

שמע קולנו

5784

*Shema Koleinu
Tishrei 5784*

*A compilation of Torah insights, experiences, and
wisdom from the Beth Jacob community.*



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In memory of all of our loved ones who have left us legacies, stories, and life lessons to inspire us as we move through our lives.

Carole Feinberg

In honor of my grandchildren, who are writing their own life stories as I proudly watch them unfold.

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In loving memory of Mr. Sydney Fink (Shlomo ben Yisrael HaCohen), Mrs. Leah Fink (Leah bas Reuven), Mr. Sam Sheer (Shmuel ben Yisrael Noach), Mrs. Claire Sheer (Chaya Sarah bas Moshe), and Meir Labe ben Shmuel.

Doreen & Burt Wittenberg

In memory of Liam bat Asher and her great-grandmother Bluma.



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PREFACE

If this is your first time picking up a copy of *Shema Koleinu* - welcome to Beth Jacob! What you are holding in your hand is an annual compilation of Rosh Hashanah essays, thoughts and musings from members of our community, assembled with the hope of adding understanding and meaning to these special days.

Beth Jacob is the spiritual home to a wide range of congregants, and *Shema Koleinu* celebrates this mix of threads and colors which comprise the fabric of our community. Taken as a whole, this publication is a beautiful expression of the wonderfully diverse community in which we live. We are sure you will find each article both insightful and thought provoking, and it is our hope that *Shema Koleinu 5784* will serve as a source of inspiration on these Holy Days.

We would like to thank the following people for their help in crafting this publication: **Mrs. Tzina Fishman** for the publication's original design; Joel Alpert for the cover photograph and artistic design; the *Shema Koleinu* sponsors for their generosity; and the **contributing authors** for sharing their thoughts to enrich

our Rosh Hashanah experience.

May Hashem hear (*Shema*) our voices (*Koleinu*) and grant us a happy, healthy, and sweet New Year.



MY FIRST ELUL

Erika Needleman

Every year as Elul arrives, I find myself filled with memories. Eleven years ago, I was a recent college grad with a dream of learning Torah in Yerushalayim. All of my friends from my Brandeis internship had told me, “You don’t know what it means to be a Jew until you go to Israel.”

So there I was, fresh off Birthright, and after quite a providential turn of events (another story for another day), I found myself sitting in a Charedi seminary in a religious area surrounded by fifty-something young women wearing tights and long skirts. In the summer. I had major imposter syndrome with my not-quite-there attire, but I saw their faces glowing with Torah (and sweat) and I knew that I had to get what they were getting.

When I met the Director of Shearim, Rebbetzin Pavlov, we had a very candid conversation. Bluntly, I put it all on the line. “I am here to learn Torah. But I don’t want to become religious. Don’t push me.”

She grinned an all-knowing grin, sat back in her armchair, and told me, “I’m not going to push you. If anything, I’m going to have to hold you back.”

She, of course, was right. I was going to classes every moment that I could. I was at seminary all day, a Chabad class once a week, and class in the Old City at least twice a week. Anything else that sounded good, I was there, too. I was lapping it up, quenching a thirst that I never realized was there, and when those floodgates opened, I drank from every well I could find.

I remember Elul. I couldn’t count how many times I heard the words *Ani L’Dodi v’Dodi Li* (I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me). Those words were ringing in my ears all month. I was transformed by this idea of closeness to Hashem; that Elul is the time when I am gifted the relationship of my dreams.

In one of my classes, the teacher was explaining the *koach* (power) of Elul and our relationship with Hashem, and how He wants to come close to us if we’d just let Him. And I remember at that moment feeling this click. My whole life, up until that point, I had been investing in the wrong relationships. For my whole 22 years on Earth I had basically been totally unaware of Hashem. He blessed me with so much good, and had also given me many hardships and challenges. But I had suffered the slings and arrows feeling alone. I had not seen Him there pulling the strings.

In Yerushalayim, I recognized that my life had been lived on a stage, and the Director had thrust open the curtains and was staring at me, beaming, holding the strings to my mind, to my hands, and to my heart. I remember leaving the class and taking the bus back to Har Nof with my mind racing, my heart leaping. I wanted this relationship. I was going to stop making all of the wrong decisions and I was going to start making all of the right ones.

My Rebbetzin had told me I should write down what I wanted to work on in Elul. That night I wrote my list:

Shabbos

Tznius

Shomer Negiah

Kosher

Daven Shacharis every day

I proudly read my list to her the next morning.

“Um, Erika,” she said, “I meant you should write down and take on one small thing. You’re not allowed to take on everything all at once.”

She had clearly never met Erika with Clarity.

“Sorry,” I told her. “This is my list and I’m sticking to it.”

And I did.



THE LAST STEP

Elaine Alexander

We were often asked throughout the years why we became Shomer Shabbos later in life. We had been at a place for years where we kept Shabbos, except for driving to Shul. So when we stayed home, we were Shomer Shabbos.

I was fine with that. I once spoke to Rabbi Ilan and said we were semi-frum, he said something like, no such thing. If you want to know what prompted this change, read on, if you don't care, stop.

In 2010, a spot was found on the tail of Peyton's pancreas. He opted to have surgery, even though the biopsy was benign. The surgery was laparoscopic and the doc had to remove his spleen to get to the area. That explains the fist bumps, no handshakes. The spot was not cancer.

When he woke up in recovery, he was in excruciating pain and then he went into a-fib. They gave him big doses of pain medicine. The short version is, his intestines pretty much shut down from all the pain medication. He was in the hospital for three weeks, not the overnight we expected.

When he finally came home, it was with two drains. They had to be emptied often. He also had a nutrition supplement that ran in his arm. A nurse came every evening to hook it up, and I unhooked it every morning.

He had his davening paraphernalia and sometime during that three-week stay in the hospital he started wearing a kippah all the time. He continued until the day he died in 2020. There were subsequent complications and three or four trips to the ER and being admitted to the hospital, but he eventually recovered.

Sometime during this experience he decided he wanted us to have a Shabbos house. I admit I was not buying into it, but went along with it. We eventually found a house on "old" Biltmore that had a basement. He renovated the basement and that became and still is the Shabbos apartment. We could go to Shul and not violate the Shabbos.

November, 2011 we started using the Shabbos apartment.

That was the LAST STEP.



A SHABBOS TOAST AND BRACHA

*For Shabbos Rosh Hashanah
and every Shabbos of the year!*

Mira D. Bergen

Here is to:

Easy Aging

Elevation and Closeness to Hashem

To always having people around us who WANT to NOURISH us and

To always having people around us whom we WANT TO NOURISH.

Here is to the people who are not PHYSICALLY with us, however, are ALWAYS with us in our hearts, minds and souls.

Here is to good health, healthy children, healthy grandchildren, and healthy great-grandchildren, G-d willing, one day.

And here is to the Creator of the Universe, for giving us the GIFT of Shabbos, because

Without the Gift of Shabbos, we would not be in each other's lives.

So thank you, Hashem, for giving us the Gift of Shabbos and for giving ME the Gift of Shabbos #....?

L'Chaim!

On the eve of the new millennium, Mira accepted our Creator's gift of Shabbos and has been counting each one consistently ever since. She welcomes you to ask her which Shabbos she is celebrating when you see her.

Enjoy your journey!



DAWN

Bev Fermon

*There's a magical moment at dawn,
 Before the sun appears,
 Long before its rays reach the horizon.
 The black of night melts into a flat gray.
 That's all you can see.
 There is nothing but gray,
 Except, then, the gray fades back,
 Slipping behind the naked limbs of trees.
 Trunks grow fat. They move closer.
 and further away
 In 3-D.
 You think, "Wow! That was cool. I guess now
 The wonder is done."
 You look away.
 -- But when you look back
 You find
 The gray sky was not flat.
 In fact, it was tastefully textured with pink clouds.
 Bright pink!
 And the sky around them – powder blue.
 --But not for long. The clouds turn white
 And the blue becomes a backdrop
 For the branches that form a filigree of lines stretching up toward the sky.
 Then it happens.
 The tips of the branches burst into a golden crown.
 To think,
 This happens every morning,
 And I've only seen it
 Once.*



RE-FORM

Rabbi Ariel Asa

“The essence of human life is to constantly strengthen ourselves in the repair of our character traits. If not – of what purpose is life?” [the Vilna Gaon]

On a regular basis, fellow Jews whom I meet for the first time ask me something like, “So are you...Orthodox? Ultraorthodox? Chasidic? Chareidi?” They want to fit me in a box and define me by some preconceived perception of what they think a person with that label will be like. I usually respond, “I’m not a big fan of labels – I like the more simple title, ‘Jew’”.

