

נשמהלה

Sharing Our Special Experiences: Chizuk & Inspiration

# Neshamale

magazine

**DO SEMANTICS  
REALLY MATTER?  
PARENTS WEIGH IN... /22**

**PACHIM  
K'TANIM  
CHIZUK FROM RABBI  
BORUCH RABINOWITZ /4**

**ONE DAY  
AT A TIME /6**



Editor: Chayala Tawil  
Contributing Editor: Fraydel Dickstein  
Layout/Design: Adina Cahn  
Copy Editor: Susan Tawil  
Printed By: Ramapost

With much appreciation to our contributors:  
Rabbi Dovid Ashear      Shira Speiser LCSW  
Toby Brief                      Leah Tawil  
Batya Dancykier              Gitty Weiss  
Rabbi Boruch Rabinowitz    Yehudis Wolpin

**Sponsored**  
**in honor of**  
**Avumi's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday!**

*May you continue to bring your joy  
into our home and hearts until 120!*

Neshamale Magazine welcomes your contribution of articles, poems, personal experiences or any material that may inspire our readers. We will respect your request for anonymity. We reserve the right to edit all submissions for clarity, space and sensitivity. We also request your comments, suggestions and donations. Please contact us if you are interested in the opportunity of sponsoring the next issue.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

E-mail: [neshamalemagazine@gmail.com](mailto:neshamalemagazine@gmail.com)  
Mail: 112 6th St. Lakewood, NJ 08701  
Text: 848-299-2908 Phone: 732-436-9916  
To subscribe for free e-version:

[neshamalemagazine@gmail.com](mailto:neshamalemagazine@gmail.com)

To subscribe for printed magazine, view the current issue and explore archives:

<https://www.ramapost.com/neshamale>

Copyright 2025

The information provided in Neshamale magazine is for educational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to substitute for the medical judgment of your healthcare provider. Opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the policy or opinion of the editors.

## Table of Contents:

### ■ Connecting

Editorial	3
Inbox	5
Glossary	35

### ■ Inspiring

Chizuk Boost   <i>Rabbi Boruch Rabinowitz</i>	4
One Day at a Time   <i>Shevi</i>	6
Illuminations   <i>Rabbi Dovid Ashear</i>	13

### ■ Educating

Resource Guide   <i>D. Wadiche &amp; E. Hazzan</i>	9
In Session   <i>Shira Speiser LCSW</i>	25
Sensory Bins   <i>Chanukah Bin</i>   <i>Chayala Tawil</i>	25
Supportive Reading Material   <i>Children's Books</i>   <i>Toby Brief</i>	26
Smart & Safe   <i>&amp; Hopeful</i>   <i>Fraydel Dickstein</i>	30

### ■ Sharing

Passing the Gift Along	10
<i>interview with Rochel of Climb Therapy Spaces</i>	
This is Me   <i>Batya Dancykier</i>	12
Wow! Moments   <i>compiled by Fraydel Dickstein</i>	14
Do Semantics Really Matter?   <i>compiled by Chayala Tawil</i>	22
Teen Sib Speaks   <i>Yehuda's sister</i>	27
Tips from the Experts   <i>Getting Meds Down</i>	28
My View   <i>This is Who You Are To Me</i>   <i>Leah G.</i>	33
My View   <i>Voices in the Night</i>   <i>Gitty Weiss</i>	34

### ■ Exploring

When I Think of You   <i>Yehudis Wolpin</i>	15
I am a Yid!   <i>Hadassah</i>	16
Designer Labels   <i>Sarah Chana Radcliffe</i>	18
The Power of a Neshamah   <i>Fraydel Dickstein</i>	19
My Name is... Mom   <i>Penina N.</i>	20
Alook Beyond my Wheelchair   <i>Breindy H</i>	21

In the upcoming issue will be

### The Camp Issue

*Have you sent a child with special needs to overnight camp?  
Have you worked in an overnight camp? Can you share your experiences,  
thoughts, tips and advice? ...*

*We always welcome photos, Wow! Stories, Memorable Mishaps stories, Sweet  
Spices stories, as well as any questions you may have for a Rav, doctor or  
social worker.*

Deadline for submissions: **January 22**  
Email: [neshamalemagazine@gmail.com](mailto:neshamalemagazine@gmail.com)  
Mail: 112 6th St.      Lakewood, NJ 08701

Dear Readers,

This morning, my four-year-old son Tzvi was looking over my shoulder as I was *bentching*. He suddenly pointed to the page, exclaiming: “This starts with me, Mommy! This starts with me!” He was so excited to see a *tzadi*, which he recognized from the spelling of his name. Aside from the fact that his grammar was off, however, he was making a fundamental mistake. Although my little *tzadik’s* name may start with a *tzadi*, his name is not *him*.

It’s not only four-year-olds who make this mistake. Human beings the world over define themselves by many criteria – be it occupation, family name, financial status, or dress size – but none of these things are inherently *us*. Who are we then? The answer that we know as Torah Jews, is that we are our *neshamas*.

I remember a parenting class I took many years ago given by Rabbi Nechamia Grama. He began by saying that a newborn baby engenders a feeling of wonder and awe. We gaze at this tiny portrait of precious perfection, and there’s something other-worldly there. Why don’t we feel the same awe when an eight-year-old walks through the door? The answer is that when we look at a newborn, we sense his *neshama*. The *neshama* is what invokes those tender, reverent feelings. When we look at an eight-year-old, the *neshama* is not as apparent. Instead, we are seeing what the child has become.

The shift in this perspective begins as soon as a baby starts developing. As soon as the baby reaches his first milestone, we are already focusing on and celebrating who they are becoming, not who they inherently *are*. This explains why the *neshama* is more visible in a newborn – simply put, there’s nothing else to see – no talents, no grades, no milestones. As time goes on and the baby grows up, we focus more and more on his accomplishments, and may forget about the *neshama* inside.

This explains beautifully why our special children are often seen so clearly for their *neshamas* – it’s not despite their disabilities; it’s precisely because of the disabilities! When there are less accomplishments to distract us, it is easier to see the *neshama* shining through.

I recently came across a book titled *Song of a Pure Soul: The Inspiring Life of an Extraordinary Boy* (written by Aviva Kelly and published by Ayal Press). Biographies are usually written about world-famous personalities who lived long lives, impacted thousands of people, or made significant changes to better the world. This 250 paged book was different. It’s about a little boy, Shauli Mordehai, who suffered brain damage when he was two years old. Little Shauli could do virtually nothing – he couldn’t sit, eat, or play unassisted. The only ability he had was to smile. That smile, coming from the depths of his *neshama*, profoundly impacted hundreds of people. The book is a compilation of memories and impressions from those who were touched by his purity.

As one volunteer wrote: “*What was it that we who knew Shauli saw when we gazed into those eyes? I believe we each caught a glimpse of one the most pure and untainted neshamot. We saw what a soul looked like without all the trappings of material existence. The hundreds of people who called themselves friends of Shauli connected with him through acts of kindness and goodness. Shauli’s life was one of chessed and Torah. No façade.*”

These words are just one paragraph among thousands written by accomplished adults, fun loving teenagers, great Rabbis, and young family members. How can it be that they were affected merely by being in the presence of this boy who couldn’t hold a conversation, couldn’t learn a *pasuk* of *Chumash*? It must be the *neshama* connection.

Perhaps this is one of the benefits that Hashem wanted us to have from raising a special child – the ability to connect with a *neshama* in its purest form. The realization that all *Yidden* are precious, no matter how accomplished or disabled they are. As HaRav Moshe Shapiro once said: “When you see a child, you have to get as excited as if you are seeing one of the wonders of the world!”

The truth is, that even while raising our special children, we can forget how precious they are, and become fixated on their progress. When our child comes home from school, we might be thinking: How did she do in therapy today? Is his eye contact getting better? Why is her nose running again?

While in close contact with our family members, and trying so much to help them progress, we may need help remembering to connect with their true identity, their *neshamas*. So how can we connect with our special children in this way?

I have two suggestions. One method is simple, easy, and powerful: eye contact. The eyes are the window to the *neshama*. Make a conscious habit, at least once a day, to look deeply into the eyes of your child. Gaze in and focus only on their perfect *neshama*. (If this makes the child uncomfortable, try to find a way to do it where they are not looking at you, but you are looking at them, such as when their attention is focused elsewhere. If that is too difficult for your child, then take

the time to gaze at them while they are sleeping.) I personally feel super lucky that Avrumi loves making eye contact, so we both enjoy this! I urge you to try it in a way that works for your child, and see how significant it can be.

The second suggestion is one that I myself am trying to work on, but I will share it anyway (We are all works in progress!). The idea is to treat our special children with respect. Respect means treating them well, even when they don't know the difference. This can mean giving them a nicely made-up plate of food, instead of leftovers. It might mean changing their dirty clothing even if they don't know the difference. It can mean not discussing their progress (or lack thereof) with a therapist while in front of them, even if you don't think they understand. It means treating them with dignity because they are inherently holy and their *neshama* deserves to be treated as such. Even if they don't know the difference – we do! These actions remind us to appreciate the special *neshamalehs* that Hashem has entrusted into our care.

Wishing you all a happy Chanukah and a healthy winter,

Chayala



## Chizuk Boost #13

Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz  
Pachim Ktanim



When *Yaakov Avinu* prepared to meet his brother *Eisav*, he was concerned that he would not have enough *zechusim* to be victorious over him. *Katonti mikol hachasadim umikol ha'emesh asher asisa es avdecha* – I became small because of all the *chasadim* that You did for me. The *Ramban* says that Yaakov was expressing his feeling that he was never worthy of all the *chasadim* done for him by Hashem. And indeed, Yaakov is a name rooted in *eikev* – the lowly heel. “Who am I that I deserve Hashem's *chesed*?”

So Yaakov prepared to meet his brother with *tefila*, *milchama* and *matanos*.

After sending *malachim* with gifts for *Eisav*, Yaakov Avinu crossed his family over the river and then went back across the river to retrieve *pachim ktanim* – small vessels. The *chashivus* of *pachim ktanim* is not in their inherent value; rather, every little thing comes from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and therefore, every item, even *pachim ktanim*, has great significance.

*Pachim ktanim*, we know, refers also to small *mitzvos*, those we often deem insignificant. *Mitzvos shadam dash bikvav* – *mitzvos* upon which we trample with that same lowly heel.

Our children, too, who will remain small in certain ways their whole life, may be compared to *pachim ktanim*. They might be small, seemingly insignificant vessels in the eyes of many, but in actuality they have inestimable value!

*Vayivaser Yaakov levado*. There, all alone, in the dark, Yaakov was met by the *malach* of *Eisav*, whose purpose was to challenge Yaakov's *emunah*, much like the *nisyonos* we face every day are meant to challenge us. Will we fight, as did Yaakov, to overcome that which is challenging? Will we fight for the small things, for *pachim ktanim*, with the *mesiras nefesh* of *Yaakov Avinu*? Will we stand up with strength and pride for our children whose *tzelem Elokim* is no different than any other person's *tzelem Elokim*?

At the end of that long night of struggle, Yaakov was victorious and his name became *Yisrael* – *ki sarisi im Elokim v'im anashim vtuchal*. Yaakov saw himself as the seemingly unimportant *pachim ktanim* – he was *eikev* – and yet he transformed himself into *Yisrael* – *Li rosh, yashar Keil*. The long dark night taught him a different perspective, as he tapped into his hidden *kochos* and overcame the *malach* of *Eisav*. *Ki eishev ba'choshech, Hashem obr li*.

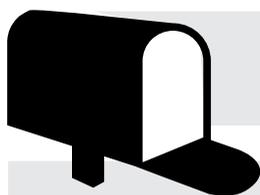
And yet, the *malach* did succeed in injuring the *kaf yerech* of Yaakov, which the *Ramban* says, alludes to the *tzadikim* of future generations. We might also say it refers to the children of future *doros*.

We live in the time period which is the *eikev* of history. Now, in the *ikvesa d'Mashicha*, there are many children from the *kaf yerech*. A little damaged, perhaps, but these are our *pachim ktanim* ('*kaf*' *osiyos* '*pach*'). Maybe the test of our generation is how we deal with our *pachim ktanim*; whether we learned from *Yaakov Avinu* that they, too, are *chashuv* and have value beyond their limitations.

The *ohr* of *kedusha* was hiding in those *pachim*. The *Ohr Chanuka* and the *Ohr haGanuz*, says the *Shlah Hakadosh*, are hiding in that which comes out of *yerech* Yaakov.

*Klal Yisroel* were *zoche* to find the *pach shemen* of *neis* Chanuka in the *zechus* of *Yaakov Avinu*'s going back for those *pachim ktanim*. We must learn from Yaakov, that we can't ignore even the smallest vessel. It just might contain within it the eternal light of *kedusha*, of eternal *zechusim*—the light which may chase away the darkness of this *galus*.

*This Chizuk Boost is excerpted and adapted from one of Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz's weekly 10 minute Chizuk shiurim for parents of children with special needs. There are now over 250 recordings, which can be accessed on Kol HaLashon (718-906-6400, press 1, 4, 97, 2). They can also be accessed at yedei.org*



## INBOX

Thank you so much for your wonderful magazine. I was especially happy to see the older people with special needs highlighted in the most recent issue. It would be wonderful if *Neshamale* could run an article about communities that are “adult special needs friendly” and what services are available.

