



נשמהלה Neshamale magazine

Sharing Our Special Experiences: Chizuk & Inspiration

NEVER ALONE

**RAISING A SPECIAL NEEDS DAUGHTER
WITH HELP FROM ABOVE /6**

RABBI EZRA KLEIN IS BACK!

THE POTENTIAL WITHIN:

HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

HOW DO WE ACTUALIZE IT? /10

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שמואל ע"ה בן
ר' חיים נתן הלוי נ"י

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.

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In the upcoming Winter Issue we plan to focus on the topic of
Siblings: Their Role, Their Perspective We'd love your input to help explore this theme from all angles. Please submit your articles, stories, poems, thoughts, questions and advice that may be of interest. Your anonymity will be protected if requested.

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: **November 7**

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Dear Readers,

Welcome back to another issue of *Neshamale* – our 12th issue, completing our third year of publications. The potential in the written word is deep and powerful, and we strive to utilize it to its fullest. I want to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to all of the wonderful writers who fill our pages with their words of inspiration and education. To those who write an ongoing column – your dedication and loyalty know no bounds. And to those who take the time and effort to send in submissions, know that sharing your story, and the heroes behind it, brings *chizuk* to us all. A tremendous thank you to our talented editor and our designer – the standards that we have become known for are thanks to your efforts. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge our readers who take the time to drop us a line to let us know which columns you enjoy, how your life is touched, and to suggest improvements. It is your feedback that keeps us going.

The theme for this issue is “the potential within.” How do we measure it? How do we actualize it? It reminds me of something that my husband and I were told by the Lakewood Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Dovid Schustal, *shlita*, in a discussion about raising our son, Avrumi. There is a well-known *Gemara* that a *malach* teaches the entire Torah to every Jewish baby in utero. Then, right before birth, the *malach* taps the baby’s lips and he forgets everything that he was taught. The child is then given a lifetime to learn and reacquire what was taught before birth. The Rosh Yeshiva asked: “Do you really think that every person – man and woman, the sages and the simple folk, were taught the exact same Torah before they were born?” He explained that every *neshama* is taught “*Torah Shelo*” – his own personal Torah, meaning *his chelek* in Torah. What the baby is taught is, in essence, that person’s potential in Torah. It’s his own personal portion of Torah to master. The Rosh Yeshiva explained that every parent’s job is to guide each child to uncover and take possession of their vast portion of Torah. And yes, this includes Avrumi’s portion, as well as the portion of every other special child.

I mustered up the courage to ask: “How can Avrumi possibly have a portion in Torah? He cannot speak or understand deep things at all!” The Rosh Yeshiva explained that we really have no way of knowing what anyone’s *chelek* of Torah is. Many people think that they can’t learn well, for various reasons. Only after one puts in his full effort can he see what he is truly capable of. We shouldn’t go by statistics, or give up, based upon others’ experiences. In my work with this magazine, I have been privileged to speak with many parents, and a common theme I hear is: “We could never have imagined our child getting to this point in life!”

Trust me, I’d give a lot of money to uncover the secret of what exactly it was that my special needs son learned during those nine months before his birth. But the Rosh Yeshiva explained that every person has their own *tafkid* in life. Avrumi may never learn a *possuk* of *Chumash*, but he already inspires others to be *b’simcha*, to appreciate the good in their lives, and to give unconditionally. It’s our job as his parents to do whatever we can for Avrumi (as well as for the other children with whom we have been blessed), to continue to bring out his *kochos* and lead him to fulfill his true potential.

We tend to think about the potential of something in the very beginning, as we look toward the unknown future. A new baby. A new job. A new year. Yes, this time of year, *Erev Rosh HaShanah*, as well as the start of a new school year, is very focused on the potential of the upcoming months. We are all hoping and *davening* for basically the same things for our precious *neshamalas*: a healthy year, without medical emergencies or hospital stays. A year of progress and growth in their relationships, in all of their therapies, and in their behaviors. A year of loving, trustworthy teachers and caregivers, who believe in them and care for them devotedly (without cancellations!).

Just as we have no clue as to what our baby’s potential in Torah is, neither do we know what the coming year has in store. But just as we trust that the *malach* has done a good job teaching our baby the Torah he needs to know, we can trust that Hashem, our loving Father, is setting us all up for the best possible year. That doesn’t always mean it will be easy. No one says that actualizing our potential doesn’t take hard work. But maybe, just maybe, our special *neshamales* will be the ones to lead us on our paths to greatness. May we all be worthy.