After much contemplation, I am strongly reconsidering my standard answer and instead would like to reply “I am a reform Jew”. When the inevitable look of disbelief crosses the face of my interlocutor, I will take the opportunity to explain as follows: The dictionary definition of reform is the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, unsatisfactory, etc. Therefore my goal is to reform the Jew (myself), and I am attempting to do so by improving or amending what is wrong, corrupt, or unsatisfactory about myself.

After working extensively on becoming a reform Jew I hope to be able to claim that minimally:

Jealousy at others’ success not only doesn’t bother me anymore, but I actually feel happy when I hear good news about how much someone has been blessed with all the things I wish for myself.

The pull to think or do inappropriate things has been eliminated or at least been tempered. I will work on being in control of my negative tendencies and even my subconscious ruminations will be appropriate.

I will mentally and verbally recognize what my spouse, family, friends, and strangers do for me and will never take it for granted.

I will be in a state of happiness and focus on all the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on me. Even when challenges in health, finances, or other areas of my life are not developing in the way that I planned for my life, I will remind myself that “this is also for the best” is a fundamental principle of a Jewish outlook on life.

If, theoretically, I would master all of the above (and then some), I would contemplate

opening a reform institution in which individuals can come to focus on improving what is wrong, corrupt, or unsatisfactory in their lives.

I envision that after the initial success in my community, other communities will want to emulate this model, and soon every major Jewish community will have similar institutions for individuals who want to become 'reform Jews'. Major studies will be conducted to analyze the spread and success of this reform movement and to glean from the influence it has had on the Jewish world.

Tikun HaAdam (self-improvement) will become the new buzzword throughout the Jewish world as everyone will be vying for creative ways to implement new strategies to reach every individual in the community to convince them of the importance of this endeavor.

May the coming year be one of extraordinary re-forming of every individual and of the collective Jewish people.



PURE VIDA

Helen Gerchikov

This past summer my husband Mordechai and I got the opportunity to go to Costa Rica for our anniversary. It was an unexpected and wonderful trip. One of the things that we noticed there was that the people were incredibly friendly and used the expression *pura vida* often. Loosely translated, it means “pure life” or “good life”. We heard that phrase often, used to say “hello” “goodbye,” or even just “yeah”.

This phrase became a sort of mantra for us, one of the few Spanish ones we knew. Especially when we were asking for directions, which we did a lot. After thanking whoever helped us, we would say *pura vida* to each other, wishing each other a good life. Who needed Google translate when everything was *pura vida*?

For Shabbos we booked a hotel near a Chabad House in a town called Santa Teresa. Unbeknown to us, the hotel was owned by two Israeli brothers. We got a very pleasant surprise when we saw a mezuzah on the doorpost of our hotel room.

Friday afternoon we realized we might have a small problem. There is no *eruv* in Santa Teresa and our hotel room door locked automatically after it was shut. We couldn't carry our key with us when we went to Chabad House for Friday night services and dinner and we obviously couldn't leave our hotel room wide open.

Mordechai went to find Avi, one of the owners of the hotel, to explain the problem. They came back to our room and Mordechai asked if there would be a guard or someone on premises to let us in our room when we came back.

“What, the key doesn't work?” Avi asked. Mordechai explained about the lack of *eruv* and that we wouldn't take our key with us. Avi looked at us like we were nuts, threw up his hands and said, “I don't have anyone here at night. These crazy rules!” and he stalked off. Well, I guess the customer isn't always right. Baruch Hashem, Mordechai managed to put duct tape on the lock so the door closed, but didn't lock. Problem solved.

Our second problem that Friday afternoon occurred when we tried to call our children back in the States to wish them a Good Shabbos and give them their weekly *bracha*. Right in the middle of the conversation with one of our sons, the phone disconnected followed by a lot of Spanish words. Avi happened to be walking by (we were making the calls outside as it was better reception). Again Mordechai reached out to him and asked him what happened to our phone.

Avi listened to the Spanish issuing from it and said that we were out of minutes. It was erev Shabbos and we would not have time to go and try to get a new SIM card or to figure out how to add minutes to our card. I got a little upset that we would not be able to give our children their bracha.

Without another word, Avi took out his phone and told us to call our kids. "We have more than one child to call," we told him. "Go ahead," he said. As Mordechai was dialing, I thanked Avi profusely and asked if the calls were free. He answered in the negative, it was not free to call the States from Costa Rica on his phone.

"Oh no," I said, not wanting to take advantage, "How much do we owe you?"

"Nothing. We are all brothers," was his reply. We are all brothers, even if he didn't understand "our crazy rules."

We are all connected, all children of the same Father. He wasn't just being friendly, like our other encounters with the people of Costa Rica, he was genuine. He thought we were insane for not carrying a key on Shabbos, but that didn't stop him from helping us, his brothers.

A few weeks ago, all of our children were home. It was for a short time, 48 hours together (as everyone had their own summer schedule). But those hours were so special, we got so much *nachas* from seeing the *achdus*. Our children all have different personalities but it didn't stop them from enjoying being together and getting along (for the most part!).

In a few short weeks it will be Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Our shuls will be full of our brothers - those who come every week and those who only come once a year and everything in between. We are all children of one Father, who will get tremendous *nachas* when we have *achdus* and get along.

This is true *pura vida*, a pure life, a good life. A life together as brothers.



THE ENVELOPES

Vicki Kayser

David and I went to Israel in August 2022 for a few weeks. Part of our travels was spending several days with friends in Ramat Beit Shemesh. We made plans to go to Kever Rachel and to Chevron. We rented a car and drove to Kever Rachel, and then parked our car at the mall and took a bus to Chevron. When we returned to Ramat Beit Shemesh, I had a message from my cousin Chana in Tzefat asking me if we had been to Chevron that day.

I was trying to figure out Jewish geography and who would have seen us that knew her. Not going to happen like that. My cousin told me that she received a very weird phone call from a Chevron bus driver. He told her that some envelopes were found on his bus with her phone number on one of them. She and several siblings tried to figure this out with no luck.

Chana gave me the bus driver's name and number, and in broken Hebrew, David and our host made arrangements with him to retrieve these envelopes. He told us to meet him two days later at the Central Bus Station in Yerushalayim. He also said not to bring anything [for him] because he didn't want to 'sell' his mitzvah. We were amazed at the Israeli bus driver who was doing this incredible mitzvah of returning a lost object.

We met up with him and got the envelopes back - turns out they were full of money (more than an Egged bus driver earns in a week!), definitely ours, and all of the money was there. Did the driver find the envelopes? Did another passenger find them? How many people were involved in this story? And how did Chana get the phone call?

Let's back up in the story of our trip. We stayed with my cousin Shayna in Tzefat for Shabbos, and had called her from the bus to let her know when we would arrive. While on the phone, Shayna gave me Chana's number to make arrangements to see her family, who also lived in Tzefat. We were using my son's phone and I needed to write down the number, so David handed me a scrap piece of paper. I wrote her name and number down and gave the paper back to David.

That scrap of paper was an envelope which David put our extra money in. He thought he put them in his jacket pocket, but accidentally dropped them on the Egged bus returning from Chevron.

The Hand of Hashem is always in our lives.



TO PERSEVERENCE AND GOOD HEALTH!

Paul Carus

I want to share a health story, and I feel like this is the right time. I have always been health conscious, and I try to be on top of it as much as possible.

About four years ago, I had cancer. It happened right after I got Covid for the first time. I was at work when I noticed that something didn't feel right. At first I thought nothing of it, but when I was doing strenuous things, I started feeling pain. I suspected maybe it was a muscle sprain or strain. So I made an appointment with my primary care doctor and she did an exam. She told me based on her findings that it could be cancer.

A lot of illnesses run in my family - like kidney, heart disease, breast cancer, and diabetes. But cancer was the one thing I dreaded most. So I was very freaked out when I heard that. I made an appointment with a specialist and got set up with some of the best doctors, staff and nurses. Thank goodness it was one of the most treatable types of cancer.

My surgery went very well and I didn't have to do radiation. I have to make sure I get annual exams and MRIs, but hopefully I won't have to do it much longer. Thank G-d I had symptoms or I would've never gotten that exam. It was one of the scariest things in my life, and something I never expected to deal with as a young adult in my thirties. Especially right after getting Covid, in the early days when it was so nerve-racking because no one knew anything about it! I learned that you can experience things like that at any age, regardless of how healthy you may seem.

I have the most loving and caring friends and family who supported me through those challenges. To this day, my close friends are my everything - you really need that in this life, for the hard times, the good times, and everything in between. That's what got me through it!