We have a son in his mid-30s. We live out of town, and there is very little for him in the way of religious and social activities. He would like to get married, but we understand that the special needs shidduch world is very limited for young men. Any resources you could provide would be helpful.

Much *hatzlacha* in your work to bring support to families navigating this special special needs journey.

All the best,  
Susan R.

Thanks for your gorgeous magazine! I would like to respond to the woman in “Camera Kaparah” on page 32. The same story happened to me *twice*, where my special needs son deleted all the pictures and the memory card said “Empty.” I bought the camera into Photo Factory, a regular photo store

in Boro Park, and for about \$30, they were able to retrieve all the pictures both times this happened!

Yehudis Wolpin

It was so exciting to get a hard copy of *Neshamale* in the mail! We really enjoyed the content, and the sleeping column was actually very helpful, even though our son’s sleep has gotten better. Thank you to all the readers who submitted their ideas!

C.B.E.

Dear Leah of “In Session” Vol 21 and all *Neshamale* Readers,

Your question was personal to your circumstances, but really can be generally asked as: “What do we do when others close to us are insensitive to our situation and hurt us?” We have to realize that others who never (B”H) had a child with medical challenges or developmental delays simply cannot relate to the pain, worry, and fear that we live with. Their comments, questions, and even criticism is usually coming from cluelessness or good intentions.

We would save ourselves so much

heartache if we would understand that no one means to hurt us, they just don’t have the right words. One of the positive outcomes of living with adversity, is that it makes us more sensitive to others and more understanding of others’ pain. Hopefully we will use this insight to uplift and encourage those around us and not cause anyone pain.

As for those who are not there yet, let’s try not to take it to heart – it will leave us with more energy and joy to care for our special *neshamales*.

Forgiving those who hurt you should be a *zechus* for your baby’s complete recovery.

A Reader

*Neshamale* is the most fabulous magazine! To say that I enjoy is an understatement! I have a 14 year old daughter with Down syndrome. I love all the articles and helpful tips. I borrowed some of the magazines from the Yahalom library in Baltimore, and I was able to read the last edition from my email when I was away on vacation. Thanks for keeping it free like that. Keep up the great work!  
Nechuma Fuchs



## Just Laugh!



Our beloved Bruchy, 15 years old, asked to take our *shofar* to school, as she is a qualified *baal tokaya*. We allowed it, and of course we heard that she had managed more than her fair share of 100 kolos.

The next day I told her that maybe it would not be such a good idea to bring it again. She asked why and I answered that we heard she had been blowing the *shofar* the whole time. Bruchy answered: “No, Tatty, I am not blowing the whole time - only when the teacher talks about *Teshuva!*”

I had no answer to that!

Submitted by Schwartz Family, London, England



# One Day at a Time

My name is Shevi. I have an adorable five-year-old son, Ruvy. He has Down Syndrome. The story I am going to share with you started years before he was born. It's a journey in which I have experienced tremendous *Chasdei Shamayim*.



My story begins when I was a single girl, attending seminary in Gateshead. Many of my friends were busy with a girl with special needs whose name was Devorahleh. “Doing Devorahleh” was the constant refrain heard amongst my friends. One ordinary Tuesday, a girl asked me if I could take over her shift of “Devorahleh.” She reassured me that I would thoroughly enjoy my time with this girl, whom she described as ‘adorable.’

So off I went, to “do Devorahleh,” having no inkling of what awaited me. I knocked on the door, and her mother led me into a room in the back of the house, where I was taken aback to find, not the cute little girl who had been described to me, but rather, a large teenager! I observed her making some interesting sounds. To be quite frank, in my eyes, I did not see the “adorable.” Her mother said: “Go on, take her. Just take

her by the hand.” I was so overwhelmed. I looked at her and thought: “*Take her by the hand? She looks like she is going to take ME by the hand!*” But I overcame my fears, and took her by the hand.

Following my friend’s instructions, we went to a light and sound therapy room where there were some lava lamps and soft music playing. I massaged her and sang to her as we sat. Suddenly, she locked eyes with me and broke into a huge grin. At that moment, something changed inside of me. I felt a connection of our souls. I slowly got into what I was doing, and by the time I was done with the hour, I felt so good about myself. A whole new world had opened up to me. When I got back, I asked her mother, if there was ever an opening, if I could take her. She was so shocked that this was coming from the same girl who had looked so terrorized just an hour before.

This became my passion. I told my mother that I had found my calling, and asked her to look out for a job for me in this field after I finished seminary. My mother found me a job in a school called Kisharon. I was a year and a half into sem, 18 years old, and I did not get married until I was 24. This was my life for six years. During the week, I worked full-time at the school. I ran respite care programs whenever there was no school, and even brought kids home with me for Shabbos. There was one particular child to whom I connected. She was an only child

for whom we traveled extensively, seeking out the best methods to help her. She became 'mine.' I gave her my heart and soul until my marriage.

## 2

My journey continued: I got married and lived in *Yerushalayim*. My good friend who lived near me on Sorotzkin Street gave birth to her third child, who had Down Syndrome. He would come to me every Tuesday. My family loved him.

Then we moved to Detroit. A few years ago, my neighbor in Detroit gave birth to a son with Down Syndrome. I went over to her and said: "I spent my life doing this. I'm going to help you. I will take him once a week and do therapy with him." And I did. I joined his physiotherapist, Meghan, and watched during sessions, taking notes, so that I would know what to do with him when he came over to my house.

Fast forward a couple years. I was expecting my seventh child, ka"h. I went in for my 20-week scan, and it was taking so long, I started feeling uncomfortable. The technician kept going in and out, and all I wanted to do was go home. I couldn't put my finger on it, but I was getting very bad vibes. The technician said: "We think we might see something, but don't be alarmed." My brain screamed: "Do *be alarmed!*" I drove home, trying to push it to the back of my mind.

The next day, a Friday afternoon, I received a message from my doctor: "Please call me right away." My heart hit the bottom of my feet. I got on the phone with him and he said: "Batsheva, the ultrasound showed enlarged ventricles."

I said: "Okay, what does that mean?"

He said: "To be really straightforward: Enlarged ventricles... you are 41 – there is a good chance he has Down syndrome."

I started to argue with him: "C'mon, it doesn't mean he has Down Syndrome. Whenever the doctors give that warning, everything is fine, and the people who do end up having Down Syndrome babies had no

forewarning." I had been exposed to many such situations.

The doctor said to me: "You don't have to believe me, but if you want, I suggest that you take the test. Then you'll know, and you won't be in terrible suspense for the next five months."

I decided not to take the test, but soon after, I became sick with pregnancy-related kidney complications, and I was in and out of the hospital. I was completely consumed with concern for my own health, and the issue of the baby's uncertain diagnosis faded into the background.

Then COVID hit. It was *Motzai Purim*, and I was due two weeks after Pesach. Right before Pesach, during an ultrasound, the doctor was concerned that the baby was not growing well. The initial concern was niggling at me, and I was worried that things weren't so okay. The doctor was thinking of inducing, but with Pesach looming, I wasn't interested. We moved into my in-laws for Pesach, even though, because of COVID, everyone was staying home that Yom Tov.

## 3

As Pesach was finishing, my husband caught the virus. That year, Pesach finished on a Thursday. I remember I went home to make challah and returned for Shabbos. Friday night, after *bentching licht*, I said: "I think I'm in labor." My husband laughed; he was used to this. It was two weeks before my due date, and I was never early. A few hours later, I realized that

I'd better go in. We called the Shabbos cab. It was a female driver, B"H. You have to remember what was going on during this crazy time. No husbands were allowed in the hospitals with their wives. My husband was sick. Someone stuffed a cell phone into my pocket before I left, murmuring something about *pikuach nefesh*.

I was on my own, on the way to deliver a baby. The future was uncertain. The ride to the hospital was eerie. The streets were deadly silent; it felt like a ghost town. On the way, I asked the driver to take me to Beaumont Hospital, which was closer to home. She said: "No, don't go to Beaumont, it's terrible there, they have tents set up. I'm taking you to Henry Ford." When we arrived, there was a sign on the hospital: 850 Survivors, 30 fatalities, etc.

Later, I recalled my experience in the hospital as surreal. It



was Shabbos, and Jews and non-Jews alike had their hair covered and were all using a “*shinui*” to press elevator buttons and the like. They asked me where my husband was. I stammered, “He’s not here. He... was sort of *exposed* to the virus... so he couldn’t come.” “Oh, he can come,” the kind nurse informed me. “No, no, he... well, he actually *has* the virus.” “Oh, that’s alright, he can come,” they miraculously responded. *What?* “Well, I, uh... I’m okay, I’ll call him if I need,” I said, nervously wondering how to navigate the complex Shabbos-related *halachos*. I would figure out what to do later.

I had an amazing nurse sit by my side throughout the labor who never left me. On Shabbos morning, I gave birth to my precious son, Ruvi. He weighed less than 5 pounds at birth. I kept asking: “Is he normal?” They said they would send in the pediatrician to look him over.

When she came in, she looked him over and said: “There are some soft markers; I would suggest they do genetic testing.” I asked what the soft markers were, and she told me: “Well, he has a line across his hand.” They took an echo, and the results came back normal. None of the bloodwork showed any issues. Even

his latch and nursing were totally normal, which is extremely unusual for a child with Down Syndrome. I was in the hospital all by myself, and looking back, it was clear to me that Hashem orchestrated the whole thing in a way that would be manageable for me, throughout this difficult ordeal.

When my husband asked me: “Well, what do you think? This is your forte. Can’t you tell?” I told him that here and there, I could catch a glimpse of something, but nothing obvious, and it would just pass. I came home from the hospital on Monday

afternoon. By the time we got the results on Thursday, I was convinced that our son was normal. My husband and I were in the middle of discussing the *sholom zachor* when I got the call from the hospital.

I was devastated. B”H, my husband was at my side, and he was a rock of strength. He did not even show a moment of weakness. He calmed me down and spoke only of the bigger picture, how it’s all from Above, and that we would get through this together.



As *hashgacha* had it, in the following months at the height of Covid, no therapists were doing home visits. But I had my notes from my neighbor’s baby, so I followed them to do therapy with Ruvi.

Time and time again, we were privileged to see the clear *yad Hashem*, every step of the way. Initially, after birth, everything checked out as normal (another clear embrace from the One Above, Who wanted to ease the challenge for me, being all alone in the hospital with his birth). However, later, many of the ‘normal’ health complications that Down’s babies have, started to surface. Hypothyroidism, his cardio issues (his Echo had come back normal after birth), and sleep apnea, to name a few.

To address the sleep apnea, Ruvi underwent several surgeries, none of which seemed to resolve the issue. I sat with seven of the top doctors at the University of Michigan, and each of them had their ‘solution.’

I asked them: “Can any of you guarantee that your idea will resolve the issue?” None of them could. I said: “Well, in that case, I will not go ahead with any more surgeries.” They hemmed and hawed, with all their explanations of how important it was to address the sleep apnea, implying I was neglectful by not agreeing to more surgery.

On the way out, one of the doctors tapped me on the shoulder. She said: “Mom, you are your child’s best advocate. Keep your head on your shoulders.” It was so empowering, and I was able to feel the hug from Above that I was making the right choice.

Aside from the tremendous and clear hand of Hashem’s *hashgacha* at every stage, there are many lessons that we gained from our journey. I will share two of them with you:

The first: We tend to blame social pressure and the environment for our need to try to live up to the “Joneses.” What I have



learned from Ruvi, is that it's not society and it's not environment - it's us! When Ruvi was born my husband and I said to each other: "At least with Ruvi we won't have to worry about expectations."

He is what he is, however Hashem made him, and we accept it. Over the years we have come to realize that, although the expectations for him are obviously not the same as for our other children, there are still expectations and comparisons, and having to live up to the "Down Syndrome next door." I have learned that the world is not the cause of my problems - I need to work on myself!

Another lesson that we uncovered was the following: there is one motto we hang onto in our house. It's "One day at a time." From Day One, whenever I would meet older people with Down Syndrome, I would despair. How will I manage that stage? When he's 5, when he's 10, when he's 20, etc.

My husband always answers: "Hashem gives you *koach* to manage each stage when you get there—One day at a time." And He does! We live in the moment and embrace Ruvi and all he has to offer—to us as a family, and to everyone in his life.

Our son has enriched so many people's lives. I get calls to bring him over to cheer up elderly people. He puts a smile on everyone's face. One person at a time. One smile at a time.

One day at a time.

## Resource Guide- Part VI

Compiled by D. Wadiche and E. Hazzan

*Here are some hot-off-the-press discoveries of grants that may be helpful to you:*

### 1. A Bundle of Warmth

[abundleofwarmth@gmail.com](mailto:abundleofwarmth@gmail.com)

347-WARMTH-4U (347.927.6844)

Newborn - Teens

Cozy care packages for patients

traveling 3+ hours from home for a medical procedure and requiring a hospital stay of over two nights, or

a medical procedure that requires remaining far from home for 6+ days.

Each bundle is lovingly custom-packed for your child with the information you provide.

Pick up in Lakewood, NJ.