L’Shana Tova u’Mesuka,

Chayala

Holy Souls, Holy Deeds

Words of Chizuk from a Father: Akiva Zentman

As the father of a delicious 10 year old with autism and CP, I have often been privileged to attend retreats or speeches for parents of special needs children. Although many times I walk away inspired and empowered, there are times when I feel that the speaker's message does not hit home. Worse, I sometimes walk away feeling crushed and invalidated. I'd like to share some thoughts with other parents, based on insights from *Gedolei Yisroel*, which I hope will speak to your soul as they speak to mine.

I would like to begin with a story that happened to my older sister. A little over nine years ago, my sister and brother-in-law lost a three month old baby girl to SIDS, *Rachmana Litzlan*. During the *shiva*, my sister's non-Jewish boss and his wife came to express their condolences. This couple are multi-millionaires and famous in the business world, and they told my sister words that I will never forget. The wife had herself lost a baby to SIDS many years beforehand, and she told my sister: "You have something that I did not have; you have something to hold on to. I did not have that, and I never came to terms with my loss." This non-Jewish woman's words touched me, and it struck me that the only way to console a troubled or despondent person is with *HaKadosh Boruch Hu*. People can have all the money and fame in the world, but the only way they can have strength and stamina to deal with their challenges is by clinging to *HaKadosh Boruch Hu*. Like the *Navi* in *Yeshayah* says: "*Ani Menachemchem*" (I console you).

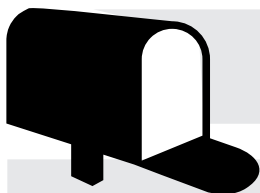
The *Gemara* in *Avoda Zara* (*daf Yud Ches*) tells us an incredible story of R' Chanina ben Tradion, who went to be *mevaker choleh* R' Yosi ben Kismah. R' Yosi rebuked R' Chanina for teaching Torah in public, since it was a time of *shmad* and he was putting himself in tremendous danger. R' Chanina questioned R' Yosi: "Will I be *zoche* to get a *chelek* in *Olam HaBa* (Will I merit a portion in the World to Come)?" R' Yosi responded with a question: "Did you ever do a remarkable deed?" R' Chanina answered back: "Yes. One time my *maos Purim* (charitable money for Purim) got mixed up with my personal money, and since I wasn't sure which money was which, I gave away all the money that was mixed together to *tzedaka*. R' Yosi told him: "*Halevei* my *chelek* should be with yours." This puzzling *Gemara* needs an explanation. Wasn't the fact that R' Chanina was teaching Torah in a time of *shmad* enough to earn him a *chelek* in *Olam HaBa*? Why did he need to search for another special deed? R' Blau, *zt"l* from *Yerushalayim*, explained that on the surface, the two *mitzvos*, risking his life to teach Torah, and giving his personal funds to *tzedaka*, seem far apart in significance. However, the true *kavanah* of each act is what

determines the value of the deed. Like the *Chovos HaLevavos* says: "*Me'at ha'zach hu ha'rov*," – a little bit of purity is what makes something great. Only Hashem knows the true *kavanah* a person has when he does a *mitzvah* – "*V'ha'Elokim yireh la'leivav* (G-d sees the heart)." R' Yosi ben Kisma was uncertain as to the true motive of R' Chanina teaching Torah in public. But when he heard about the story of the *Maos Purim*, where R' Chanina was *misgaber* even though no one was looking, he knew that R' Chanina was acting completely *l'shem Shamayim*, and he said: "*Yehi chelki mei'chelkicha*."

I write this *Gemara* with tears in my eyes. Who in the world knows how hard we work for our special needs children? Who sees when we diaper a grown child, who may sometimes soil himself completely, and even soil us while we are trying to get him clean? Who knows how many times we have had to head out in the middle of the night or a leave our Shabbos table to rush to the emergency room? Who sees how hard it can be to fight with our child to give him medicine, or to feed him with a G-tube day in and day out? Who sees the enormous amount of time and emotional energy we spend collaborating with teachers and therapists? Who sees how we struggle to cope when workers and caretakers cancel on us at the last minute (again!)? Who sees how we bite our lip when people say senseless and hurtful things? Who knows the worries we carry – worry whether we are giving our child what he needs to reach his potential, worry about what the future will bring, etc.?