It was such a *bracha* (blessing) the way it all occurred. To this day, I check myself for lumps or bumps or anything that could look not right or feel right. If you feel something off with your body, get it checked out. It may not be anything, but better safe than sorry.

The most important thing I learned from this was that I said to myself, I'm tough, strong and I'm going to get through this. I have so much in life to live for and so many things I still want to do, accomplish and flourish in. That also got me through the tough times. I'm still getting my energy back - it was really draining emotionally and mentally. But I came out even stronger. The things you are given in life sometimes are a test, and I still feel like I'm being tested at times. But I strive to be better, and I'm determined!

I wish everyone a happy, healthy, sweet New Year. May only good and great things happen that you want to happen in life. But remember that if you're going through a lot - persevere and never give up. There are ups and downs in life, but keep striving to be your best!



Dr. Moshe L. Gavant, MD

SIGNED, SEALED & DELIVERED

Thoughts on making a siyum for Maseches Gittin

Most of the students at the Academy in the sixties came from conservative or unaffiliated homes. By the time I graduated 7th grade, I had a good grasp of davening, reading and writing Hebrew, and a good exposure to Tanach and Rashi. But I had little exposure to any Mishna and Gemara.

There was no such thing as middle school in those days. For most graduates, 8th grade was going to be the pre-freshman year at Briarcliff High School. For the 1968 school year and with the encouragement of Rabbi Emanuel Feldman of Congregation Beth Jacob and Cantor Robert Ungar of Congregation Shearith Israel, I attended 8th grade at the Talmudical Academy in Baltimore. My good friends and neighbors, Ilan and Jonathan Feldman, were among the five boys from Atlanta that were going to TA that year. (The Baltimore-Atlanta connection was strong even 55 years ago).

My first exposure to the Talmud at TA was tractate Gittin. Much of the first part of Gittin deals with the disagreement between Rabbah and Rava on what portion of the divorce process must be *lishmah*, performed for the specific wife in mind. As I recall, I was not disoriented by the give-and-take of the logical arguments that played out over the first few pages of the mesechta. What stymied me for several weeks was just trying to understand what the difference was between a Rabbah and a Rava!

I did not seem to have the same problem going through the mesechta 55 years later during its recent review in the current 14th cycle of Daf Yomi (although I admit I still occasionally confuse their names and legal positions!)

The second part of the mesechta spends a lot of time on the disagreement between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Elazar on what is the critical component of the divorce process. What is the action that specifically severs the relationship between husband and wife? Rabbi Meir holds *eidei chasima karti*, the witnesses who sign on the document are critical. The document itself is less so. Rabbi Elazar holds *eidei m'serah karti*. The witnesses who deliver the document are critical. It is the wording of the document that is critical. The witnesses who sign, less so. Rabbi Elazar rules that even an unsigned *get* can be validated if witnesses attest that they saw the document delivered to the ex-wife.

I am more comfortable with the logic of Rabbi Meir. If there are witnesses' signatures on the *get* document, I can envisage the ex-wife having less difficulties if the validity of the *get* is ever called into question. I still have some trouble understanding Rabbi Elazar's hashkafic and legal viewpoint. I think it could be asking for trouble if the validity of the *get* is challenged in ensuing years and there are no signatures of the witnesses on the *get* document to attest to its legitimacy. Yet we learn toward the end of the mesechta that it is Rabbi Elazar's approach that is preferred.

I had an epiphany of sorts into Rabbi Elazar's approach as I started learning Kiddushin, the next mesechta in the Daf Yomi cycle. From a hashkafic approach, the legal process of establishing the marital bond between man and woman can be compared to the spiritual process of establishing the "marital" bond between the Ribono Shel Olam and the Jewish people.

In Gittin, we learned that marriage and divorce are legally linked by their proximity in the Torah. These opposing rituals, in their representation of the success or failure of a marital relationship, certainly are spiritually linked. Hashkafically, if the Jewish people were "married" to the Ribono Shel Olam at Har Sinai, it is reasonable to describe our current *galus*, our current exile, as a "divorce" between Him and His people.

But where is the *get* document that attests that our covenant, our marriage, has been dissolved? How do we know it is a done deal?

Well, certainly the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would seem to be a witness to that divorce. Certainly, the destruction of the second Bais HaMikdash by Titus and the Roman legions would seem to be a witness to that divorce. It is a done deal.

Not so quick.

When Moshiach comes and the final redemption is upon us, the nations of the world will declare the Jewish people have no "marital" rights to the newly rebuilt third Bais Hamikdash.

Let us examine our divorce documents.

According to Rav Meir, Nebuchadnezzar's signature is there, and right below his is Titus'. It is a done deal. According to Rav Elazar, neither signature is present. And lo and behold, Nebuchadnezzar and Titus are nowhere to be found. They have been lost to history and can no longer testify about the delivery of any so-called divorce papers from Hashem into the hands of His Jewish nation.

So indeed, in the days of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the third Bais HaMikdash, the *get* between the Ribono Shel Olam and the Jewish people will be found to be invalid, to be *pasul*, and our relationship and our marriage with Him will be renewed.

In closing, I would like to offer a bracha for 5784, by paraphrasing the words that Rabbi Elazar would recite at the conclusion of his silent *amidah* (Berachos 16b):

May it be Your will, Hashem, that You allow us to live together in love, brotherhood, and peace. May our future be good. Establish us with a good life companion and a positive and optimistic attitude in Your world. May we rise every morning and find that the yearning of our heart is to fulfill Your will. May our needs and their fulfillment come before You for the good.

G'mar chasima tova!



JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU

David Kayser

It was the final boarding call and the frazzled couple were being allowed to board the plane and take the very last two seats. They were overjoyed. They had spent over two hours at the ticket counter unraveling the mystery of a system that would not allow them to check in. Co-workers were asked to help, supervisors paged, calls were made to support, they made their own phone calls and finally - problem solved. Have a nice trip.

But when they got on the plane, someone was already sitting in the wife's seat with a valid ticket, so they were told to exit the plane. Another challenge, but it would probably be okay, because they had over eight hours until their connecting flight was scheduled to leave and two or three more flights that could get them there on time. Before they could exit the plane, a Delta pilot asked the attendant to wait while he checked with the pilot to see if he could ride in the cockpit on the "jump seat", thereby allowing one of them to sit in his seat. He came back a moment later and said they could stay and he would ride up front. They thanked him profusely and made a note of his name from his employee badge.

They returned from a wonderful trip exhausted, but in need of a vacation to recover! A few days later, the husband emailed a friend who worked for Delta and asked if there was any way he could find an email for this pilot or get in touch with him some other way. It was a few days before he received a reply with the email address, and a few more days before he wrote to thank the pilot. He reminded the pilot of that flight and shared with him some of their pre-flight experience. He explained how he got his email address and told him how much they appreciated the kindness he showed them.

A few hours later his phone rang and he answered the call from an unknown source. It was the Delta pilot. He told the passenger that he was overwhelmed by all the trouble he went through to thank him, and he added that his wife and kids were also amazed. He said that he has been flying for over 22 years and has done countless favors for others - at work and in other settings. He said that until that day, nobody had ever given him anything more than a cursory thank you, let alone gone to the trouble he went through to say thanks. He felt obligated to call and thank the passenger for thanking him!

Hakaras Hatov - recognizing and acknowledging everything good that has been done for us - is a cornerstone of our relationship with other people, and especially with Hashem. Are we polishing this cornerstone, or is it slowly becoming overgrown with moss?

Our Rabbis teach us that by accepting a *kabalab*, a resolution, we can dramatically change the outcome of the judgment we face this time of year. If this cornerstone of ours, *Hakaras Hatov*, is not polished to perfection, maybe we can resolve to thank one person a day for something they have done. And maybe we should also thank Hashem once a day for something He has done for us. With this added merit, we can look forward to a better year ahead for us and for those we come into contact with.

Thank you, Beth Jacob, for the opportunity to share this. *K'sivah v'Chasima Tova!*



HUMMINGBIRDS, A TABLECLOTH & THE RABBI'S GREEN HAT

Joel Alpert

Furiously Flapping. They never fail to mesmerize.

Every single minute, hummingbirds of many color combinations breathe in and breathe out 250 times. Every minute their tiny hearts machine-gun fire 1,200 times. Every minute, they flutter their wings up to 80 times per second (!) enabling them to go backwards, forwards, and hover midair. Flicking their w-shaped tongues 18 times per second to draw their nectar.

We hover. We draw the nectar of growing Jewishly, too. We run. We do. We race to daven. Drop off. Pick up. Men help the guy on the next street put *schach* atop their sukkah. Women show up with an aluminum foil tray of potato kugel. We slow down a good bit one day a week. Reflect. We draw a special Shabbos nectar. We let our relative stillness reflect our individual colors within a tapestry we call The Community.