### 2. מקור הברכה Shabbos Home

[liluy\\_nishmas Bracha bas Shimon Meir](mailto:liluy_nishmas_Bracha_bas_Shimon_Meir)

347-909-2806

Open Shabbos home in Williamsburg, for kids with all kinds of medical conditions.

Room and meals provided. Child must have a counselor to come with before calling.

Can accommodate up to four children a week.

### 3. Josh Provides for Children with Epilepsy

[Joshprovides.org\\_info@joshprovides.org](mailto:Joshprovides.org_info@joshprovides.org) 800-706-2740

Covers medical services and transportation and travel to/from medical service providers, Seizure Alert and detection devices (patient will be responsible for ongoing service fees), and up to \$2500 towards a seizure-response dog.

Email/call to check eligibility and funding availability.

### 4. Bella's Bumbas

[www.bellasbumbas.com](http://www.bellasbumbas.com)

585-506-7554

A mobility device for use by toddlers who will likely be wheelchair users until they are ready for a "real" wheelchair. The chairs can be used on grass, carpet, or any surface where a child might find themselves. Each chair includes a push handle mount and can be customized to the child's needs with add-ons such as a basket or foot extension. These devices are built by volunteers, and are given free of charge to eligible children. Families pay only for shipping.

*A Project of the Refael Faham Legacy Foundation*

# A Gift Passed Along...

INTERVIEW WITH RACHEL, CREATOR & DIRECTOR OF CLIMB THERAPY SPACES

Chayala Tawil

**Hi Rachel!**

**Can you share what prompted you to start your Climb Therapy Spaces?**

It all started with my nephew, who has autism. I love him and wanted to help him, but didn't know how. I started researching and became interested in the DIR / Floortime model of therapy. I ended up going back to school to become DIR certified, obtaining my master's in special education and floortime certifications. This is something I never thought I would do! I used my newfound skills to work with my nephew and saw

walks, and to Urban Air. Those were all good activities, but they were not conducive to the work on regulation and social interaction that he really needed.

In our search for a therapeutic environment that we could go to or rent for him, we recognized a gap in the community. Although there are many wonderful agencies and schools, we were unable to find a therapy space that individual therapists and families can use temporarily for their sessions with children.



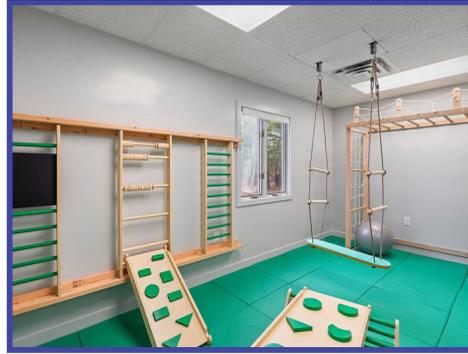
beautiful results. I started working in The Monarch Center in Lakewood, NJ, where I learned more about working with children in a play-based and developmental way. I enjoyed creating sensory boards for my nephew, small boards with interesting textures and visuals for him to play with and relax with. I was surprised how something small that was specifically created to match his individual sensory needs was able to be so calming and regulating for him.

About a year ago, my nephew was out of school for an extended period of time. His devoted mother tried to fill his day with meaningful activities and useful therapies. She had some skilled girls who were willing to work with him, but they didn't have an appropriate place to work. They took him to the library, on

From this need, an idea was born. I decided to create a sensory room where my nephew could relax and get his sensory needs met, that would also be a conducive space for therapists and volunteers to work with him. My sister got on board with me, and we started planning together. Somehow the idea grew wings, and evolved into a whole facility with multiple rooms full of various therapy equipment, to serve different children with different needs. We realized that we were not the only ones who could benefit from such a service, and the idea for Climb was born.

**Tell us a bit of what went into the planning.**

There was a lot of hard work and *siyatta d'Shmaya*. We put a lot of thought into planning every detail out. With my years of



experience as a therapist, and my sister's role as a mother of a child with special needs, we had a good idea of what therapists and parents would be looking for.

We specifically chose a central location, on Pine Blvd, off Route 9 South, with its close proximity to many Lakewood schools. This would enable therapy sessions to take place, with students missing a minimum of class time. We installed cameras in every room so that the sessions could be videoed for the therapists, who need to review their work with mentors and such.

We included lockers for therapists to store their own equipment, so they would not have to *schlep* their loads with them each time they used the facility. There is white noise "music" throughout the facility to ensure that sound from one room doesn't disturb another.

We dedicated one room to be a conference room, a quiet dignified place where therapists, schools, and parents can collaborate a child's care and training.

**It sounds like you really did think of everything! Tell us more about the therapy rooms themselves.**

Every room is designed with purpose and intention. The waiting room isn't just a place to sit and pass time – it's a space that is, itself, calming and therapeutic. Each therapy room was planned with a different type of child's needs in mind.

Both the gyms are fully padded, and include swings, climbing bars, climbing walls, beanbags, foam pits, and obstacle courses. Therapists can move around equipment to create their own environment, tailored to the client's needs.

The regulation room is the epitome of calm and relaxation. With a glowing LED bubble wall alongside a cozy bean bag, this room invites children to decompress and restore.

The playroom is an adorable real-life re-enactment, with a two story "house" where the concept of "pretend play" is taken to the next level. The mini kids couch, play kitchen, and colorful furniture give the room a fun, playful vibe.

Perhaps the most unique room is the sand-tray table room.

Hidden under a regular tabletop is a large sand tray. There is an array of miniatures to use for sand-tray therapy. Additional toys, such as *mentchies* and Magna Tiles, are available to add into any session.

**This sounds like something that can be useful to so many! How can we reserve a slot?**

Book a session by calling: 732-504-8484 or online at: [climbtherapyspaces.com](http://climbtherapyspaces.com). There are all kinds of packages and memberships, depending on how often the rooms will be used. The system is fully automated. When you sign up for a membership, you receive a hotel room style key that is programmed to open up your room at the appointed time. All rooms are key-controlled and the process is efficient and organized.

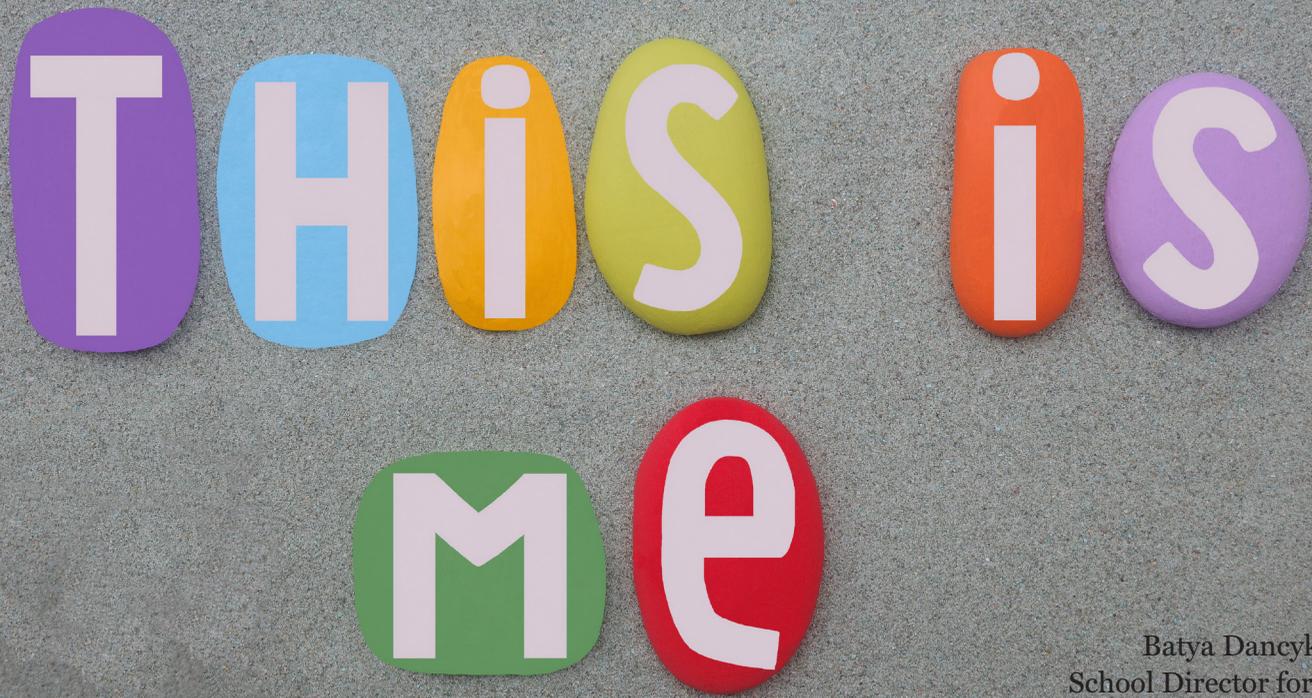
Baruch Hashem, the feedback has been great, and therapists are enjoying the benefits of having an ideal environment for growth.

**Do you have a parting message to share with our readers?**

I would love to tell the therapists out there, that there is so much opportunity to work privately. It's not as scary or as overwhelming as it sounds. Climb can help create a cushion, so you can start slow in private practice without going 'all in' with investing in your own professional therapeutic environment.

And to everyone else: Follow your heart. If you have an idea, go for it! I never dreamed I would do such a thing, but I'm so grateful that Hashem led me here. We can all make a positive difference!





Batya Dancykier,  
School Director for the  
Special Children's Center

When it comes to children developing an identity, it is particularly challenging for those with special needs, because who they are can sometimes get lost in their needs. To help a child identify with themselves rather than their needs, space needs to be carved out for them to just be themselves!

There are activities that can highlight the essence of children with special needs by the very nature of the activity. Regardless of the modifications or support necessary to accomplish these activities, they are opportunities for children to shine in their own light.

**Things we can do to highlight our children, rather than focusing on their limitations:**

**Extracurriculars** – Children often have jam-packed schedules, especially those with special needs. There's school, therapies, and tutoring — all essential, but what about the activities that are *just because*? These are activities that enrich our child's life and make it fuller. Think of art for the sake of creativity, music for the sake of relaxation, or dance for the sake of free expression.

**Social engagements** – Arrange playdates for your children with other children of similar abilities. Connection doesn't always happen through words or actions. It can be shared through listening to music together, being read to, or going for a walk. Social engagements that focus on teaching social skills may not always bring out the outcome we hope to see, because these interactions focus on skill-building rather than connection.

**Giving to the community** – Everyone benefits from feeling good about themselves, and by doing *chesed*, a child with special needs can experience that same sense of pride and purpose. Depending on the child's abilities, he might help deliver baked goods to a neighbor, say *Tehillim* together with others for someone in need, or visit the elderly to bring cheer.

**Hobbies** – Help children develop hobbies such as collecting items, reading comics, or anything that sparks their unique interests. Think outside the box. What does your child like that is special to them? Buy books about it, watch educational videos, expand their knowledge in areas that light them up. If your child loves delivery trucks, visit a UPS store! Take pictures there and make a book out of it.

At the essence of every child with special needs is... a child. The more we find ways to ignite that inner spark, the less the focus will be on the special needs, and the more it will be on living a fulfilling life.

# Illuminations

## THE TORAH OF CHESED

Rabbi Dovid Ashear

The *Gemara* says: The Torah begins and ends with *chesed*. In the beginning, it speaks about Hashem doing *chesed* with Adam and Chava, and in the end, it speaks about Hashem doing *chesed* with Moshe Rabbenu.

*Chazal* tell us the world could only exist with the Torah, and for the 26 generations before *Matan Torah*, Hashem sustained the world purely on *chesed*. Thus, we have a *mizmor* thanking Hashem with the words “כי לעולם חסדו” 26 times, corresponding to those 26 generations.

When a person does *chesed*, he is emulating Hashem, and fulfills one of the 613 *mitzvot*. The *Chafetz Chaim* writes in his *sefer Ahavat Chesed* that people need to cling to the mitzvah of *chesed*, which arouses so much heavenly mercy. Even after the *zechut* of our Avot runs out, the *zechut* of *chesed* will continue carrying us to the days of *Mashiach*.

There are times when Hashem calls upon a person to be involved in *chesed* 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The job may not appear appealing or glamorous, but that makes it even more valuable. This happens when Hashem gives a person a special needs child to raise. He is making a very special request from the parents, giving them a unique *chesed* opportunity. When someone is actively involved in a *chesed* organization, it's a great mitzvah. But for these people, there is recognition and fanfare involved. When a person is doing *chesed* in his own home, with no appreciation and no fanfare, the *zechuyot* are infinitely greater.

The Novominsker Rebbe, *zatzal*, said parents of these children can reach levels that others are not capable of reaching, especially because of their constant *nisayon*, and their need to have patience and good *middot* and *mesirut nefesh* all the time. The parents have to realize how much *kedusha* is involved in the *chesed* they're doing with their child. *Chazal* tells us, לא תקרי בניך אלא בוניך - the children are the ones who build the parents, and that is especially true of special needs children.

Chana prayed for so many years to have a child, and when she finally had one, she dedicated him to the service of Hashem from a very young age. He was brought to Eli *HaKohen* in the

*Mishkan* to be 'הל שדוק'. Chana never heard compliments about her child from her neighbors. She never walked out in the streets with him, proudly holding his hand. She did not make birthday parties for him, or have the joy of just playing with him. Her child was קודש לה.