Do you know Who sees? The *Av HaRachamim* sees ALL of this. He knows how hard it is for us, and he sees how we struggle to overcome our feelings of despair and to care for our child with a smile (or even with a frown!). He sees how, day in and day out, we accept our situation, knowing that it is the *ratzon Hashem*, and is a major part of our *tachlis* in this world. Nothing goes unnoticed – *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* is keeping score!

Hashem was *mezakeh* me with an insight into a famous *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (*Nun Amud Alef*). R' Yosef ben R' Yehoshua ben Levi became ill. He went to the *Olam HaEmes* for a short time and returned. His father asked him what he had seen up there, and he responded: "*Olam ha'fuch ra'isi. Elyonim le'mata v'tach'tonim l'ma'alah* (I saw an upside-down world. The high things were degraded and the low things were elevated)." R' Yehoshua ben Levi told his son: "My dear son, *Olam barur ra'isa* (You saw a coherent world)." The simple *pshat* is that in the next world there are simple people who will be considered great, and people who we consider great who may not be considered great in the World to Come. I would like to add that it is true, as well, for the *ma'asim* of people. Things people do that are admired and respected in this world may not be considered so great in the *Olam HaEmes*. Likewise, actions that people consider small, or don't even know that they exist – these are the actions that are valuable in the Next World. The



INBOX

To the *Neshamale* Staff,

Thank you for sharing your outstanding magazine with us here, in Ramat Beit Shemesh Gimmel, Israel. It is highly professional, heartwarming read, and gives us a refreshing glimpse into the world of special needs families, while maintaining a level of dignity so often lacking.

May HKB”H *bentch* everyone with many *kochos* and much *simcha* in their journeys.

Kol tuv,

E.C.S.

I really enjoyed the last issue (Vol #11) on Bar Mitzvahs. Even though my son is six, it was still good to read about it and to see that it doesn't have to be so scary. I got a lot of *chizuk* hearing the perspectives of the mothers and how they're all ok handling their *nisayonos* with such *chochma* and strength. *Tizku Lmitzvos* and thank you! N.L.

I wanted to comment on the article about vision therapy (Vol #11, p.28). As someone who was helped with this therapy myself, I was dismayed to see it put down in this way.

In addition to the therapy helping me to read and track, I was able to pinpoint one of my younger sibling's weakness and have her start on therapy immediately as well.

If you feel that your child can benefit from vision therapy, please speak to parents who have seen it make a difference. E.H.

I just read the magazine for the first time. I am literally so touched and invigorated from the overflowing *bitachon* emanating from the articles. It is a true *kiddush Hashem*. Life is so full of challenges and this is just pure *chizuk*. I have three relatives with special needs, and I never saw such a *heilige* perspective so openly displayed. *Chazak!*

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for your award-winning issue about bar-mitzvahs. It was full of meaning, and you explored a vast rainbow of how families celebrated their *simcha*. Once I started reading, I could not put the magazine down. My eyes were brimming with tears throughout, especially the article about Yehuda's bar mitzvah!

I would like to respond to a comment in the column, *Tips from the Experts*, which discussed how to bring Torah and *mitzvos* into a child's life. Shira M. wrote that it depends on who really wants it. If the child is bothered by the lack, then she should learn more. But if it is the parents who are bothered, then they have to understand that each child has a different *tafkid*, and they should

concentrate on keeping her healthy, happy, and productive.

It is definitely important for parents not to confuse their own feelings of lack with their children's feelings. But I'm afraid that someone might misunderstand the letter to be saying that one should not try to teach the child more Torah if the child is not interested herself. Would we refrain from giving a child medicine to prevent her seizures if she wasn't interested in taking it? Would we allow our typical children to stay home from school whenever they want to? Of course not. We are the parents and we encourage the child to do what is good for him, whether or not he is interested.

Our Torah is what life is all about. It is not just an "extra" we do for religion. It is the reality for us and for our child. We are obviously not discussing a child who is unable to learn or do *mitzvos*, because we agree that if the child is interested, we should help and encourage him. Therefore, just as with typical children, we should encourage him to do what is in his best interest. Of course, we try to do this in a way that the child will, himself, want to participate. But we take the initiative. Making our children healthy spiritually, happy in a meaningful way, and productive according to our Torah, is truly a goal worth pursuing.

Noach C.

struggles that we overcome *le'ma'an re'itzono* (for the sake of His will) may be hidden in this world, but in the *Olam HaEmes*, where things *really* count, they are *l'ma'alah* (elevated)! These hidden actions, in fact, are what keep the world going.