Rinse with a washing cup, and repeat.

Quietly Wrapping

I don't generally put a tablecloth on my dining room table for Shabbos. It's a beautiful table that doesn't need covering. And for the longest time, I've had invitations for both meals, and open invitations to "just call us and tell us you're coming". So I didn't think much about setting the table.

During Covid's first months, Shabbos was at home. The seder was at home (for this we left Egypt?). But setting the table for my say-out-loud seder only for me was a simple and profound gesture.

I can't remember a week when I stayed at home (other than when I actually had Covid). But the tablecloth stuck. Nothing revelatory for most, but to me it has meaning.

When I set the table, it's not a Thing To Do on the TTD List for Shabbos. It's a conscious special action. I try to remain awake, particularly in anything that engages the Source of our being. I've thought the tablecloth is a covering, and the concept of *klippah* is a covering — a shell or curtain that separates the Divine spark from its natural expression. While the tablecloth separates the table from the everyday, that separation brings us closer. Our kedushah is separation. We can come together or separate within the context of kedushah.

We make choices in our everyday activities. Like hummingbirds, who remember the locations of flowers and visit 1,000 per day. We make so many choices in many moments.

When the little girl is distraught because she can't find Daddy on the men's Side, do we flutter by to help? Is picking up the cookies that somebody's kid dropped on the floor at kiddush (before they get stomped on) someone else's responsibility, or do we flutter by? Do we take action on that next-step in our spiritual journey, or do we flutter by?

Choices. Do we separate ourselves like a tablecloth, or do we draw closer together?

Curiously Lapping

When I attended Ner Hamizrach for Ariel Oami's bar mitzvah, many of the customs were different from across the street in the mothership.

Some of the imagery is different from the Ashkenazi universe. My Sefardi brothers honor the Torah in a stand-up split-casing, with a Beis HaMikdash sculpture atop. Congregants in the pews actively participate in the *shaliach tzibur's* entreaties.

When I walked into the crowded shul, Rami Hachimoff greeted me with a ready smile, and offered me his own seat. I couldn't take a chair out from under him, but spied one of two seats right upfront near Rabbi Khoshkerman.

Shortly after I sat down, a gentleman I recognized from BJA came right up to me, also equipped with a ready smile. I thought he wanted to guide me through the shul and service. Aharon Zavulunov sat in the other empty seat. Following Torah reading, we enjoyed a short conversation.

When I returned to earth after *mussaf shmoneh esrei*, Aharon pointed down with his face and eyes, in an exaggerated fashion. Look, look! At first I didn't follow. Another Sefardi custom, big gesture before the Repetition? He wants me to look down, I think... so I did.

It was a meeting of two worlds. The inside word and the outside world. Of the world's most advanced creatures, and it's simplest. The rabbi's hat was on a bench, and perched on top was a bright green gecko – he was the one running around this time. Running laps around the exquisite black felt surface of the brim. So lightweight that not one little green footprint embossed this highest of haberdashery.

I leaned over to Aharon and said, "You know I'm not familiar with all of the Sefardi customs. Is there a significance to the number of circles around the brim? Does a Sefardi minyan need to include him?"

Aharon laughed. He said, "I don't think so. But you might be able to get a discount on your Geico insurance!"

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May we all have a meaningful year of running around, resting, and getting closer.



UNSEEN MIRACLES

Helene Shleifer

2022 was an eventful year for our family. We celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, excitedly anticipated the arrival of our first great-grandchild, and on a sad note, we commemorated the second yahrtzeit of our first-born son.

It was the end of September, two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, and we were in New York to celebrate the wedding of our oldest grandson. We were hosted by a gracious, hospitable family, the Z's. They live in a beautiful home with a very comfortable guest room on the lower level.

My husband decided to go downstairs to check out the guest room. He tripped going down the stairs, and within moments he was surrounded by several Hatzala members, the local Jewish volunteer emergency response team. The men very carefully lifted him onto a stretcher and brought him to the ER.

The ER physicians performed numerous assessments as well as multiple diagnostic tests. The examinations showed the absence of broken bones or head trauma, but to everyone's surprise, the CT scan showed a swelling in the brain area with suspicious findings. We stayed in New York to celebrate the wedding, with a plan to follow the advice of the ER physician to check out the findings upon our return to Atlanta.

The wedding was joyous and amazing. We returned to Atlanta and followed up with our internist who referred us to a neurologist for further evaluation and assessment. There were no apparent neurological or physical symptoms, but as a precaution an MRI was ordered. The result of the MRI showed a benign brain tumor and he was referred to a neurosurgeon. Surgery was promptly scheduled to remove the tumor, which resulted in a very successful outcome.

This experience was life changing in many ways. My husband firmly believed he was asymptomatic of any cognitive or neurological deficits prior to the diagnosis. However, immediately post-surgery he began to notice and continues to notice marked improvement in many cognitive and neurological functions. In fact, it is entirely possible that the tumor was present and growing slowly for many years and for this reason, subtle symptoms went unnoticed.

We enter this holiday season bursting with gratitude to Hashem for all of the hashgacha pratis related to this experience, as well as for the many blessings He has bestowed and continues to bestow upon our family. I am filled with heartfelt thanks to my incredible support system, my wonderful family, our rabbis, as well as my incredible friends and community.

May we all appreciate the gifts Hashem sends our way and be cognizant and thankful for all of life's daily miracles.



OBSERVATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY COMPARABLES IN TANACH

Jay Starkman

Over the years, I have noted some fascinating examples in the modern world that echo, and help me understand, stories in the Tanach.

1. Why did the Jericho authorities pursue the spies for three days?

In the haftarah for Parshas Shelach, Rachav tells the Israelite spies who had infiltrated the city to hide in the mountain for three days until the pursuers abandon their search. [Joshua, Chapter 2]

Surely there was some secret the spies had discovered, though it's not disclosed in the text. I suspect Jericho likely had a protocol to pursue for three days. Otherwise, how would Rachav know that the chase would stop after three days? (Rashi claims that her knowledge was Divinely given.)

Similarly, the book, "The Escape Artist," describes the experiences of two Slovakian Jews, 26-year-old Alfred Weczler and 20-year-old Rudolf Vrba. They were assigned to a fenced-in work detail outside the electric fence surrounding Auschwitz. When someone escaped, the Germans would look for him for three days, then call off the search. The Jews knew this and managed to hide out in a hole in the ground at the work site for three days. After dark on the third night, they came out of hiding and escaped.

Both Tanach and Holocaust history refer to the same three days before giving up a search. The Slovakian Jews tried to warn the world about the death camp, revealing terrible detailed secrets, and were largely ignored. We don't know details about what the Jericho spies revealed, except that Yehoshua accepted their report.

Can it be mere coincidence that Jericho and the Germans both pursued escapees for three days before calling off a search?

2. What was the strange selection process for the men Gideon would lead into battle?

In Shoftim [Judges 7:5], Hashem tells Gideon to take his men to drink water. Those who "lap the water like a dog" should be rejected from a war party.

I never understood this test until I read Primo Levi's "The Drowned and the Saved." He describes a scene in Auschwitz where a daily pot of soup is brought into the barracks. Conflict among the prisoners resulted in the pot overturning and spilling on the floor. He describes how some prisoners bent down and lapped the soup off the lice-infested filthy floor. I then understood the command to Gideon. These men had lost their humanity.

3. How did the *korbanos* (offerings) of the 12 tribes differ?

We read in Bamidbar concerning *korbanos* [Numbers, Chapter 7] of the 12 Tribes that appear identical. Rabbis have long tried to explain that each *korban* was different. It's hard to accept this because there is not any difference discernible from the text.

I collect musical scores. Many recording titles are duplicates, yet each performance is different. In a classical piece, each conductor will set a different timing (faster or slower), play louder or softer, emphasize brass or strings. Singing is even more variable, as each singer has a unique voice and different abilities.

If you looked at the sheet of music text, it would just be a collection of notes and lyrics, and each "duplicate" would appear identical - until you heard the actual performance. Like sheet music, the Torah can only describe the *korbanos*. While they appear identical, we can only imagine how the delivery differed. Had a video been taken, we could see how different they actually were.

If we think about it, we would find many other instances of real life experiences being forecast in Tanach, demonstrating the wisdom of the Torah and ability of people to recognize patterns and learn from the past.



I AM SORRY

Anonymous

The morning after I heard of your death, only nine people showed up to our minyan. I don't mean at the beginning; I mean even at Yishtabach. I don't remember ever not having a minyan before, not even in the socially-distanced, fully-masked, bimah with a mechtza days.