The same can be said of special needs children. Their mothers may not proudly wheel their carriages in the streets. These children don't talk like other children. They don't interact like other children. Nobody compliments the parents on their child's achievements. Other people may even be afraid to approach the parents of these children. These children are completely קודש לה.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein wrote in a letter, that the same way that the prayers of Chana protected the Jewish people all the way until today, so too, does every Jewish mother with a special needs child who does her job faithfully *l'shem shamayim*, just because it is the will of Hashem. She is a student of Chana, and her prayers, as well, have so much power.

The *Gemara* tells us one of the greatest *Tanaim*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgeda, had children who were born deficient. Every one of his sons was deaf. His daughter, as well, gave birth to two children who were both mutes. How did the Rabbi accept his lot in life? He did the very best he could to make his children the greatest they could be, and all of them, in one way or another, benefited *Klal Yisrael*.

His daughter followed his example and raised her children the same way. She used to bring her children every day to the *Bet HaMidrash*. At one point, they were miraculously healed, and were found to know the entire Torah.

Even if it appears that the special needs child does not understand what the parent is telling him, his *neschama* is listening and understands everything. The job may not be glamorous, but it's a *chesed* at the highest level and will be rewarded greatly.

If the parents are able to be patient and take care of the child with love, they are doing their job the best way possible. To get the child at ten years old to learn how to tie his shoes, or to learn how to put his shoes on, is a great accomplishment. If the parent taught their child at age twelve how to button his own shirt, that's a major accomplishment.

All of their toil and heart and soul and money invested is *Kodesh Kodashim*. One of the merits needed to produce the *geula* is *chesed*, and the parents of these children are contributing a large chunk of it. In the future, these children are going to give their parents so much *nachat* by telling them how much they accomplished every second they were taking care of them.

# WOW!

## MOMENTS

compiled by Fraydel Dickstein

My seven year old daughter was recently made fun of by a friend. The friend said that my daughter's special needs sister looks like a baby (she's five). This was especially hurtful, because my seven year old is the oldest, and her special needs sister is her only sister (the rest are boys).

My daughter went to the school principal to tell her what happened. The principal spoke to the whole class about *Elul* and how special *neshamos* don't need to do *teshuva*, etc. My daughter was so comforted.

I thought it was so special that an outsider took her feelings seriously and addressed the issue right away. It meant a lot to me and my husband. I always feel that, as a parent, I can have tough skin if someone says something hurtful, but having a sibling with special needs is probably really hard. I'm so proud of both of my girls!

Floods beneath Yehuda's bathroom often happened multiple times a day. Following a particularly severe flood, we had to actually replace the ceiling under the bathroom. At this point, we put in a shower door, hoping to bring the situation under control. We caulked the whole bathroom and installed a drain and fiberglass underneath the tiling.

In spite of all this, one spot continued to leak, and we could not get it to stop. Desperate to close up our dining room ceiling, we finally decided to close it up, but to leave this one spot open. It was a small spot right at the foot of our dining room table, and we kept a rug there to absorb the water. B"H the subsequent floods were never too major.

Recently, a strange thought occurred to me: how is it that Yehuda's bathroom hadn't leaked in a while? While Yehuda was in camp, I went into his bathroom and picked up the stopper from his bathtub. It was the metal screw-in stopper that came with the drain, and try as I might, it did not work.

I turned it over every which way, trying to figure out how it is possible for such an item to break. Honestly, it did not make sense to me; it just does not reach the drain anymore, hence no more overflowing water.

It was a funny moment for me. I would never deny Yehuda the enjoyment of his baths, as I want him to have whatever pleasures he possibly can. Yet, perhaps Hashem, in His infinite kindness, made this happen, and now our ceiling doesn't leak! The ways of Hashem are so great, and when I see His hand in such small details, it warms me in a deep way.

My seven year old daughter came in from playing outside, clearly needing to ask me something very important. She looked shell-shocked and asked me in a confused tone if specialneeds is bad. I answered: "It's not bad for us." She looked at me with the innocence of a child and asked: "Why did Chayala say 'Chas v'Shalom'?" My curiosity was piqued, so I asked her: "When did Chayala say 'Chas v'Shalom'?"

She explained that the neighborhood children were jealous that she and her friend were going to Sky Zone with Yehalom Sibs (an organization that does programming for siblings of special needs children). My daughter and her friend innocently recommended that the neighbors *daven* to have a special needs sibling, so they too, can join.

The neighbors responded: "Chas V'Shalom!"—and my daughter could not understand why. I was amazed at her positivity, especially since my son is quite large, and her friend's sibling is a *bochur* in his twenties whom the children are often afraid of. WOW!

I was in a clothing store shopping for *Yom Tov* with my daughters. I watched a teenage girl try on a dress and admire herself in the mirror, no easy feat (maybe we can call it a miracle?) for a teenage girl. She said to her mother: "I like this dress. I think I will take it." When she turned around, she saw that her sister with Down syndrome had tried on the same dress, and that she looked good in it. She said: "Never mind, I want her to have it."

Just like that, she gave up her dress. I was amazed and thought to myself: "What fine selfless people our special children turn their siblings into!"



# *When I think of you...*

Yehudis Wolpin

When I think of you, my child, my love,  
I think of a *neshama* sent straight from above.  
Your *neshama* is so beautiful, sparkling, and white,  
It really just yearns to do everything right.  
A *neshama* that comes straight from learning with Hashem,  
But needs a *tikkun*, so it's in this world again.  
When I look at you, my child, so dear,  
All I see is a *neshama*, it's so crystal clear.

Through your tantrums, meltdowns, fighting, and chaos, I will try to stay calm—  
I have a *neshama* in my house, so I am a lucky mom.

# I am a Yid!

Hadassah

I am a shy person. Thanks to my dear husband, I have slowly begun to emerge from my shell. I have learned so much from his *middah* of *simchas bachayim*. I noticed that since he was so happy all of the time, his mood rubbed off on others.

My struggle toward climbing the ladder of self-belief came crashing down one year later. I came home from the hospital, a brand-new mother of a daughter with special needs.

Logically, I knew that it was not my “fault.” Hashem determines the course of our lives. Yet, every time I would bump into one of my old classmates, the irrational feelings would creep back in. It was like a nagging thought that wanted to seep into my brain and take over. I could only get rid of it by concentrating really hard on keeping it out.

It took a long time for me to work through my emotions and come to acceptance. I outgrew my feelings of inadequacy and did my best to focus on my gift from Hashem: my special child.

Nonetheless, there was one remaining thought that harassed me from time to time. *Who am I?* I know that I am a wife and a mother, but I didn't really understand *who I was as a person*.

After many years, I finally got the answer I was seeking. My daughter, Rivky, taught me a lesson that I will never forget.

Rivky has several disabilities and is developmentally delayed. She struggles in almost every area of life, with the exception of one – her connection to Hashem.

Although Rivky finds it difficult to *daven*, she *davens* three times every Shabbos. Not only does she have trouble reading the words in *Lashon haKodesh*, she doesn't have the patience to get through all of the *tefillos*. Yet, week after week, she takes out her *siddur* and tries to *daven*. I have noticed that she usually skips half of *davening* and says only the first and last two *brachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. But I feel that Hashem hears her *tefillos*. After all, she has never been forced to *daven*.

She lovingly prepares her *siddur* on the coffee table every *Erev Shabbos* and *davens* in her *makom kavua* (designated spot) on the couch. *Chas v'Shalom* someone should sit in her seat when it is time to daven! I have had numerous incidents on Shabbos when Rivky opened her *siddur*, walked right over to a guest seated in her spot, and loudly exclaimed: “Move over! I need to *daven* in my seat!”

This past Shabbos, her *davening* not only improved my *tefillos*, but taught me a thing or two about life.

It was Shabbos morning, the table was set, and we were ready to *daven* together. I took my chair and Rivky got her *siddur* and made herself comfortable in her usual spot on the sofa.

**“Mamele, you are a Yid, do you know why you are a Yid?”**

I taught her to say *Birchas HaShachar* out loud so that I could answer “Amen.” The first thing she did was open her *siddur* and begin reciting the *brachos*. Rivky was in a rush as usual. She wants to *daven*, but doesn't have the patience to say every word carefully. She mumbled the first *bracha*. I said “Amen” loudly and clearly, to emphasize my desire for her to say the next *bracha* in the same tone of voice.

“*Baruch Atah... She'asani Goy...*”

“Rivky! Oh no! Do you know what you just said? You said “*She'asani Goy*” instead of “*Shelo Asani Goy!*”

Rivky's face paled and her mouth dropped open. I immediately regretted my response. I had no idea that she would react in such a manner. She was speechless.

I spoke again in a hushed tone. “Rivky, you made a mistake because you were in a rush. Hashem wants to hear your *brachas*. We need to try to say the words slowly and not mumble, so that we don't make a mistake and say something not true.”

Rivky just looked at me. Her bottom lip quivered. I felt tears come to my eyes. I hadn't meant to raise my voice at her. I just wanted to use this opportunity to teach her a lesson about

saying each and every word.

“Mommy, I am a Jew!”

“Rivky,” I answered in a soft voice, “You are a *Yid*.”

“Mommy, I want to be a *Yid*!”

I reached out and placed my hands on her shoulders. I looked her squarely in the eyes and said: “Rivky, you’ll always be a *Yid*.”

She didn’t believe me. Her anxiety took over. She continued *davening*, but interrupted herself every five minutes to tell me that she only wanted to be a *Yid*. I put my *siddur* down, knowing that this was not a good time to *daven*; I needed to calm her. Each time she questioned me, I answered her in a gentle, firm tone that she was a *Yid*.

It didn’t help. By the time she got to *Shemoneh Esrei*, she couldn’t even *daven*. I took her *siddur* from her hand and told her to come sit next to me.

“*Mamele*, you are a *Yid*, do you know why you are a *Yid*?”

Rivky shook her head “Yes.”

“Why?” I asked her. I was curious to find out the reason.

With tears welling up in her eyes, she answered: “*Aseres haDibros*,”

“*Mamela*, you heard the *Aseres haDibros*?”

Rivky nodded her head “Yes.”

“At *Har Sinai*,” she answered in a choked whisper, as a tear slowly rolled down her left cheek.

I was taken aback. These words were coming from a child who has difficulties thinking in an abstract manner.

I put my arm around her shoulder and answered her: “You are a *Yid* because you have a *neshama*. Do you know what a *neshama* is?”

Rivky looked at me blankly. Based on her expression, I wasn’t sure that she understood what a *neshama* really was. But she then put both hands over her heart and said: “I have a *neshama*!”

“Yes, Sweetie, you have a *neshama* and you are a *Yid*. Hashem loves you. You made a mistake in *davening* and that is okay. But you will always be a *Yid* because Hashem made you a *Yid*.”

With her hands still over her heart, she took a deep breath and exclaimed: “I have a *neshama*. I am a *Yid*. Hashem loves me!”

At that moment my husband came through the door. He looked at me, looked at Rivky with her hands on her heart and asked, “Is everything okay?”

Rivky jumped up from the couch and ran to her father. She threw her arms around him and said: “I am a *Yid*! Hashem loves me!”

During the meal, I filled my husband in on the details of the morning’s episode in a fairly discreet manner. I didn’t want Rivky to hear me repeat the incident, for fear that it would initiate another episode of anxiety.

He was very touched by her reaction, and we both agreed that we were lucky to raise such a special *neshama*.

When it came time for *bentching*, Rivky got her favorite *bentcher* and ran back to her seat. We expected her to finish in approximately one minute – her average *bentching* time. Much to our surprise, she took her time, mouthing every word. My husband and I smiled at each other. We realized that her connection to Hashem had been strengthened.

I sat back in my chair and sighed. I realized that Rivky had taught me the biggest lesson of all. Who am I? I am a *Yid*! And Hashem loves Me!

-----  
*Reproduced from Hidden Gems: Our Special Children by Ruchi Eisenbach, with permission of the copyright holders, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Ltd.*

# DESIGNER LABELS

Sarah Chana Radcliffe

## We Are So Much More Than a Label

We love labels. They sum it all up in just a word. For example, “inconsiderate” is a concise way of saying that “someone tends to do things that end up causing some level of discomfort to one or more people.” Wow! Do you see how many words that one label saved us?

There are lots of different kinds of labels, of course, but they all serve this basic, time-and-effort-saving purpose. Designer labels on clothing and products say, “This is a prestigious, expensive, high-quality article that indicates that its owner has good taste and/or lots of money, or is a very wise shopper who knows how to get an amazing bargain.” Again, it’s easy to see how an individual word like “Burberry” can communicate so much in so little space.

In a similar way, we like mental-health labels – not just for their diagnostic value, but also for their concise summation of the problem before us. In the case of some mental-health disorders, such as depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia, the label points to a specific medical intervention. In this sense, it has diagnostic value.

But we like mental-health labels even when they don’t point to a treatment protocol or we’re not about to avail ourselves of treatment. “He’s narcissistic,” “She’s borderline,” “He’s neurotic,” “He’s an Aspie (has Asperger’s syndrome).” With a few words, we feel we’ve solved a problem for ourselves. “I know why he behaves the way he does – it’s because he’s an Aspie.” Done.