We are approaching the *Yamim Noraim*. This time of year can be extremely challenging for parents of special needs children. There are a lot of days off, with no structure, and many of our children have a really hard time with this. We may naturally feel despondent if we feel that our special child is "robbing us" of the spiritual high we would like to feel during this time. Whether it is a mother who cannot *daven* in *shul* (or cannot *daven* at all), a father that has to

come home early to make sure everyone is ok, a family that cannot have a tranquil Yom Tov *seuda*, or a Simchas Torah where all your child lets you sing is the ABC's, we need to know that, although our actions may not feel *heilig*, they are the most pure and *heilige* actions you can find during this time. If we are busy with jobs that are undesirable or difficult, we are clearly doing these jobs only for Hashem's Sake. Only Hashem sees our unique *avoda*, and this is the biggest *zechus* we can take with us into the Yom haDin.

May *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* continue to give us strength and show us that He is looking and seeing all of our hard work. May we be *zoche* to a *shnas geula vi'yishua* (a year of redemption and salvation).

Never Alone

Fraydel Dickstein

Raising a special needs daughter with help from Above

In her husband's final hours, Miriam turned to him and said: "Sender, we raised Ahuva together. How am I going to manage without you?" He could barely talk, but he mustered the strength to say: "You are strong, and I will be there to guide you." Those words became a lifeline for Miriam Goldman, giving her the strength to continue raising her special needs daughter.

Let me go back to the beginning. For the first time since before Covid, I had the privilege to visit Mrs. Miriam Goldman in her home and hear her story.

You can truly feel Hashem's presence residing within Miriam's lovely Lakewood home. When we entered her den, Miriam showed me beautiful pictures of her children and grandchildren. I noticed a picture of her grandson whom I recognized as staff at SCHI. Miriam said that when he was a little boy, he would say: "When I grow up, I want to work with special needs children." When asked why, he answered: "Because I love my aunt Ahuva!"

"There is a G-d"

Ahuva was born normal. She developed from an adorable, alert baby into a precocious walking and talking toddler. At two years old, she had a seizure. Her mother told me: "I remember it like yesterday. I called her to come to *Shalosh Seudos*, but she didn't come. I went to look for her and found her swaying. I knew she was having a seizure." Miriam had an epileptic brother, so she knew what to do. She laid Ahuva on her side, making sure she wouldn't swallow her tongue. Then she knocked on the non-Jewish neighbor's door and asked him to drive them both to the hospital. The neighbor then went home and informed

Miriam's husband that his wife and daughter were at the hospital, so after Shabbos her husband drove there to see them. Ahuva woke up at around 3am. The doctors thought that she had meningitis and took all kinds of tests, but everything came back negative. The family returned home and everything was totally back to normal.

Six weeks later Ahuva had another seizure. The effects of the second seizure were very damaging. Ahuva regressed in all areas. She lost the words she had already had, and didn't talk again until she was four years old. The regression was an immense challenge for the family. Ahuva's father would look at her and say: "There is a G-d in the world." He told them that that's really the only answer to why these things happen. He was very *mechazek* the family. He would remind them: "We are *Yidden*, we are the chosen nation, and we believe that Hashem knows what He is doing." Miriam says: "I don't know how I would have survived it if I wasn't a believing Jew."

They took Ahuva to a top neurologist at Johns Hopkins who found the right seizure medication for her. With some tweaks

through the years, they are very grateful that she has been almost seizure-free since then. Unfortunately, the damage that the seizure caused was not so easily resolved. It took many years of therapy and tutoring to regain lost skills.

A Jewish child thrives in public school

When it came time for Ahuva to go to school, they tried to find an appropriate classroom in a Jewish setting, but she was rejected everywhere. When Miriam asked the director of a Jewish Special Ed program where they should send her, she answered: “She needs the public school system.” This was a very hard step for them. Miriam remembers telling her husband: “You always tell us there is a G-d. So He is telling us to send our daughter to public school?” Yet, along with the challenge, Hashem sent the help. A family friend worked in the public school system and was able to guide them in navigating the unfamiliar territory. She taught them how to talk to the staff and explain their concerns and expectations.

Ahuva was the only Orthodox Jewish child attending an all-black public school. Her parents were understandably nervous. The staff knew they were only allowed to give her kosher food. Miriam tried her best to make sure that Ahuva always had a kosher variation of whatever they would be serving. She would buy kosher candy canes during the holiday season and send them to school, so Ahuva could have one too.