It took 15 more minutes to find someone to sit in and allow us to continue. Fifteen minutes to think about a missing man. Fifteen minutes to reflect on our loss. Fifteen minutes for me to realize that you never came to our minyan and I never missed you, until today. I am sorry.

It's not that I didn't know you and your family. It is not that I didn't ever see you. I did see you and of course I politely nodded at you and said hello or wished you a Good Shabbos. I am sorry that I never reached out to you, I never asked you how you were doing, I never asked you to join us for a meal, I never cared. I never cared about what I might have to offer you or even what you might have to offer me.

Were you a talented singer, a good story teller, a charming conversationalist? Did you have any novel insights into the Torah or Halacha? Did we share any hobbies or interests? Now I will never know and I'm sorry.

I am in turmoil about what I need to do. Do I care enough to expose my fragile self to someone outside of my tiny comfort zone? Do I appreciate what I can offer someone else? Can I take the multitudes of kindnesses that have come my way and pass them on to others?

Do I dare myself to make a difference? Or do I do nothing and face the accusations on Judgement Day? What will I be able to say then? I don't think saying "I am sorry" will suffice!



MORE TZEDAKAH, MORE SHALOM

Yehudah Levine

I was hesitant to share this story publicly, but when I saw in Pirkei Avos 2:7 the link between tzedakah and shalom, I realized that an increase of shalom is a worthwhile endeavor.

Many years ago, I was invited to attend a fundraising dinner for a *kiruv* organization that I was involved with at that time. I didn't have the funds available, but was encouraged to attend as per the concept, "The more people, the more glory to the Melech". The Rabbi told me that whenever I had the funds, I could make the donation.

Several years passed, but I never got around to paying that obligation. However, it was always in the back of mind, and it bothered me that I owed the donation. This past June, my stepsister and her husband were the dinner honorees. I realized that this was the perfect opportunity to pay my previous obligation. Even though our budget was tight, I remembered the famous *pasuk* that is read on Shabbos HaGadol:

"Bring all the tithes to the Temple storehouse, that there should be food in My house. Please test Me in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I do not open for you the windows of the Heavens and pour upon you endless blessing." (Malachi 3:10)

Rabbeinu Yona discusses this concept in Pirkei Avos 3:13 by citing Ta'anis 9a which states that this is the only matter in which you can test Hashem. Rabbeinu Yona elaborates further in his commentary to this Mishna:

"Giving charity is the same as separating tithes. Giving more charity increases your wealth. Your heart should not restrain you from giving lavish gifts to the poor, for fear of diminishing your assets and leaving yourself lacking. You should realize that giving charity makes you deserving of wealth."

With this *pasuk* in mind, I not only donated what I owed, I also added additional funds in honor of my stepsister and her husband.

Two days later, I get an email at work from the partner of my division. It stated that he wanted to recognize me for "everything that I do for my company." It was a cash award that I even forgot existed. In my 20 years at my company, I got this award only once, and it was at the end of a big project. This time, it seemed "totally random", and I certainly was not expecting it.

When I saw the amount, I was pleasantly surprised. Taxes were going to be taken out of it so I applied my 20% rule to figure out the net amount. Thirty seconds after I made that calculation, I realized that it certainly was not random. The net amount equaled - to the penny - the amount I donated two days earlier. I immediately got the chills and experienced a true "Hashem Moment".



BARUCH HASHEM

Chantza Lawrence

It's important for all of us to remember that everything comes from Hashem. I find it really makes challenges a lot easier to deal with knowing that Hashem guides everything. The things that some of us say are "lucky" are actually miracles from Hashem. Bitachon (faith) goes a long way!

At the end of May 2023 we went up north for my grandson's wedding. We stayed

for a week at a friend's house. It was wonderful until I slipped in the shower before Shabbos and it was VERY painful. Though I was in pain I didn't think anything was broken. We opted not to go through the medical system there as it was shortly before Shabbos. We decided to wait until we got back to Atlanta to see a doctor. Our flight was that Sunday.

Chaverim, a volunteer chesed organization, and my friend's strong son-in-law (and family who were also visiting that Shabbos), got me up the steps in a wheelchair to the first floor and to the car.

When we arrived at the airport I was met with a wheelchair. My husband Yehuda went to return the rented car while an airport attendant brought in our luggage to

be checked in. She asked for my ID. I knew I had it but couldn't find it. I must have gone through my wallet and purse a dozen times. The attendant said TSA would never allow me on the plane without ID. Here's where bitachon comes into play. I was concerned, but not crazy. I said, okay Hashem, it's all up to you. We'll do what we can! If they didn't let us on the plane we had no idea what we would have done. Not going on the plane was just not an option.

Yehuda had his ID, his driver's license. After TSA finished interviewing both of us and checking our luggage very thoroughly they said we could go on our flight.

We were flying back on a small airplane whose flights are not usually as smooth as larger planes. This flight was very smooth.

My wonderful son-in-law picked us up at the airport. I wanted to go to the hospital ER and be put in an induced coma for 3-4 weeks until the pain stopped. I knew the chance of that happening was slim to none so I agreed to go to an Urgent Care facility and be seen a lot faster than in a hospital ER.

At Urgent Care, a doctor saw me, gave me a shot for the pain, and took x-rays. Nothing was broken or fractured but it would be a slow recovery.

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We went home and I went straight to bed. Yehuda started unpacking and looking for my ID. He couldn't find it. I was speaking to my friend about my week's itinerary and remembered that I put my ID in my dress purse with my phone, lipstick and tissues for the wedding. We checked the purse and there it was in the zipper compartment.

The next morning Yehuda went to the pharmacy to get my meds as the pharmacy was closed the night before. He came home agitated. He couldn't find his ID (license). After looking all over for it and trying to figure out where it might be, it was not found. We thought it might be at Urgent Care since they took his ID because I didn't have mine. We called to see if they had it. They didn't. My very special daughter asked the last time we saw it and it was at Urgent Care. I then remembered that they returned my medicare cards. Yes, his ID was with my medicare cards in my wallet.

My tale is not over in the saga of the Lawrences. The day after we got home I got called for Jury Duty.

Fortunately I am exempt since I am over 70 years old. But of course an affidavit had to be filled out with my ID, which I now had. I'm glad Hashem has a sense of humor and made me laugh and I hope that He laughed too.

The way I see it is that Hashem was with me and guiding every step of this journey. There were so many miracles. How else could I have gotten on a plane without identification?

Not so bad after all. Bitochon goes a long way.

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ZAIDY AND SURVIVAL

Shayna Krohn

I am not a writer by any means and if you know me, this is not something that you would ever expect me to do. With that being said, I feel like if I am going to share a story, now would be the time.

My Zaidy Joseph Bistritz was born in the town of Carlibaba in Bukovina, Romania on January 18, 1927. He was the first son in a family with three older sisters and later a younger brother. He lived in Carlibaba until they moved to Ermihalyfalva when he was about five years old.

In May of 1944, my Zaidy, his family, and the whole town of 400 families were taken in cattle cars to Auschwitz. From there he was bounced around to Buchenwald, the town of Zeitz, back to Buchenwald, to Sachsenhausen and finally to where the story happens, Ohrdruf, in February of 1945.

Ohrdruf is the coldest part of Germany and when he arrived at the camp they assigned him to the top row of his bunk, which was not the prime spot to keep warm, next to another man. They didn't know each other and there was a mindset of mind your own business, keep your nose down, and don't get into trouble. After some time, they started to talk with each other and he learned this man was also Jewish and spoke Yiddish, the main language.

My Zaidy started to notice that this man was acting very strangely. He was always turning away from him and hiding under his blanket. Even though they started to talk, he didn't ask any questions. Finally, once they shared more of themselves with each other, the man realized he could confide in my Zaidy. And as my Zaidy said, "It changed my life completely at that time."

Somehow this man had been able to smuggle in a *tefillin shel rosh*, and before he went out each day, he would put it on and say Shema. Since they were on the top bunk, which was not a desirable location, there weren't any other people who were close to them. This is precisely why the man chose this spot, so no one would be able to see what he was doing with the tefillin.

The man started to share the tefillin with my Zaidy, allowing him to put on the tefillin first and then putting them on himself. On Sundays they often didn't have to work, and they would both get up early to put on the tefillin. One early Sunday


morning Zaidy was wearing the tefillin when all of a sudden he found himself in some sort of trance. The place he saw in his trance was the total opposite of where he actually was - it was as if he had been transferred to a utopia. The sun was shining, there were women pushing carriages, children playing and he thought to himself, "What is this place?!" It felt so real, like he was actually there.