## Limitations of Labels

There is some truth in the assertion that a person may behave the way he or she does because of an underlying disorder.

However, too quick and tight a grasp on the handle may cause us to steer in the wrong direction.

“After Elisheva was diagnosed with anxiety, we lowered our expectations of her considerably. We didn’t want to push her for fear of triggering her anxiety. After a while, I realized that we were treating her like a walking disorder rather than a

normal person. Once I decided she was a normal person who gets easily frightened in new situations and crowd scenes, I saw her as the strong little girl she is, and was able to help her use ‘fear-busters’ to better manage herself in situations that triggered her fear.”

Labels don’t have magic powers and, in fact, can be harmful in that they close down our perceptive abilities. Once we have a label, it can be difficult to see what is actually in front of us and what we can do about it.

**Finally, one specialist told me: “I’m not interested in the labels. Just tell me what’s going on with your child.”**

“My own child has something – I know that. We’ve been told that he has Asperger’s syndrome, High Functioning Autism (HFA), and nonverbal learning disability (NLD) by different practitioners at different times, as well as ADHD, Tourette’s Syndrome, and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD).

“Sometimes I would stare at his freckles and try to find the little boy under there – my bundle of love and laughter, my wild thing, my little genius. Whenever he struggled, all I could see were the names he’s been called and it made me feel sad and helpless.

“Finally, one specialist told me: “I’m not interested in the labels. Just tell me what’s going on with your child.”

This person actually saw that there is a child here! And he really wanted to



target my child's issues.

"I've since learned that there are huge differences among kids and adults who share these labels, and each person with one of these disorders is really a world unto himself, requiring individualized treatment approaches."

### Seeing the Individual

Indeed, each human being is a world unto himself, whether or not he has identifiable symptoms and issues. Every disorder and disease manifests differently, but so does every other aspect of personality. We can help each other far more when we tackle individual issues – the what's-going-on stuff – than when we label each other.

Getting to know each other and love each other is a process that requires patience and discernment, and a willingness to embrace everything that we find: all the strengths and weaknesses and unique characteristics of the full human being before us. We are so much more than any one word.

Courtesy of Family First Magazine

# The Power of a Neshama

Fraydel Dickstein

It was a milestone birthday, and all the children and grandchildren were assembled to hear *Bubby's* words. *Bubby* stood up and started to speak. It was a cute speech about her original encounter with *Zaidy*, a happy speech about the beautiful children they had together.

Then *Bubby* said she would like to talk about her mother. "My mother," she said, "saved one baby girl (referring to herself)." *Bubby* was born at the beginning of the World War II, and her father and brother were killed shortly after. *Bubby's* mother took her one remaining newborn child, and they masqueraded as Aryans, to save their lives. It was extremely challenging for *Alte Bubby* to do this.

"Food was scarce, fear and loneliness were constant, but *Alte Bubby* prevailed; she needed to save this one *neshama*, her baby daughter—me, your *Bubby*. The war robbed *Alte Bubby* of her husband, her other child, her parents, her community. The *churban* was indescribable, there are no words that can do justice to this terrible *churban!*"

*Bubby* then turned to us, a room full of over one hundred of her descendants, and said: "LOOK WHAT THIS ONE GIRL HAS BECOME! None of you would be here today if not for that one lone baby who survived!"

There was not a dry eye in the room! We were experiencing the value, the potential, of one *neshama*. The power of a *neshama* reverberated deep inside of me. What a moment! I thought about each of my children; how their value is so huge, their potential beyond my grasp.

I thought about Yehuda, our special needs child, who, barring a miracle, will not have children of his own, and will need to be cared for forever. But I thought of how Yehuda is a part of the *Kisai haKavod*, and that he does not need to have descendants to bring value to his *neshama*. His *neshama* is complete, and it comes directly from under the *Kisai haKavod*.

Every *neshama* is an unbelievable blessing, something of eternal value, but special needs children are extra special and bring us extra value!

We have been chosen to care for this *neshama*, whose potential to create *zechusim* in this world is endless. This *neshama* is pure *kedusha*. It's like having the *Shechina* itself in our house, and I feel so very blessed.

# *Hello My Name is...*

# *Mom*

Penina N.

Let me introduce myself: I am “Mom.”

(at least that’s what the doctors and therapists call me.)

It’s my identity.

“Mom” is tough and strong. She fights for her son, for his health, his happiness, and his future. She doesn’t take the easy way out, and does everything, and then some, in her power to pave the way for his success.

(at least that’s what my family tells me.)

“Mom” is always positive, cheerful, and optimistic. Even when there are setbacks and the going gets rough, she remains calm and collected. She encourages everyone to keep going, and never gives up hoping for better times.

(at least that’s what my friends say.)

“Mom” is so amazing – she’s a real *tzadekes*. She is raising a special child, one among other needy siblings. He is always well dressed, looking cute and clean. She takes such loving, devoted care of him, despite the many difficulties involved.

(at least that’s what my neighbors say about me.)

Let me re-introduce myself: I am Penina, and yes, I am Dovid’s mother.

But that’s actually only one facet in my very multi-dimensional role in life. I am also a wife and a mother to three boys and two girls. I am also a daughter, sister, friend, neighbor, and co-worker.

Being Dovid’s mother has definitely taught me how to be tougher and stronger than I was. But truthfully, at times, I feel paralyzed by fear and worry. I have the same questions as everybody else: Will he be healthy? Will he be happy? How will we manage? I try so hard to do everything I can to pave the way for him, but it’s not easy for me to be pushy, or even assertive.

Being Dovid’s mother is a real test to my *simchas ha’chayim*. In the never-ending roller-coaster of his special needs life, we always have ups and downs. I can choose to focus on the good news, or the bad. I cry a lot (in bed), and often hear a very negative doomsday voice inside my head. But when I see the worry and the pity on other people’s eyes, I paste a huge smile on my face, force a happy lilt into my voice, and try to encourage everyone (and myself, most of all).

Being Dovid’s mother has not made me into a *tzadekes*, or anywhere near one. I’m taking care of my son, not because I’m amazing, but because he’s my son. It’s insulting when others give me credit for doing things that any normal mother would do, such as dressing him well, etc. I’m just doing my job, some days better, and some days worse. I complain more often than I would like. I don’t always feel lucky to have this job.

Despite all the challenges, I know I am blessed to have Dovid in my life. And there’s one thing I don’t need anyone else to say about me, because I know it in the deepest, truest part of myself: I truly love my son, with all my heart and soul.



# A LOOK BEYOND MY WHEELCHAIR

By Breindy H.

Just as an experiment, lie down on your bed and try to turn over without using your arms and legs.

Can you swing your legs over the edge of the bed and stand up? I can't. My staff needs to help me do all of these basic things.

I am a twenty-five year old woman with quadriplegic cerebral palsy. That means that all four of my limbs usually do not comply with my brain's commands. How does that make me different? If you want to grab something, your brain instantly receives a message, and then your hand instantly reaches forward. When I need to get something, I need to use my mouth to ask for help.

When you sat down to breakfast this morning, did you think about how easy it was to feed yourself? Eating meals, for me, is like playing a game of basketball. I dribble, dribble, dribble with the spoon, working hard to keep my hand steady, and then try to dunk the food into my mouth, working creatively to coordinate my movements.

Did I get it in? No, not this time. The simple act of eating can be a religious experience: before every spoonful, I say: "Hashem please guide this bite into my mouth." When viewing this spectacle, some people ask me: "Why do you bother? It would be so much easier and neater if someone else fed you." I tell them that life is not all about ease and cleanliness. Life is about overcoming challenges.

If I leave the house in my specially designed motorized wheelchair, I have to carefully plan my route. But even when I'm very careful, things can still go wrong. For example, a few days ago, I went to an optical store to buy a new string for my glasses. On that street, there's a "No Parking" sign where the sidewalk dips down to accommodate wheelchairs. But someone had parked there anyway. I'm sure he had a good reason, or maybe he wasn't thinking. Either way, that was my only access to the store; now I was stuck. In the end, I threaded my wheelchair between two cars, narrowly avoiding denting them both. Then my staff had to lift my very heavy wheelchair (remember, it's a motorized machine) onto the sidewalk. When everyone you know is healthy and strong, it can be hard to consider what life is like for handicapped people, and how all

the little details of day-to-day life are affected.

When you're in my position, you have to rely on others--all the time. You quickly learn what gratitude really means. Where would I be without the people who taught me how to communicate? I am so grateful to those who take the time to listen to me: they know that, when I ask for something, I really need it.

I am lucky enough to have friends whose vision is not restricted--they see my potential inside. They don't classify me, put me in a box, or make assumptions about my intelligence, emotional strength, or social capabilities. They try to discover what I am feeling, or figure out where I want to go and help bring me to that place. They constantly encourage me to grow, to defy the "normal" way someone like me is supposed to be. They aren't embarrassed to walk around with a handicapped person.

There is that word again: handicapped. When I look in the mirror, that's what I see. The mirror doesn't tell you anything about what's inside. About all of the things that I have overcome in my life. Or all the things that, G-d willing, I will accomplish in the years to come. I always remind myself that I am not defined by my handicap. I am handi-capable---handy and capable.

Courtesy of  
Family First  
Magazine



**I am lucky enough to have friends whose vision is not restricted--they see my potential inside.**

# Do Semantics Really Matter?

Readers Weigh In...

Compiled by Chayala Tawil

*A reader's request sparked the following questions, which I posed to fellow mothers of children with special needs:*

**Does it make a difference to you if people refer to your child as: "a special needs child" or: "a child with special needs"?  
How do you feel when people use the all-inclusive "special needs" label, as opposed to sharing a specific diagnosis?**

The responses were varied and fascinating, with some very important points being raised. I appreciated hearing others' opinions and the reasons behind them. Thank you to all those who took the time to respond and share their thoughts.

I think that saying: "a child with special needs" is more proper at this point than saying: "a special needs child." I would say that individual diagnoses should be mentioned rather than the generic "special needs." Somehow, the parent whose child has the same diagnosis will feel more connected, less alone...if she sees or hears her child's diagnosis mentioned.

M.R.

As a writer for *Neshamale*, I have learned that people really do care about the exact terminology we use to describe children with special needs. They say there is something very powerful in how you label someone, and I very much understand it. It was always very important to me that people view my child a certain way, and I have seen that "you need to label it to tame it."

F.D.

My daughter was born over 20 years ago, and she was diagnosed just minutes later as having Down syndrome. A few days later, a rabbi called me from the *Bikur Cholim*, and told me something I will always remember: "Mrs. Gold, you did not give birth to a Down syndrome baby; rather, you gave birth to a baby girl who happens to have Down syndrome."

This heartfelt message was very meaningful to me. Her Down syndrome is not her identity; she's a regular baby, who has a *neshama tehorah*, is a *chelek Eloka mima'al*; a part of Hashem, has her body intact, and has amazing potential to achieve great feats in this world, just like all other babies. She also has a special challenge that will affect her life significantly and will have to be dealt with. But it does not define who she is.

S.G.

I absolutely hate the term "special needs child." Every child is always a child first, then you can say if they are tall, dark, have special needs, other struggles, etc.

I also don't appreciate when all children with special needs are lumped into one soup. But I understand not wanting to share every diagnosis code. It's a tough balance and very individual.

C.G.

I know many parents who get very offended if their child is referred to as "a Downie" or "He is Down syndrome." It's both politically correct, as well as the kind, sensitive thing, to be careful to say: "a child with Down syndrome."

R.K.

They say that "actions speak louder than words," and I think that here we can say the same. It's really irrelevant if you say "a special needs child" or "a child with special needs." What is relevant is how you relate to them, how you treat them, how you care for them. That's a lot more important than the semantics.

G.W.

I personally don't care if others call my son: "a child with special needs," or vice versa. I understand why others use the all-inclusive label of special needs, but I will personally specify autism when referring to his diagnosis.

B.G.

I remember, years ago in camp, there was a girl in a wheelchair who needed assistance with everything. I went over to one of the girls who was caring for her and said: "I would be happy to do Breindy after supper for an hour so you can have a break." She looked at me and said: "We don't do Breindy. If you want to spend time with Breindy, you are welcome to!" Her attitude has stayed with me to this day.

S.F.

It all depends who you are talking to, and how sensitive they are. I would say to be especially careful when talking about younger children who don't have a diagnosis yet, or whose parents have not accepted their diagnosis yet, to not refer to them as "special needs kids." A much nicer way of saying it is: "They have some special needs." It can take family members time to get comfortable with the name of the diagnosis, so don't use it unless you hear them using it freely. Another point: Don't assume you know another child's diagnosis and label him! I don't appreciate when people call my son autistic.

T.S.

I don't think we should be saying the specific diagnosis when talking about our children – it puts the kid into a box with a label and a limit. When others hear a diagnosis, then that may be all that they see. Every child is so individual, and so much more than just his diagnosis. In addition to their own unique personality, they have their family's genes that affect who they are as well. "Special needs" is a basic umbrella term that doesn't have a negative connotation or result. R.H.

