordechai Miller zt”l of Gateshead seminary. She teaches internationally, addressing a wide range of Torah topics, her speciality being deep and relevant Torah for women. She is one of the founders of HGHELP UK, and author of ‘Hypermesis - A Spiritual Perspective’. She is the Women’s Educator for TAL London, and together with her husband, Rabbi Ilan Halberstadt, they lead the Machzikei Hadas community in Golders Green. Her shiurim have been made available on the free app ‘Ruthie Halberstadt’. She can be reached via her website rebbitzinruthie.com.

When was
the last time
you asked
yourself
a *really* good
question?

Not “what’s for dinner?”



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THE SOUL OF MY THOUGHTS



Aviva Aberman

I started dieting before I was even *bas mitzvah* age. Never mind that I was skinny — everyone around me was talking about the size of their body and praising mine. Plus, all my friends were on diets.

The fad then was "fat-free is best." We would eat an entire Entenmann's fat-free cake — all chemicals probably — and feel terribly sick afterward, but also so satisfied that we were successfully watching our weight. I laugh when I think back to those stories.

My mind began creating neural pathways: "Aviva, stay skinny — it's one of the only things people really compliment you on." "Diet so you do not gain weight!" My body became my identity.

When I look back at pictures from younger me, I remember thinking, "I just need to lose five pounds..." Smile! Snap, the picture was taken, and the smile would fade back to worry. It was constant background noise in my head.

Then Hashem sent a woman in her eighties to my house for a meal one shabbos. I complimented her on her dress and how pretty she looked. She

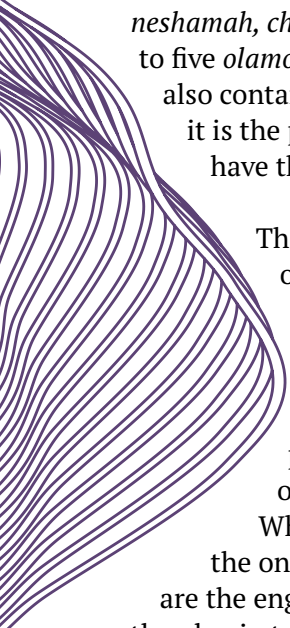
replied, "I'll be happy when I lose ten pounds..."

What a *chessed* that moment was. I realized how sad it was to be waiting to lose weight to be fully happy, and how if I didn't do something about it, I could be the same way in my eighties. I knew that this was it, it had to stop.

I learnt at that moment that the arena of thoughts and mindset is the exact area in which we have free choice. We can choose our thoughts and control how we view ourselves.

I embarked on a journey to change my thought process. *Da Es Atzmecha*, Getting to Know Yourself, was one of the first sefarim I read. It teaches that we are fundamentally a soul, and discusses how to begin identifying as one. The first step is to change our thoughts from "I am a body with a soul" to "I am a soul in a body." It all begins with thought.

**"I'LL BE HAPPY WHEN
I LOSE TEN POUNDS..."**



Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in his sefer *Nefesh HaChaim*, discusses the five parts of our soul (*nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chaya, yechidah*), and how they correspond to five *olamos*. *Olam* is translated as "world," but it also contains the word "hidden". This is because it is the place where Hashem is hidden, and we have the opportunity to reveal Him.

The world that corresponds to the part of our soul called *neshamah*, which is housed in the brain and expressed through our thoughts, is the world of *Beriya*, the world of creation. This correlation shows us that our thoughts have the power to create our actions, influence our experiences, and form our reality.

When we notice our thoughts, especially the ones that have been with us for years and are the engine behind our feelings and actions, we then begin to step into being able to choose what kind of reality we want for ourselves.

The Rambam states that thoughts are energetic impulses, constantly activated in our brains to a point we often are not even aware of them. This is why meditating is so powerful; the meditator takes control of the direction of their thoughts, thus generating another way to view their world.

Once I had awareness, I began by choosing to think, "I am a beautiful soul". At first, there were so many thoughts competing with the true one that I felt like I was in a thought-tennis match. I asked Hashem to help me and - Thank You Hashem - He did and still does to this day. It took years of work to undo the past conditioning of my mind, and it remains a constant challenge, because that is where real *bechira* lies. However, replacing my inner negative voice has given me access to experience myself in a more sincere, *emesdik* way. I stopped berating my body for its weight and started focusing my thoughts on its gifts — I have legs and arms and organs that work, b"H! — and thanking Hashem for the fact that I have a body to carry me through this world, so that I can actively choose to

ONCE I HAD AWARENESS, I BEGAN BY CHOOSING TO THINK, "I AM A BEAUTIFUL SOUL"

serve Him with joy and really feel the happiness that comes with being alive. Being in tune with spiritual truths, and working to change my thinking patterns is what liberated me from the version of myself that berated, criticized, and doubted me, none of which actually helped with my health and weight.

While the rest of my journey extends beyond the scope of this article, including becoming certified in emotional eating coaching and learning to connect with the four other parts of my soul, I feel so lucky to repeatedly choose a relationship with Hashem and my true self, my soul. I am privileged to co-create with Hashem by choosing thoughts that give me and Hashem joy and align with the Torah. 🙏

Aviva has a master's in SLP, is a yoga instructor, IIN Health Coach, and Psychology of Emotional Eating specialist. She blends Torah wisdom with somatic healing to help people heal, release and thrive, by living soul-centered lives. For more information, please email her at aviva@aberman.net



"I AM A BODY WITH A SOUL"

"I AM A SOUL IN A BODY."



TORAH

EVENTS

SHIURIM

PROGRAMS

INITIATIVES

DESIGNED WITH THE
WOMEN, GIRLS, TEENS, & MOMS
OF KLAL YISROEL IN MIND

WE'RE BUILT ON:

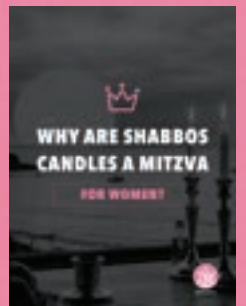
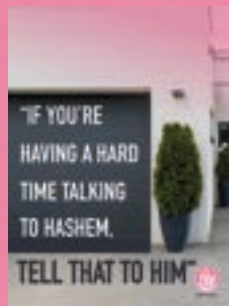
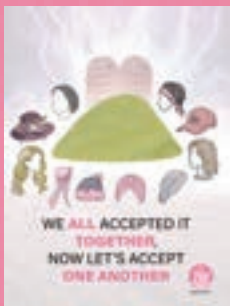
TEACHINGS
OF THE
BAAL SHEM TOV
AND OUR
TZADDIKIM

STRIVING TO LOVE
ALL YIDDEN

YEARNING
FOR GEULAH

COMMITTED TO
SEEING THE INNER
DIMENSION OF
EXISTENCE -
THE PNIMIYUS

SEEING TORAH
AND MITZVOS AS
PATHWAYS OF
CONNECTION
TO HASHEM



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