He felt that the incongruity of being in the camp, putting on tefillin, and the desire to be free combined made him see this place. The vision had such a positive effect on him and it was so vivid that from then on, when he was in a bad place, he was able to conjure up these images of utopia. “No matter how bad things were, I would check out of that place,” he would tell us. He says that was his secret to survival - mentally and physically - through the war.

My Zaidy never learned this man's name and unfortunately he didn't survive. As Joseph Bistriz's granddaughter, I want to thank this anonymous man for helping my grandfather survive and be able to go on and have four children of his own, 19 grandchildren, and 28 great-grandchildren.

May he live and be well for many more healthy, happy years, and get nachas from his family!



| KLI: Weissner - Buchwald | | Jude | HAMM: No. 16.806 |
|--|-------------|--|------------------|
| Häftlings-Personal-Karte | | | |
| Fam.-Name: <u>WISSNER</u> Vorname: <u>JOSEF</u> Geb. am: <u>18.12.27 in: Kribabab</u> Stand: <u>led.</u> Kinder: <u>keine</u> Wohnort: <u>Frankfurt a. M., Bismarckstr.</u> Strasse: <u>Kobuth Lajos 11</u> Religion: <u>pos.</u> Staatsang: <u>UNGARN</u> Wohnort d. Angehörigen: <u>Leban, Hatz</u> | | Überstellt am: <u>2.1.1941</u> an KLI: <u>Buchenwald</u> am: an KLI: am: an KLI: am: an KLI: am: an KLI: | |
| Eingewiesen am: <u>15.11.44</u> durch: <u>Sag- und 7. Auschowitz</u> in KLI: <u>Buchwald</u> Grund: <u>Polit. Jüder (Jude)</u> Vorstrafen: <u>keine</u> | | Entlassung: am: durch KLI: mit Verfügung v: | |
| Strafen im Lager: | | Strafvermerk | |
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| KL-Strich: <u>43 - Bogen</u> | | Sicherheits- u. Einsatz: I.T.S. FOTO No. 4451 Körperliche Verfassung: | |
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A TRIBUTE TO JONATHAN LEVIN, Z”L

Davida Levin and Rebecca Levin-Carroll

Ben Zoma says: “Who is wise? He who learns from every person.” – Pirkei Avot 4:1

The man who graduated college and got married in 1968 was a wonderful young man. Fifty-four years later, he was still wonderful, but significantly changed. Jonathan inspired us by being willing to alter his thoughts, expectations, and actions based on what he learned. He knew that academic achievement without practical application -- that knowing without using -- was a waste of learning.

Jonathan’s Conservadox family encouraged Jewish communal engagement and academic achievement. Both of his parents were educators, and he envisioned a similar family, with a career as a university math professor. After completing his Vietnam-era Army obligation, although community and study would remain the basis of his value system, life took him down a different path. He reluctantly traded the world of abstract algebra for software design. He became less a solo theorist and more of a collaborator. He formed solid relationships with teammates, who respected his intelligence and loved him despite his reputation as a curmudgeon.

Our family grew to include Rebecca and Shana. During those years, Jonathan’s twin brother David’s rabbinical studies influenced us. As David shared his growing knowledge, our home observance increased. The choice to join Beth Jacob when we moved to Atlanta in 1980 was a turning point that led us to become shomer Shabbos. However, we lived five miles away. Jonathan’s Torah studies so ignited his desire to put that learning into practice that for several weeks, he and Shana walked to shul on Shabbos in the Georgia heat.

Recognizing their compulsion to literally walk the talk, we moved to a home in Toco Hills. Jonathan went from Shabbos-only davening to become Gabbai of the daily minyan. A relative once bet on a horse named Tenacious because it reminded her of Jonathan. She was right!

Jonathan embraced serious Torah learning, beginning with Yesodei HaTorah, then graduating to Daf Yomi. By his third Daf Yomi cycle, he could occasionally fill in when his rebbe was absent. After retiring, he added Rabbi Binyomin Friedman's weekday Gemarah classes and Rabbi Foxbrunner's Sunday Semichas Chaver class. Our nightly conversations with Shana in Brooklyn became livelier; all she had to do was ask, "So, Dad, what did you learn today?" and he'd expound enthusiastically!



Immersed in his learning, Jonathan simultaneously focused on communal activities. He was a quiet doer of whatever needed to be done. Sybil's BJ computer not cooperating? Chevra Kadisha needs members? Torah Day School, of which he was the first Board Treasurer, is constructing its first computer lab?

Call Jonathan! He served two terms as shul President under both Rabbis Feldman, and considered them to be his greatest role models in how to interact with people and live Jewishly.

Patience did not come easily to Jonathan. An early heart attack taught him to let go of petty annoyance. Diabetes, kidney failure and dialysis added to the lesson. His calm acceptance of his situation while awaiting a transplant amazed us. This mellowing of Jonathan's demeanor was perhaps his most striking transformation. Some of our dear friends had nicknamed him Mr. Grumpy. Yet during shiva, the most consistent comments cited the bright smile and warm greeting he extended to everyone he met. Well, nearly everyone; he razzed the teenaged boys because, he said, they needed to know that they were cared about and noticed. Working with volunteers at shul required a change also. Patience and kindness, he realized, were the key to cooperation and success.

As a parent, he routinely changed his behavior as he learned about, and from, his children. Rebecca relished being teased and bantering with him, but teasing made Shana cry. So, he learned to express himself in two "love languages" because he had two very different daughters. One flourishes within a mostly Jewish world, while the other has become an ambassador for Judaism in the secular world. What Jonathan learned about his daughters engendered relationships of deep affection and respect with them both. He welcomed sharing himself with and learning from a wider world of humanity.

There is a cephalopod called a chambered nautilus that, over its lifespan, creates an ever-expanding, multi-compartmented shell. Left behind when the creature dies, the shell is a poetic metaphor for a lifetime of striving toward one's potential. We had in Jonathan a Master Class in learning from everyone and applying that learning to personal growth.

He leaves a precious legacy of dedication to becoming the best person he could be.



A TRIBUTE TO HERSCHEL SIEGEL, Z”L

Rachel Trilokekar

Once, I stopped at the Spicy Peach to get a panini sandwich. The young man behind the counter prepared my food with a friendly disposition. I learned that his name was Herschel. Later, when I went to open the plastic container to enjoy my sandwich, I noticed a handwritten note scrawled in Sharpie that read, “Have a beautiful day! :-)” The kind gesture was simple, yet it made me smile and appreciate the extra effort he had taken. Each time I went to Spicy Peach and Herschel was there, I continued to find these notes on my receipts or sandwich box. I came to appreciate the upbeat air about him that made everyone feel good.

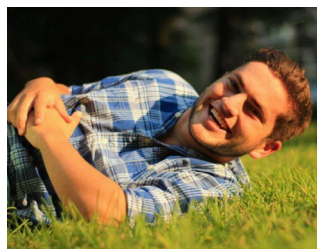
One particular day, I visited the market on erev Shabbat to buy a few things. As I approached the counter to have my items rung up, a line formed behind me. We all waited when suddenly, Herschel came rushing out from the back room to assist us. I greeted him and inquired about how he was doing. He looked overwhelmed as he replied, “That was the most stressful bathroom break ever! Knowing people were waiting, I didn’t like it at all!” I smiled in reassurance and said, “It must feel good to be needed...Thank you for being here for us.” Herschel paused, looked at me, and said, “I’m needed...Wow. You just gave me a mental shift. Thank you for that!” He relaxed and his happy demeanor returned.

I thought to myself that of all the many times I said something like this to cashier workers when they would tell me how they can’t wait to finish their shift, many didn’t get it. They didn’t understand what I meant; that everywhere we are, we are needed. We have a unique purpose to fulfill. But Herschel, he got it. And it impressed me that a young adult could understand and appreciate this message. From our many repeated yet brief interactions at the market, I had the impression that Herschel cared to live life fully “alive.” He wanted to notice the small details, to enjoy them. And he wanted to make a difference in the way that he could.

After a while, I stopped seeing Herschel, and the personal handwritten notes on my sandwiches and receipts ceased. And though everyone who works at the market is kind, Herschel’s absence was felt.

One day, I received an email and was shocked to hear of Herschel’s tragic death. When I went to the shiva to offer my condolences to his family, other people who had been there mentioned his handwritten notes on their sandwiches. Apparently, he did this for many. “He felt people needed this,” his mother confided. And he was right.

Herschel's absence will be felt deeply. Not just the notes he wrote, but the intention behind the notes; the purpose he was filling in showing others that he cared in his own personal way.