As someone who has been working in the field for a few years, I would venture to say one thing: a person is NOT a disability! It always bothers me when someone says, for example: "a Downs" or "a Downie," because while the person may have Downs (or any other condition), they ARE not Downs! They are yummy *Yiddishe neshamalach!* In general, I try to treat everyone, regardless of age or ability, as a regular person, and not as a "handicapped individual." Everyone, including a person with special needs, wants to be treated normally, spoken to like a *mentsch*, given responsibilities and independence, etc., like everyone else! L.K.

It's totally inappropriate to call someone by their diagnosis. When you say the person first, and then the diagnosis, you show that they are a person (son, student, sibling, etc.) first, who happens to have a diagnosis. It's not who they are. M.P.

To me, personally, I don't care if my child is a 'child with special needs' or a 'special needs child.' It's all the same to me. What difference does the wording make? My child is who he is, not how people word it. It's not about the words, twisted this way or that way; it's rather about how people include my child in society, how people are nice to my child, how they care. That's really all that counts. Let's look at the bigger picture and not get carried away with these little nuances...

Thirty to forty years ago, the word used for special needs children was "retarded." And that's the way it was. Then, the word "retarded" was used in derogatory ways, as making fun of people who did silly things (as in: "You're retarded"), and then the word changed to "special needs." Then some people decided that the term "special needs" was derogatory, so they decided to change the term to "neuro-divergent." If we analyze this, the word "neuro" means brain-related, and the word "divergent" means different. Basically, it's like telling someone: "You are a guy with a different kind of brain." I think this is the most derogatory term of all. Saying that someone's brain is different? Is that nice? How is this word nicer than the term 'special needs'?

I think it's time to stop with the whole wording thing, and instead focus on including all of these special needs *neshamos* into the community, treating them with tender loving care, and giving them lots of understanding!

Regarding sharing a child's diagnosis or not, it really depends who you are speaking to. If I am speaking to a teacher, a therapist, or a doctor, then I would feel it's important to be more specific about the diagnosis, because then they can understand and treat the child more appropriately. But with any random person with whom we are discussing our child, just say: "My child has special needs". Why do they need to know more than that? If they start asking more questions, then I would expand as much as I feel comfortable. Y.W.

I prefer to say: "He has special needs" as opposed to "He is special needs," although I don't take it personally when I hear it. Our children do have challenges, but we don't need to label them as challenged – it's limiting. I find that, when it comes to child who looks typical, if you share their diagnosis, such as autism, it helps people understand the not-typical behavior. If it's a child who clearly looks different and has an unusual diagnosis, there may be no real benefit in sharing, and it can be uncomfortable having to explain it all. A Reader



I will end off with this incident: One mother expressed herself very adamantly about how offensive it is to put a label before the word "child" and how the child always comes first, etc. I took what she said seriously and we spoke about it for a while. Then the conversation meandered into other topics and she asked me: "Do you know any OT's who work with special needs kids in such-and-such specific area?" I held my tongue, but I couldn't help noticing how, despite the strong feelings that she had expressed no less than five minutes earlier, she herself had just unthinkingly put the "special needs" adjective before the word "kids"!

My take-away is that we should all try to be as sensitive as possible. However, we should not take it personally when the wording is not exactly to our liking and realize that people don't mean anything deep or hurtful when they talk about our precious children; it's just a manner of speech.

Q

Dear Shira,

# IN SESSION

I recently read a book about parent attachment theory. The idea is that, for our children to grow up emotionally healthy and have secure relationships with others, they need to be raised in a very safe environment. This really hit me, as my child with special needs is tall, strong, unpredictable, and at times, aggressive. My other children do get hurt by him (not in a serious way) on a pretty regular basis. I try my best to make sure this doesn't happen, and when it does, I try to soothe and validate. But do you think that children who do not have the security that they are fully physically safe at home can be damaged long-term?

C. F.

A

Dear C. F.—and all *Neshamale* parents,

Thank you for bringing attention to this very important question for ALL parents.

Allow me to share the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs.

For this response, only the bottom two tiers will be addressed. Please notice the pyramid shape. Physiological Needs: water, air, food, sleep, clothing, and shelter, are at the bottom of the pyramid, indicating that we need them most. The second tier up is Safety Needs: security and predictability in one's environment. Ideally, in the perfect circumstances, children and people can flourish and develop to the maximum. Hashem created the most amazing body, and even when the circumstances cannot be met, people are resilient. Think of the Israeli hostages—they certainly did not have their physiological needs met, and they suffered terribly, but, fortunately many survived (May they all have a complete recovery after such deprivation and torture!).

Let's address the situation in your house. Are your children's physiological needs met? From your question, I do not have that information, but this doesn't appear to be the issue. Rather it's the second tier of the pyramid that is your concern. How secure are your children feeling? How predictable is their environment?

Your question is missing information, so I am unable to answer this fully, as I have many questions. Many years ago,

Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, did not have any limit-setting in her home, and created havoc there. Her teacher, Annie Sullivan, was able to teach her limits, and Helen became a famous and accomplished person, despite her disabilities.

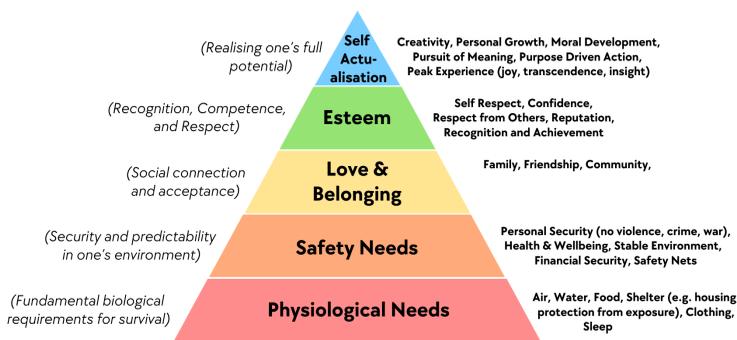
Are you able to provide limits for your child with special needs?

Many times, misplaced *rachmanus* for a person with special needs can be very harmful. Parents must ensure that their child with special needs is safe, as well as the other family members. I have been to many homes where there is an inside combination lock to the front door, to ensure that the person

with special needs does not leave the home unattended.

The other family members need to be safe as well, of course. Please pay close attention to what may be triggering your special needs child, and think about what can be done to minimize the causes. Similar to the way as you baby-proofed your home for your crawling infant, think how you can safety-proof your home for this older child. I do not want to minimize or assume that you are not already trying your utmost, but these are fundamental issues that must be addressed.

Once these matters have been addressed and the safety measures have been implemented to the best of your ability, if your other children continue to be hurt, please validate them. Share your genuine feelings with them. For example: "Honey, I see that you got hurt. I feel so sad that this happened to you. I wish it wouldn't happen. We are trying so hard to prevent this, but it is still taking a long time, much longer



than I thought. Is there something that would soothe your pain—an ice pack, a band aid? I will give it to you now, and please let me know how you are feeling.”

Although we have *emunah* and know that Hashem is in charge, this is not the time to give that speech. Validate and support the immediate pain, hurt, bleeding, etc.

Having a child with special needs is a 24/7/365 job. Certainly, there are rewards, but there are also constant challenges. You may want, on occasion, to utilize a respite facility (if one is available in your community) where your child with special needs can stay, or arrange for a volunteer or caregiver to attend to the child with special needs during busy times. This will allow your other children to have your attention, and give them a break from their stressful situation.

These are some suggestions, that I hope can be helpful. Please forgive me if I am missing the mark, as I do not know your particular circumstances.

Wishing you much *hatzlacha*,  
Shira Speiser, LCSW

*Shira Speiser is a social worker in Lakewood, New Jersey and has helped children and families for many years. You can contact her with your own individual concerns and needs at: (732) 367-1503 or shira732@live.com*



Chayala Tawil

This bin is super easy to put together (Do I say that about every column? They all really are!), because all of the components come straight from your local grocery store. Here is what I picked up:

- 20 lbs. rice (comes in a huge bulk bag)
- Blue food coloring
- Hand sanitizer (about ½ ounce needed)
- 1 box of colored Chanukah candles
- 1 package of colorful *dreidles*
- Optional add ins: gold coins, *menorahs*

We took a break from using rice as a base for the past couple of bins. Now I went back to it, as it makes for one of our favorite sensory experiences. I colored half of the rice (10 lbs.) blue, and left the other half white, the blue and white being perfect for a Chanukah background.

I poured half of the rice directly into the container I was using (a 28 qt. underbed box), drizzled in a few drips of hand sanitizer, then a few drips of blue food coloring, and mixed it with gloved hands. I kept adding a little at a time, until the shade of blue looked right to me. I let it sit for a few minutes, then added in the white rice. My kids added in the candles and *dreidels*, and we were set!

After they played a bit, I gave each of them a disposable tin *menorah*, and they had a race to find the buried candles and put them into their *menorah*. The first one to fill his *menorah* was the winner.

When Avrumi came home, he was so excited when he saw the new bin I made for him! He loves pouring the rice in our bins, so I gave him a small cup and spoon and he was in business. He also enjoyed burying the *dreidles* and candles under the rice.

I showed him how to put the candles into the *menorah*, but it was a little hard for him to do it on his own, so I didn't push it; I don't like using the short time we have to play together at night as therapy time. I did talk to him about Chanukah, about how we are going to light the *menorah* and play *dreidel*. He has a phenomenal memory, B"H, and I think he recognized the items from previous years. This bin definitely put us all into the "Chanukah is coming" mode, and was enjoyed by all!

# Supportive Reading Material



Child Level  
Books

Book List and Details by Toby Brief  
Comments by Chayala Tawil

*In this last installment of the Supportive Reading Material column, we feature books written for young children. One of these books may be the perfect way to start a conversation with your younger children about their special sibling. It can also be a great tool to have on hand when young neighbors or cousins come over and need to understand what they are seeing in your home. Or it may just be the perfect Chanukah gift for those little special people in your life!*

## 13 Our New Special Baby

Author: Chaya Rosen

Publisher: Feldheim Publishers

43 pages, Ages 2-8

*A special baby is that much more, it's a completely new reality.*



**Publisher's Summary:** Racheli is so excited when the call comes through: She has a new baby brother! Then, when her father comes home from the hospital, he sits his children down and explains to them just how special their baby brother is. In this tender, reassuring story, family members learn how to accept their new baby brother, born with Down syndrome. Sensitively written and accompanied by heartwarming, realistic illustrations, *Our New Special Baby* not only broadens our understanding of consideration for others, but also inspires readers – young and old alike – with the amazing power of a Torah perspective. The book includes a highly-informative appendix that describes Down syndrome, along with a medical overview of commonly associated medical concerns, making this an ideal guide for home, school, or anyone in the helping professions.

## 14 My Special Uncle

Author: Ahuva Ehrenpreis

Publisher: Mosaica Press

22 pages, Ages 5-8

*This book explains to children why an adult in their life may be acting differently and helps clarify what "special" might mean.*

**Publisher's Summary:** Meet Uncle Dovi and his lucky nephew, whose shared adventures help develop sensitivity and reduce the anxiety that young children (and even some adults) experience when they meet others who appear "different." Through simple text and beautiful illustrations, readers gain



an awareness that the inclusion of all people, whatever their strengths or weaknesses, enriches all of our lives.

**My Personal Take:** A must-read for those who have an older someone special in their life, such as a relative or neighbor. Mrs. Ehrenpreis has just the right words to validate and explain the relationship on a child's level.

## 15 Yossi and Laibel on the Ball (Board Book Version: Yossi and Laibel Make a Friend)

Author: Dina Rosenfeld

Publisher: Hachai Publishers

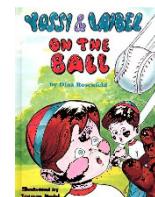
32 pages, Ages 3-7

*This book shows how inclusion can be possible. Even more so – it demonstrates that if you pay attention, you just may be pleasantly surprised at how gifted and "abled" a child is!*

**Publisher's Summary:** Yossi and Laibel learn that, although their new neighbor looks different because he is in a wheelchair, he is still an amazing asset to their game and, most importantly, to their friendship.

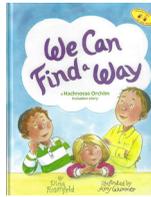
When Avi, a new boy, moves in next door to the two brothers, it doesn't look like he'll be a very good ballplayer. Will Yossi and Laibel judge him by his appearance or give Avi a chance? Join everyone's favorite characters as they find out what really makes someone a friend.

**My Personal Take:** This delightful rhyming book of the Yossi and Laibel series brings home the lesson of appreciating everyone's differences, including their weaknesses and strengths, and shows that friendship goes beyond externals. It is one of my kids' favorites!



## 16 We Can Find a Way

Author: Dina Rosenfeld  
Publisher: Hachai Publishers  
36 pages, Ages 3-7



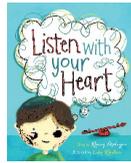
*Sometimes it may be a challenge to include those with special needs. With creative thinking and a will to succeed, We Can Find a Way!*

**Publisher's Summary:** In *We Can Find a Way*, Eli, Zev, and Leah look forward to hosting a celebration for their Bubby's birthday. However, meeting the needs of every guest requires sensitivity and lots of creative thinking.

Two of the toddlers have food allergies. What kind of treats work for them? Their uncle uses a wheelchair. He can't even get up the front steps! One of their cousins can't tolerate crowded, noisy events. Will the party have to be cancelled, or will Eli, Zev, and Leah find a way to include everyone?