This reminded me of how irreplaceable each individual is - how unique and beautiful, a blooming flower in Hashem's garden. We often forget about our significant worth, but it is an undeniable truth. At this very moment there are people who benefit from your existence—the essence of YOU, every single day! No one can take your place. You make a difference just by being who you are! You are loved and valued.

Because people often hesitate to express their appreciation for one another, we may not always recognize our worth. However, we can find comfort in knowing that every ounce of effort that we put into life—our struggle to rise above our challenges, to hope for the good, to look for the good, to pray, and to give of ourselves—is exactly the impact that Hashem created us to make. This empowering thought is a testament to G-d's faith in us.

In Herschel's memory, we can make it a habit to actualize our purpose by looking for what is good and positive in each person while finding opportunities to give of ourselves to others. We must remember to be there for family and friends, yes. But, like Avraham Avinu who sought to connect to even strangers and recognize their worth, we also have to remember those who are not so close to us.

Whether it's the cashier or customer in front of us, an elder in need, a child or a neighbor who is isolated, the list goes on. We can make a difference in someone's life just by noticing them. G-d puts in front of us individuals who need what we have to offer. And that's powerful, because it means that He believes in us. By embracing this profound truth, we can live with true passion and purpose, knowing that the world will never be the same without us.



REMEMBERING ALLAN SCHER, Z"l

Marcy Kalnitz



My beloved father, Allan Irwin Scher z"l, Eliyahu ben Avraham Wolf, left *olam hazeh* this past year on 12 Nisan 5783. His *levaya* was the day before erev Pesach (13 Nisan). Nisan is a joyous time and while *halacha* limits eulogizing, it leaves room for positive words and inspirational lessons from the life of the deceased. What follows are excerpts from what I shared at the *levaya*:

In one of my favorite Tehillim, 34 (לד), there are three pasukim that beautifully describe who my father was as a person.

מי האיש החפץ חיים אהב ימים לראות טוב - *"Who is the man who desires life, who loves days of seeing good?"*

נצר לשונך מרע ושפתך מדבר מרמה - *"Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit".*

סור מרע ועשה טוב בקש שלום ורדפהו - *"Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it".*

My father was someone who saw the good in everyone – he had an *ayin tov* – a good eye. Interestingly, he had poor eyesight and cornea issues throughout his life. Yet while his physical vision was murky, he clearly saw the good in all things.

Dad was kind-hearted and he had a positive outlook on life. As my siblings and I sat and recollected, we could not come up with even one time where our father spoke disparagingly of others. My father always chose to do the right thing. He was honest, patient, reliable, and committed. He was a pursuer of peace – he often served as the mediator to bring shalom, at home or elsewhere. And he and mom were the model of shalom bayis for their children and their friends.

Dad had endless patience for everyone and everything. And I can't help but reflect as we are about to tell the story of our most humble prophet and leader Moshe, who has a central role in the Pesach story, that our father too, was a quiet, humble man who did not like to be in the spotlight. Everything he did was behind the scenes, under the radar. He never spoke about himself, despite all his accomplishments, as he had no need for accolades or recognition. So... is it a coincidence that he left us with one day of *shivva* to share our memories of him?

My father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's five years ago. As he began to lose his memory, I wanted to share with him so many things before he couldn't remember any more. This way he could read the letter as many times as he wanted to, even if each time it seemed new. What follows is the letter I wrote to my father. As someone who has been to many

funerals, I urge you to tell your loved ones how you feel about them while they are still alive and well. Don't wait until it is too late.

June 20, 2021

Dear Daddy,

I know you are struggling with your memory, and I am sure that is scary and frustrating. Please know that we love you, we are here for you, and we will take good care of you. I wanted to write down a few thoughts so that you may read them over and over in case you forget. The first and most important thing is that I love you very much and I am so appreciative of everything you have done for me over my lifetime! Hashem truly blessed me when he gave me to you and mom. Some people are born into families, but I was chosen and hand-picked by Hashem especially for you, and you were chosen especially for me. I am beyond grateful for my wonderful childhood and the years of your support, love, and guidance. You taught me to be an independent, kind, and honest person. You gave me every opportunity to expand my horizons through education and extra-curricular activities. You switched me to a Jewish school when I asked. You sent me to summer camp (where I met my future husband). You took our family on amazing vacations to see Hashem's wonders and the broader world around us.

I was proud to go to your alma mater and be a Rambling Wreck from GA Tech just like you, and proud of your long career at IBM, even though we still don't know exactly what you did there! You were always the "go to" for family, friends, and community when we needed computer or technology assistance, and you helped us with calm and patience. Thank you for being a fun, hands-on father and an amazing grandfather. You attended all your grandchildren's school functions, sporting events, and activities which meant the world to them. Samuel, Shira, and Noah are so grateful to have grown up down the street from you and were blessed to spend almost every Shabbos of their lives together with you and Bubbie.

I also want to share how in awe I am of your spiritual growth. I remember when you began davening on a regular basis, and then attending Chumash and Gemara classes at the Kollel. Every step in your growth was purposeful and meaningful. It was evident Torah learning brought you great joy. I was so proud when you were President of Beth Jacob. You humbly and effectively took the leadership role – an example I would later follow at TDSA because of you.

Your whole family loves you so much. Please know that we are going to take good care of you!

With love and great appreciation,

Marcy

It has been almost six months since our father left us. His place at the Shabbos and Yom Tov table is vacant and there are so many things about him that we miss more than words can express. Dad was a true role model and inspiration for his family and community. The gifts, the lessons, and the memories that he left us will help us keep going. My sweet daddy made the world a better place!



WHAT MY FATHER TAUGHT ME

*And what I remember 50 years later and
will never forget*

Allen H. Lipis

My father Leo Lipis (Aryeh Leib) died more than 50 years ago and still I recall the stories he told me and the advice he gave me. On my dresser at home I have a photo of him when I was ten years old and my sister seven years old. That picture reminds me of him every day. Here is but a sample of what he taught me.

When I was about 6 years old, I lived in Connecticut, and during a snowy, cold winter I went sledding down a very large hill for several hundred yards. One day, my father joined me on the hill, and on my small sled we flew down the hill with me on top of my father. It was breathtaking and I insisted on going back up the hill for another ride.

My father said to me, "The hill is too much for me. You are better at this than I am. You'll have to go up the hill by yourself. I can't do this again." At my tender age, my father gave me confidence that I could do something better than he could. Of course, that is a six-year-old mental conversation, but that confidence helped a very shy young boy, and that confidence is what I have passed on to my children.

The other day at lunch, we had a discussion about security for our homes. We have a security system, as do other families in our neighborhood, but it reminded me what my father said about his home that was not nearly as nice as the ones in our neighborhood.

He said, "I don't expect a burglar to break into my home, and if he did, he won't find anything of value. When he's done, he will probably leave me \$5." I laugh every time I tell that story for it reminds me of the optimistic spirit my father had about life. I try not to worry about things that are unimportant.

My father worked for U.S. Bronze Sign Company, and he would install the yahrzeit plaques in synagogues and bronze signs outside of banks. Once he was on a ladder working solo when he fell off of it, broke his pelvis, and shattered the bones in his left wrist. He was laid up in a hospital for weeks and never complained.

After he recovered almost completely, and for the rest of his life, he never felt regret about what happened. He merely said it was his fault for not having a helper to support his ladder, and he lived with and accepted his mistake. He just moved on.

Years later, he settled his monthly disability insurance for a lump sum and it was enough to buy his one and only home. He saw his accident as an event that had a

positive result. When something bad happens, it might just turn out to be more valuable down the road than you think.

My father was always available to drive someone who needed a ride to go somewhere, or to take my mother wherever she needed to go. My mother never drove, and my father never said no to these requests. It taught me to do the same for my family.



One time on a Sunday, my family took an hour subway ride to Central Park in Manhattan. My father was wearing a suit and tie, nice shoes and his watch. As we walked past a small pond, I saw a woman with her very young child near the edge of the pond. The young boy slipped and fell into the pond and could not swim.

The woman did not move to help her son and only yelled, "Save my boy. Save my boy!" There was no one else around, so without thinking, my father jumped into the pond up to his chest and hauled the boy to safety. He didn't ask the woman for anything, although she offered to pay to dry clean his clothes. He went home in his wet clothes, and from that day on my father was my hero, and he remains my hero still.

He taught me that if there are no men around, be that man.

I was in shul this Shabbos, and I was given an *aliyah* because my father's *yahrtzeit* occurs soon. When someone asked me about it, we both remarked that the memory of our fathers is as if they were here a few days ago.

May you feel the same way about a loved one who is no longer with you.



REMEMBERING JACK SHENK, Z"l

Paul Shenk

Excerpted from the eulogy I gave at my father's funeral.

My Dad was an active member of the community and everybody loved him. He never spoke *loshon hora* about anyone, had a calm demeanor, and was always excited to share his passion of music and volunteerism.

My Dad was an amazing father with great *middos* (character traits). He was sweet, honest, a great advisor, a drummer, dancer, bird watcher, and fun loving. He was cherished by his many friends and business associates. He was a writer, an entertainer, a *baal chessed* (full of kindness) and was involved with lots of volunteer work during his life.

He really was a role model to his kids, grandkids and great-grandkids and showed us how to live one's life to the fullest, with passion and integrity. Most of all, his commitment to Judaism, along with Mom, a'h, resulted in his brood - 3 kids, 8 grandkids and 24 great-grandkids all being Jewish and involved in their Judaism. What a great legacy.

Music and dancing were Dad's big passions and they were a big part of his life. He was a life-long drummer, since he was 13, and Dad and Mom put on a music program for Seniors at the Jewish Home for 25 years. Together they would dance with the seniors in wheelchairs and get everyone up and dancing to the beats.

Listen to this amazing occurrence. We all know that Hashem is in charge, and as I read the Torah portion the week of his passing, I was amazed to find the one and only reference to drums and dancing in the entire Chumash (Beshalach 15:20), when Miriam led the Israelites with drums and dancing after the crossing of the Yom Suf. Only Hashem can script that! Wow!

Not only that, but Dad loved to feed and watch birds, a hobby that Ilana and I have adopted over the last few years. The Shabbos before he passed away was Shabbos Shira, because of the *shira* (song) sung at the sea. It is a custom to feed the birds for this Shabbos to reward them for two ideas: one is that they ate the '*mon*' that was left out in the desert by two people to cause trouble and two, because the birds sang along with the Shira. I take these messages as clear messages that Dad is being welcomed by G-d to Olam Habah with dancing, drums, and singing birds.

Our most special time was spent together in synagogue. Dad and I have been sitting next to each other in Shul for the last 60 years. 60 years of commitment to prayer, together, as a father and son. We were not a shomer Shabbos observant family growing up, but going to shul almost every week, as a kid, with my dad, first to Shearith Israel, and then switching to Beth Jacob in 1969, was due to my dad's dedication and commitment to raise his family in a Jewish way. I attribute going to shul on Shabbos every week with my dear father as the reason that I am who I am today.

I want to share with you two special personal experiences. Sitting next to Dad in Shul, I heard him pray and sing. Every year, on Rosh Hashanah, Dad had a special tune he added during the prayer Unesaneh Tokef, one of the most powerful prayers in the entire liturgy, in which he would harmonize with the Chazzan.

"B'Rosh Hashanah Yekasevun..." and he would sing, "Yikaseeeevun..." "Oh B'Yom Kippur Yechasamun..." and he would sing "Yichaseeemoon". And this gets repeated several times. It was his signature moment. I so enjoyed listening to him enjoy this prayer.



I had an idea to honor Dad with the special Pesicha Aliyah and to go up with him, as a father/son team, to open the Ark during this prayer of Unesaneh Tokef. It turned out to be a life shattering experience shared between us and G-d. While listening to the great cantors we had over the years, including Yonasan Gavant and Yaakov Cohen, I did this for the last 20 years up until he stopped being able to come to shul. I think he did it with me until he was 92, holding onto the *shtender*, singing "Yikaseeeevun..."

That aliyah was priceless to me and I looked forward to it every year. In 2006, I tore my Achilles in August, one month before Rosh Hashanah. With Hashem's help, I made it up those steps to be next to my Dad on one leg and crutches. So meaningful.

I may have been the only person in shul who did not mind long sermons. It was during those sermons that I held on to my dad's right hand. I felt the softness of his skin, the kindness, the love, the gentleness and his spirit. I played with his 'bent finger', his fingernails, which were always immaculate. I wrapped my tzitzit around his fingers. This was my special time with my Dad.

My Dad is the reason I stayed close to Judaism and with my wife, my friends and my Beth Jacob family. I became observant and created, with the help of my wife and Hashem, a beautiful, devoted and spiritual family. Dad, I know you are now holding the hand of my Mom and that Hashem is holding both of you.

I learned from my Dad that one needs to cherish the time with their loved ones. We are all so busy and it so easy to forget to stop and spend that quality time. Shabbos is that oasis in time that Hashem made for us to commune with Him and our families.

I recommend that you take your child out of Shabbos program every now and then and hold them tight in Shul. It's a special time to feel the love for each other and to give them your positive energy. Sit with your elderly parent and hold their hands tight. It will change your life. It changed mine.

Dad, I love you so much. I ask you for forgiveness if I did anything to offend you or hurt you. You should be very proud of the family that you nurtured. May your *neshama* have an *aliyah*.



LIVING LIKE ZAIDY

Sarah Faygie Berkowitz

I wrote these thoughts in haste and lingering emotions, days after the levaya, as a small glimpse into a giant man. No life can be summed up on mere pages, but I believe these few details and lessons are worth sharing.

On 19 Elul this year, my Zaidy - Yoel ben Simcha Leib (Yale Tolwin) - passed away. He was 97 years old.

Zaidy was a stunning example of taking life by the horns, not sweating the small stuff, and wanting the world for those he loved while caring little for himself.

I was with him in Detroit for what would turn out to be his last few days, and got to spend hours by his bedside as he recovered from hip replacement in the hospital. In that one night at the hospital, I was amazed over and over at how he would go from dozing to engaged with any medical professional who came in. He would call them by name, thank them, and sometimes crack a joke. The tech who came in close to midnight and woke him in a loud voice saying she was there to take his vitals was told, "Sure, as long as you give 'em back!"

That was Zaidy. Humor, always. Kvetching, never.

When our daughters visited him last week, he would only eat his hospital meal if they would also partake of the food. His demeanor lit up when his grandkids were around, and by some miracle of love, he kept track of every grandchild and great-grandchild and what they were up to in life. He honed in on their skills and talents, and asked targeted questions that showed he was thinking about them.

Let me take you back a little further.

Yale Tolwinsky was born in Bialystok, and at age 5 emigrated to America where his family settled in Milwaukee. At age 17, he was drafted into the navy, where he served for several years, holding onto his Yiddishkeit even when faced with blatant anti-semitism.

As a young husband and father, he chose to go into teaching to ensure that he could keep Shabbos throughout his career. He was known to his students as Mr. T, and they loved him - the tough exterior quickly fading away to reveal a heart that was big enough for every student and every person he met. He taught sick kids who were hospitalized and rough and tough kids from the streets in Milwaukee. They were all respected and taught to be their best.

Shabbos afternoons people of all ages would flock to his house after Shul to talk politics, Israel, family, and to get wise advice from Zaidy. I thought I knew my Zaidy pretty well, but I learned so much more at his funeral and from stories shared since then.

His go-to Purim costume was a blonde wig and fur shawl - he was an old lady every year, and you could spot his 6-foot-plus bedecked frame a mile away. He loved making people smile, and had an ever present gleam in his eye.

Zaidy always gardened. For his 90th birthday, his kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids convened at his house and rolled up our sleeves to 'help' him with his massive garden. He sat on a lawn chair grinning as he watched us city folk trying to make things better. It probably took him weeks to get things back to how they should be, but while we were there, he was all smiles and appreciation.



A friend once stopped by to visit and found Zaidy lying prone in the garden. The terrified visitor gently shook my grandfather, who opened his eyes and said, "I'm taking a nap". The earth, soil, nature, was his happy place. He respected all the resources of this world, and started a Jewish scout troop in Milwaukee to teach religious kids how to take care of our world. His biggest lesson to them was, "When you leave a (camp)site, it should be improved over how you found it."

There is no doubt that Zaidy left this world a better place, and helped all of us - his legacy of five generations of family members, friends, students - better people for having known him.

Watching a loved one being buried is brutal and heart-wrenching, yet several things comforted me during that emotion-laden time. The first was seeing my Bubby Shirley buried right next to him, as well as his parents - my great-grandparents Simcha Leib and Shayna Leah Tolwinski. The *zechus* of being buried next to parents supersedes that of being buried in Eretz Yisroel, from what I've learned.

The second massive comfort caught me by surprise. Before covering it with dirt, members of his shul poured boxes and bags of *sheimos* over the *aron*, and I watched as my Zaidy was literally blanketed with words of Torah in his body's final resting place. I saw kids parsha sheets, handwritten Torah notes, well-loved seforim and prayer book pages, and so much more preciousness and holiness fluttering down to 'protect' him.

We have huge shoes to fill. May we be blessed with Divine Assistance in our goal of living up to his lessons, and sending pages and pages of *nachas* back up to *shamayim* in his merit.