## 17 Listen With Your Heart

Author: Raizy Metzger  
Publisher: Judaica Press  
36 pages, Ages 3-11



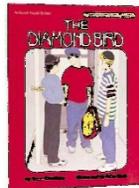
*There is more than one way to listen, and oh, so many ways to speak. This book teaches children to open their minds and hearts, for only then can we REALLY listen!*

**Publisher's Summary:** *Listen With Your Heart* is a story that teaches children the important values of relating to those who are different from them, instilling traits like caring, compassion, and sensitivity. With its fresh and endearing illustrations, this book will help your child grow and learn valuable lessons at an early stage.

This book will help young readers gain confidence in knowing how to best respond when they come across someone who isn't able to respond with words. In fact, it's a book everyone should read. Teachers, parents, professionals, friends, family members, and those with disabilities can all benefit from the lessons in this story. --Julie Sando, autism professional and founder of Autistically Inclined

## 18 The Diamond Bird

Author: Yona Weinberg  
Publisher: Artscroll/Mesorah Publishers  
(out of print, used books available for purchase)  
64 pages, Ages 5-13

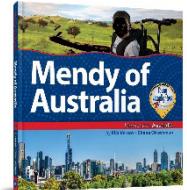


*Meet the characters and watch them interact with a young man with special needs. See how the boys can see that he is a person first, diagnosis second, and has so much to offer.*

**My Personal Take:** Although this book is out of print, we could not resist adding it to the list. This was one of my favorites as a child myself, except for the fact that my mother always got teary-eyed reading it to me! Interesting story lines, beautiful pictures by Esky Cook, and great lessons, too. If you can somehow get your hands on a copy, you'll be so glad you did!

## 19 Mendy of Australia

Author: Ella Verzov and Chana Oirechman  
Publisher: Menucha Publishers  
54 pages, Ages 5-11



*A day in the life of a boy in Australia. See how he does mitzvos, enjoys the country in which he lives, and deals with the challenges that come along with having Angelman Syndrome.*

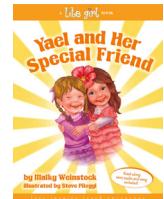
**Publisher's Summary:** *Mendy of Australia* is the eleventh book in the Young Lamplighters series. These books allow young readers to peek into the lives of boys and girls from around the globe. They meet children who, together with their parents, are trying to help Jews learn more about their heritage.

Via these first-person accounts, readers can visit the most fascinating places. They will be drawn into these children's lives, and learn about the cities and the countries in which they live. Fascinating facts and interesting descriptions, alongside authentic professional photographs, are included throughout the book. These stories broaden horizons while demonstrating the art of giving and caring for others, as well as loving fellow Jews.

**My Personal Take:** This article was almost ready for print when I walked into my local Judaica store, and the cover picture of a boy in a wheelchair caught my eye! I started reading right there in the aisle, and couldn't put it down. I love how this story focuses on so many interesting things aside from Mendy's disability: exploring the country of Australia, his family's outreach work—and woven into the story is how, despite his inability to walk or talk, Mendy is involved in every aspect of his friends' and family's lives. The last page of the book, called: "Something to Think About," has invaluable tips to help children relate to that special someone in their lives.

## 20 Yael and Her Special Friend

Author: Malky Weinstock  
Publisher: Judaica Press  
24 Pages, Ages 3-8



**Publisher's Summary:** Yael has a new neighbor it's Gila, a girl with Down syndrome. Join Yael as she befriends Gila and learns that Hashem makes each of us in our own special way and wants us to love and appreciate each other.

# Smart & Safe

## AND HOPEFUL

Fraydel Dickstein

### Wednesday night, Motzei Simchas Torah, 2025

It was *Simchas Torah* night and my house was quiet. Most of the family was in *shul*, while I had the privilege of staying home with Yehuda. I lit my *licht*, sat down on my couch, and gazed around my home. I felt so blessed, so at peace, so connected to Hashem. I *davened* without interruption; what a treat. Eventually I did go to *shul*, changing guards with my husband. Of course we invited Yehuda numerous times to come along, which he firmly refused.

As I walked serenely through the streets, I reflected on a *Simchas Torah* that took place around eight years ago, when we stayed at my in-laws for the holiday. When we finally arrived in *shul*, Yehuda was very upset. He brought me his coat and insisted that we leave. With no choice, I put him in his stroller and wheeled him around the neighborhood. I tried hiding my face so no one would see me crying. It wasn't just a few tears, I was truly heartbroken. I felt so alone, so afraid, so hopeless. Was this what my life with my special child was going to be like? Was I forever going to be gated from society? Was the highlight of my year – *Simchas Torah* – going to be snatched from me forever? I always loved watching my husband dance with the Torah; it was a pleasure that is hard for me to describe in words, it filled me up in a huge way. Now, I didn't see any future, I didn't see any hope; I just saw blackness.

I didn't know then of the unbelievable joy I would come to feel from this child. True joy stems from connecting to Hashem, and no, I do not need to be in *shul* to feel that. My dining room and my *Yom Tov licht* filled me in a way I did not even know possible then.

I was unable to see the joy that would fill my home every day: The jovial morning routine that includes singing, sometimes music and dancing (what wouldn't we do to get Yehuda up and to school?), *Erev Yom Tov* trips to check out the *shuls* in the neighborhood, going with Yehuda to the *mikva* for him to give out *tzedaka* to all the people collecting outside, driving up and down the streets looking for neighbors who need rides.

I didn't consider the possibility of leaving Yehuda, who is fully independent, with my cleaning lady, while I went off to *shul*.

I never dreamed I would be able to let Yehuda scooter outside on his own, with me only semi-watching him. I thought I was trapped, positive that each year would bring more challenges, and life would just get harder and harder.

I never dreamt that I would sometimes host other special needs children for *Simchas Torah*, happy to know that their families could celebrate *Yom Tov* without feeling the heartbreak I had felt. I never dreamt of having his BT come over and bring him to *shul*. I never dreamt that neighbors would be so kind to him at *shul*. I simply could not imagine how much hope and possibility surrounded my beautiful boy, who then felt like the biggest tragedy Hashem could have given me. I entered the *shul*, as it pulsed with singing and dancing, and felt like singing along in amazement and appreciation for how far we have come.

### Thursday Night

Lying in my bed, it's now 12.30 a.m. and I am comfortably turning over to go to sleep. I hear a door slamming, Yehuda clapping, and some other noises he creates, and I just turn over and go to sleep. At sixteen years old, I let him put himself to sleep whenever he deems it right. B"H, anything we think is unsafe is locked, and the doors to the outside all have double-sided combination locks.

It must have been eleven years ago, when I would sit night after night at Yehuda's bedside, singing and talking; then I would turn to saying *Tehilim* and cry that he go to sleep. I remember some nights going into the room next to his and *davening* tear-filled *Ma'ariv*, so distressed that he was not falling asleep. *Lev nishbar v'nitdkah Elokim lo tevazeh* (*Hashem listens to the broken-hearted*). I am sure some of the *nachas* we now have emerged from those broken-hearted *Maariv*s.

Bedtimes were just one part of the terrible situation we felt we were in. It drained me and my husband and made us truly despondent. Then there was the night when Yehuda, at about seven years old, learned how to unlock the front door. I moved the couch against the door and took up residence there for the night. B"H the next day brought Arrow Locksmith to our door to install a double-sided combination lock.

Up until just a few years ago, I was still sitting by Yehuda's door at night. In fact, the first few years of the *Neshamale Magazine* were partially created by Yehuda's bedside. I remember asking Mrs. Rubashkin in all earnestness, how she puts her Moishy to sleep, and I am pretty sure she said it was not a problem. I was very intrigued by that, and I am not sure how we got here ourselves. I think it happened over a period of time, when I would sometimes fall asleep before putting Yehuda to bed—and somehow it was fine. He made a racket which some of our other children did not like, but I was often too tired to pull myself out of bed to stop him. Then I decided to stop locking the upstairs door so he could go downstairs and not wake up the other kids. I am so grateful to Hashem that this has been working.

### Motzei Shabbos

On *Erev Shabbos*, I went to *bentch licht*. My tall silver candlesticks were prepared for me with candles. I took my lighter and performed the sacred *mitzva*. I exhaustedly plopped down on a nearby couch. I looked at the candles, and the beauty of it all was not lost on me. I thanked Hashem from a place deep within, that we had arrived at this point. Our Shabbos table is set, replete with china and flowers. I just stared and thanked Hashem again and again for the gift of using candlesticks, for the gift of lighting on a *lichter* table in my dining room, for the gift of my children being able to set our Shabbos table.

I remembered lighting my candles on top of the freezer. My husband would try to clear a spot for the *leichter* amidst the cereal boxes and everything else that needed to be out of reach. I didn't even cry, I accepted it as fact. I worried, however, that something would fall on the *leichter*, *chalila* – it was not safe. I did not have the luxury of plopping down on the nearby couch then; Yehuda was always on the run, and by necessity, so was I.

I wouldn't dream of setting the Shabbos table, as he would grab and destroy everything. I could not even prepare food for the meal, as I had no place to put it without him getting into it. I don't even think this made me sad; it was simply the way we existed. We did not have solutions; we just survived.

B"H the day came when we moved, and Yehuda's difficult behavior decreased by 70%. Thus began our journey from survival to eventually thriving. A few factors played into this. One was our new location. Our neighbors were *tzadikim*, and they provided endless respite help. I still lit my candles on top of the fridge, as my kitchen did not easily lock, but it was an empty clear fridge, aside from a microwave. I was not comfortable using my tall silver candlesticks there, but I eventually bought nice short glass ones. We set the Shabbos table gingerly, as we did not have a full locking system for the dining room. But the Shabbos table did not interest Yehuda as it once had, he now had his swings upstairs, and lots of space to run and play.

It took time for us to get used to our new reality. Preparing food was still a challenge, because that interested him. Since we now had more room, I was able to be creative about keeping things out of his reach. Having *chesed* girls come to take Yehuda out before the *seuda* was a huge help, giving us time and space to prepare. This was the first time my husband didn't dread coming home, as there was now some semblance of order in our house. The black cloud of hopelessness around Yehuda started to dissipate. I saw possibility where there was previously only darkness and tragedy.

The big question is: How did we get here? How did we get from bitter survival, hopelessness, and constantly being engulfed in a river of tears, to a place that still has challenges, but with an atmosphere that is happy and thriving. I have been *zoche* to watch many friends, by now, make this journey as well.

Instead of featuring the usual "helpful product" details in this column, I will share five fundamental tips that can help you a lot more than any lock or shoe ever could.

### 1. BELIEVE THAT TIME HEALS

Having a special child, or just realizing that your child is not going to be typical, is unbearably painful. All the *chizuk* in the world, everyone telling you what a *zechus* it is, or any other platitudes, cannot take away that unbearable agony. It's the pain of loss, a deep place of grief that I think is impossible not to experience. The only way to move on is to go through the stages of grief as they come, be it denial, anger, bargaining, etc., and come to acceptance.

### 2. UNCLOG THE PICKLE JAR

Picture a jar of pickles that are jammed in so tightly that it's hard to get one out. But once you get that first pickle out, it's much easier to get out the next one, and it just gets easier as you go along. When things are just so hard, it is completely overwhelming, and you are convinced there is nothing, but nothing, to do to make the situation doable. It looks bleak, hopeless, impossible.

Now, I beg you to make a small move. Even a tiny improvement will make a difference, and will bring more improvements about as well. One small move can be to set aside a bit of time with your spouse. One mother told me that when they were in the hospital around the clock with their child, she and her husband took turns being with her. They began a tradition that, when they changed shifts, they would sit together for 15 minutes and drink a coffee in the hospital cafeteria.

Another doable first move is making life physically easier. Perhaps it's hiring some cleaning help. Maybe it's indulging in using more paper goods, or making easier suppers, even if they might be a little more costly (think peeled garlic, chicken nuggets, or whatever works for your family).

*continued on page 31*

If you are considering medication, find out about capsules that can be put into apple sauce.

If there is gastrointestinal upset, try the FODMaP diet to identify triggering foods and/or gluten free/dairy free.

Consider adding water-based smoothies to your routine to increase water content, fiber, Vitamin C, and other vitamins.

Try emptying a capsule of probiotics and/or Benefiber into a smoothie or applesauce.

Get a trampoline, pogo ball, pogo jumper, or pogo stick (depending on balance level), or find someone to teach biking.

Find an outlet for exercise your child likes, since exercise produces the same chemicals in the brain that medication does (just in smaller doses, needing more frequent movement breaks). One study found that when kids moved for 15 minutes every 1-1/2 hours, it worked like medication.

It's possible that higher doses of intense cardio, even for shorter stints, can powerfully boost a child's ability to sit and focus.

Speak with Fun and Function about setting up a sensory room, which might be eligible for coverage by the Health and Safety Division of the OPWDD budget.

Consider a behavior-based school like Beacon/Ohr Dovid (where my son attended), or a holistic/sensory program that also incorporates ABA, such as Yaldeinu.

*Daven, daven, daven!* Because it's all *hishtadlus* and *Hashem* can heal anything and everything.

Pessy Nimchinsky

There are two chewable long-acting Ritalin meds: Cotempla and Qulchew, and two chewable long-acting Adderall: Adzenys and Vyvanse chewable. There are also patches that dispense the medication: Daytrana, a Ritalin patch, and Xelstrym, an Adderall patch. a PA

Ritalin patch:) P.B.

There are medications available in liquid form, and there are also patches that can be worn that dispense the medicine. Ask your neurologist or pediatrician for information about these options.

Chaim T.



## Tips From The Experts

*hey! that's us!*



There are liquid, chewable, and (monthly) injection forms of ADHD medications.

Regarding the pills, use a pill crusher and mix the crushed pill in yogurt,

apple sauce, or the like. The pill crusher I use is called Ezy Dose Pill Crusher from Amazon.

This should definitely help. It takes some time to be absorbed in the body. Work with a competent doctor. *Hatzlacha!*

Miriam G.

**My six year old son is extremely hyperactive, one of many aspects of the rare syndrome that Hashem created him with. He can barely ever sit still; he is always running, climbing walls (literally!), bumping into other people, etc. It also impacts his learning, as even though he has some level of intelligence, he is not able to focus enough in class to learn well.**

**He is not able to swallow pills, so typical ADHD meds are not possible. Are there any alternative ideas that others have used to help in this area?**

**Thank you!**

**C. K.**

Cutting out all corn products (including anything with corn syrup) was a game changer. The hyperactivity significantly decreased. I don't understand the science behind this, but it has something to do with the high fructose affecting brain chemistry. Try it and see the magic for yourself. R.T.

My daughter was on Ritalin but we didn't see any major changes. We spoke to a nutritionist, who suggested that we cut out candy, corn snacks, colored drinks, and anything with food dye. She gave us some vitamins, including a kosher version of called "Focus and Concentration." After a few weeks, we started to see improvement. It wasn't dramatic, but it was real. This may not work for everyone, but it's for sure a good start and will not cause any harm! S.O.



Smart and Safe continued from page 29

To answer the question – I would never want to offer advice that might be inappropriate, so forgive me if this suggestion is not suitable, but it is unclear from the question about swallowing meds whether the 6 year old with a rare syndrome cannot swallow at all, or just cannot swallow his pills. Our son could never swallow meds and had to take large quantities of meds in liquid form – seizure meds as well as all his other meds. Recently he started new meds that only come in pill form and are slow release. We tried to give it to him with drinks, yogurts, puddings, etc., but nothing helped, and he always chewed it (thus defeating its slow-release benefits.) Then one time, we accidentally found a way that enabled him to swallow the pills whole. Obviously nothing is accidental – it was a gift from Hashem!



It was on Pesach. He had just eaten meat, and we had nothing on hand to help him get down his evening meds, so I gave it to him with frozen sorbet. Due its texture and because it is so cold, it is hard to bite on sorbet – and miraculously the pills went down whole! Since then, he swallows his pills whole – in two spoons of sorbet in the morning and evening (yes I know: sugar, unhealthy, and don't ask about the impossible task of brushing his teeth). 99% of the time, the meds just slip down whole along with the sorbet, and some of the pills he takes are big! It only works for him with sorbet. We have tried ice cream but he manages to eat the ice cream and keeps the pills in his mouth, which he then chews. Perhaps ice cream is not quite as cold and slippery as sorbet. Whatever the reason, for us/him, taking his meds with sorbet was transformative!

All the very best,

Y. R. (Bnei Brak)

Question for the next issue:

My well-meaning family and neighbors are always telling me to make sure to do self-care. They feel for me, that my special children take up so much time, effort, and energy. The problem is that it's hard for me to find capable babysitters. I need ideas for how I can leave home, other than when my husband is home for a short time in the evening. I would love to hear practical ideas that other special moms are using.



Julie K.

Please send us your answers to:  
neshamalemagazine@gmail.com or text your answers to:  
848-299-2908



### 3. TAKE HELP

**It's hard to take help but it's harder not to.** I heard this line from Perry Binet. I do not think there is a better way to say it. In the beginning, my pride was so high and it was so hard for me to accept help – until I pretty much fell apart. Help is incredible; it makes all the difference. I found one of the barriers for taking help when I was so overwhelmed, was that I felt if it wasn't the perfect time, person, and place, it was just not worth it. But good enough is good enough.

I will never forget how one friend expressed her reservation about getting help: “How can I sit on the couch while someone else is running after my son?” To answer her (and me, and all of us!), I say that help is like a bank account. If you can sit on the couch now, then you will have the strength later to run the marathon that is your life.

I remember being taken aback when someone told me that she was going to watch her neighbor's special needs child so her neighbor could go walking. Today I understand how absolutely brilliant this woman was. **TAKE HELP, TAKE HELP, TAKE HELP!** Even if no one can help you with your child, they can send meals or watch the other kids.

### 4. GET SLEEP

We cannot function without sleep. I wish my younger self knew this. I spent hours sitting at Yehuda's bedside and losing sleep. I don't have practical solutions for everyone, but please know that it is worth it to do things that may not feel ideal for your child so that you can sleep, even if your child won't. **Your child only has one set of parents - please take the best care of them!**

### 5. DON'T DWELL ON THE FUTURE

Don't allow yourself to think excessively about the future, or to envision all the challenges to come. I spent hours and hours sobbing about what would happen to my Yehuda and what I would do when he was grown. How would I manage a boy who was bigger than myself? Did I think that these thoughts would somehow motivate me to put in more effort? Or maybe I just couldn't help it.

In some ways, the challenges Yehuda presents now are even more difficult than I imagined — and in other ways they are much easier. One thing I did not know is that I would grow with him. I am not the same overwhelmed, grieving mother that I was then, coping with the challenges of today. I did not envision my growth and what a different person I would become. When negative thoughts come, tell yourself it's not worth it, because you really have no idea what the future will bring. There is so much hope and healing out there.

May Hashem give us all the strength and skills to raise our special children. May we be able to see past the pain and hardship, to find hope and joy in our lives.

# Teen Musing

By Yehuda's Sister

It's now 12:26 at night, or should I say morning? I was snuggled up, cozy in bed, until about five minutes ago. I heard my mother um, talking—in that special way of hers, that practically screams that something I won't be very happy about, happened—to my dear precious very special, special needs older brother. Being the curious, worried, nervous teenager that I am, I slipped out of bed to see what the commotion was all about.

I have to say that, sadly, the sight that greeted me did not faze me all that much. It was actually all too familiar, and neither shocked nor astounded nor... Hey, getting curious? Well, sorry for leaving you hanging! Anyhow, this very not-peculiar sight was the entire contents of our previously very clean, very neat, very organized linen closet, now grazing our very brown, very wooden once-clear floor! 😞

At first, I was quite upset, but then I started thinking some good positive Elul thoughts, and making some deep cheshbonos. Pause...

I go to find the school calendar from last year. Yes, it's still in the middle of the night, 12:33, to be precise (in case you were wondering). And guess what I discovered? What?

Patience my dear reader, patience! Here goes... Pesach break for BYHSL started on beis Nisan, and the very first day of our break was the day I (modest bow) organized our now not-so-organized linen closet (Try to guess why—hints up ahead). And now it is September 13. Actually, it's not; it's after 12 midnight, which means it's the 14th. Do you understand what I just said? I mean,



wrote? I don't want to wake the rest of the family, but: Drumroll, please!

I ORGANIZED THE LINEN CLOSET ON MONDAY, MARCH 31, AND IT'S NOW SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025! I ORGANIZED THE LINEN CLOSET ON MONDAY, MARCH 31, AND IT'S NOW SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025! I ORGANIZED THE LINEN CLOSET ON MONDAY, MARCH 31, AND IT'S NOW SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025!

Yes! The linen closet in the Dickstein house stayed organized for ... hold on, putting some math skills to use... Got it! Ready? Here goes: for a whole of 167 days! (Yes, I literally just sat and counted that). Wait, minus the weeks he was in camp. But, with Yehuda around, this is a Completely, Unbelievable, Unfathomable, Inconceivable, Unimaginable feat.

Now, we won't talk about the other closets that got dumped numerous times in the interim (we're trying to stay positive). I think I might have some big zechusim, since the closet that I organized didn't get dumped for so long. Maybe I should go organize the rest of the closets, so they can have a similar (or even better?) mazel. Hashem can do anything!

Well either way, if you happen to be in my house in the near future, please don't judge our not-so-organized closets—more hours were probably put into them than half of Lakewood put together...

Whew! It's 12:42 a.m., maybe I should go to sleep. Wow! That took 16 whole minutes to write. Perhaps I should have put the closet back together instead... 😊

# *This Is Who You Are to Me*

Leah G.

To my Students with Special Needs:

In my ocean, you are my jellyfish,

Quietly soothing in your smooth graceful way.

In my grassy field, you are my earth,

Keeping me grounded and connected to what really matters.

In my galaxy, you are each a whole world,

With ideas, personality, likes and dislikes somewhere deep inside.

In my crayon box, you are each a beautiful, vibrant crayon,

Yearning to be "colored" with, and to show your hues.

On my table, you are my carbonated drink,

Bursting and bubbling with laughter.

In my toy box, you are my most cherished dolls,

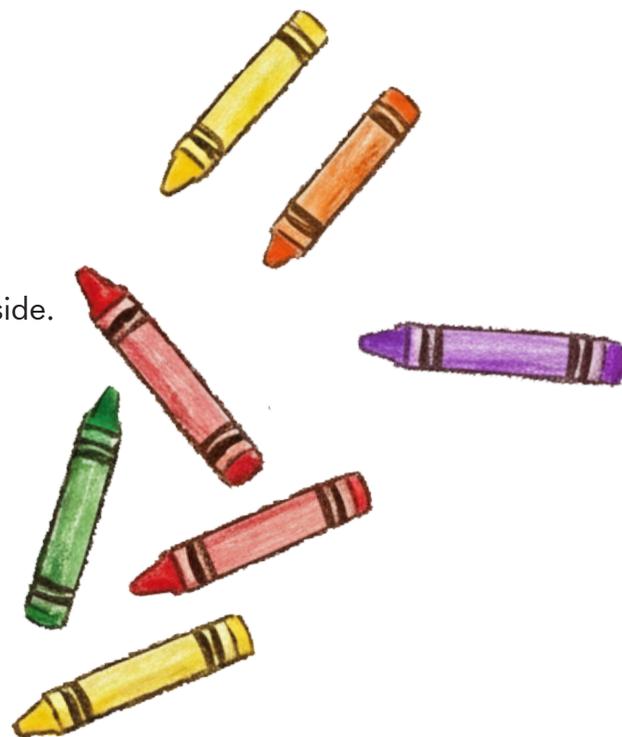
Because I feel connected to you, and love to cuddle with you.

In my dreams, you are my miracles,

Where you magically walk and talk, and have no pain.

In real life, you are my heroes,

Because I learn from you how to endure the hardships of life.



# Voices in the Night

Gitty Weiss

It had been a long day. A long Sunday. With all the kids home. Dovi's afternoon therapist didn't show. I had a screaming newborn, hot, sticky weather, and only a few hours of sleep to run on. The laundry was never ending, the mess was everywhere. But like all long days, evening eventually comes. Finally, everyone went to bed. I wearily surveyed the house and started picking up the pieces. It took a few hours to get everything standing upright again. The mountain of laundry got folded, the floor was unearthed, the sinks emptied of dishes. At 1:00 am, I reached the coveted prize: a hot shower. Afterwards, I ran back downstairs to take the white shirts out of the dryer to hang them so they wouldn't crease overnight. I trudged back upstairs to hang them, counting the seconds until my weary body would collapse into bed. My pillow was calling so loudly, I didn't know how everyone else was sleeping through the screams.

I walked into the boys room to hang the shirts when the smell hit me. Dovi had a dirty diaper.

*No, I can't do this now. I'm so tired. I just can't. I'm going to sleep.*

*You have to change him. He's dirty. You can't leave him that way until the morning.*

*But he's sleeping. He doesn't even want to wake up.*

*He'll get a rash. You have to do it.*

*I can't. What if I hadn't walked in here? I wouldn't have known and I wouldn't have changed him and he would've survived.*

*But you do know.*

*But no one else knows. It's fine.*

*Hashem knows. He knows and He wants you to change him.*

*Okay, Hashem. I am doing this for You. For Your child.*

*For Hashem? For yourself. This is good for you.*

Usually when Dovi needs to be changed in middle of the night, my husband helps me and lifts him onto the dresser. It's not easy for me to do it on my own. But my husband was also tired and had just fallen asleep. I won't wake him; I can do this.

Harnessing strength I didn't know I had left, I haul Dovi onto the dresser. He resists, he wants to sleep. I whisper to him reassuringly and he gives me a precious sleepy half-smile. Undress, clean him up, re-diaper, re-dress, wrap up the diaper, get him back into bed, unlock the front door and walk to the garbage can... I walk back up the front steps feeling like a hero. I did it.

*For You, Hashem. Are you proud?*

And I feel Him answering me: *"For you, my daughter. You just climbed a giant step in the direction of greatness, and you are in a better place for it, forever."* The joy of knowing that I did right is more delicious than my bed. But I head there now, and try to get a little rest, so I can climb some more tomorrow.





*“ When you judge someone based on a diagnosis, you miss out on their true potential. ”*