Once Ahuva came home with a candy from school. When asked why she didn’t eat it, she responded: “It’s not mine, it’s from the school.” When asked why she didn’t just throw it away, she said: “It would be a *chilul Hashem*!” Miriam was blown away by this response; she shared it with her husband and they felt more comfortable, knowing that their daughter could be her own *mashgiach*!

They dealt with issues as they arose, picking her up early from school on early *Shabbosim*, and educating the staff to understand different needs. Overall, it was a smooth ride. She received a good education and learned many important skills. Miriam admits that, although it was a grueling decision to send their daughter to public school, she is pleased with the outcome and does not regret it. Her husband taught Ahuva *Aleph Bais* in the evenings, and they filled in the gaps of her Jewish education. “She turned out *frummer* than other *Bais Yaakov* girls!” Miriam says.

I asked Miriam how she managed her daughter’s care when she was younger. She explained that when Ahuva was born, the sibling above her was already ten years old, so she had a lot of time to work with her. Ahuva was 13 years old when her father passed away. Everyone pitched in to take care of her

during that week. But when it was over, everyone went home and it was just the two of them. Miriam says she tried not to cry in front of her daughter, but sometimes it was too hard. Ahuva would touch her shoulder and say: “I am here. I am not going anywhere. Do you need anything?” She was so sensitive; and had a very mature understanding, it didn’t make sense for a child with special needs. It was very difficult for Miriam to lose her husband, and she feels that Ahuva is a big comfort to her. “I had to take care of her. She gave me a beautiful reason to live; she really kept me going after my husband passed away.”

“I will be there to guide you”

Today Ahuva is 38 years old. She functions at the level of a 12 or 13 year old in most areas. Ahuva talks, albeit like a child. She does not understand what’s appropriate to say in different settings. Her mother would warn her before going out: “You can’t say everything!” but it is hard for her not to speak her mind. She currently lives in a home in Brooklyn and is employed in a jewelry factory, putting jewelry in little boxes. She loves computers and would like to get a job in that field.

I asked Miriam how she, as a Baltimore resident, was able to place Ahuva in a NY facility. She responded that it was a sheer miracle, one of many that she’s had with Ahuva since her husband passed away.

“When Ahuva was 21 years old,” she explained, “we went into NY to see some group homes and get Ahuva onto the waiting lists. When we went to *Ohel*, we really liked what we saw. Miriam Boylan, the social worker there, took to Ahuva right away. As a recent *almanah* herself, she felt for me and put Ahuva’s name on the top of the waiting list. She asked if I’d be willing to live in NY to gain residency, which would be necessary for Ahuva to get accepted to a home. I reluctantly agreed, but in the end, I never had to move there.

“At that time, which was 17 years ago, I sat *shiva* three times within thirteen weeks, for my mother and two of my brothers. While I was sitting *shiva* for the third time, I got a call from the *Ohel* social worker. She said: “I don’t know how this

happened, as it has never happened before, but if you can get Ahuva here within two months, we have a room for her and a program for her, all paid by the government.” I was shocked! When I inquired about the residency requirement, she said: “Miriam, do not ask questions!” She reminded me that I had told her that my husband had said he would be there to guide me. “There is no doubt that he is involved in this!” she said.

“When we went into NY to take care of the paperwork, we went on a tour of two day programs to see which one Ahuva would attend. When we came back to the Board, they asked us which program we liked better. I personally liked one better, but I asked Ahuva. “You will be the one living there, so tell us which day program you like better.” She answered that she liked the other program. When I asked why, Ahuva responded: “Did you see how the people in the first one looked? I don’t look like them and I don’t want them to feel bad, so I think I should go to the other one.” (Ahuva does not look like she has special needs.)

I started to cry. I said to the Board that maybe she doesn’t have to stay here—at that moment, I just wanted to take her home with me. They said “No way—we want her!” And that was that – Ahuva became a resident of a wonderful group home in NY.”

They were concerned about the transition, but Ahuva took it very well. She went to a special bunk in Camp Agudah for many summers, so the concept of going away was not foreign to her. Miriam lives in Lakewood, so Ahuva comes home for some *Shabbosim* and *Yom Tov*. She goes on the bus independently and is picked up from the bus stop. Now when she comes home, she says: “It’s ok you see me, and now I am going back home.”

Miriam shares that she sometimes thinks that she must have done something wrong because Ahuva doesn’t want to stay home, but she knows that’s really not the case. In truth, it’s an incredible *bracha* that Ahuva loves where she lives. The staff loves her too. She has a life and her mother has a life, B”H.

A Pure Neshamah

Miriam shared some beautiful stories with me. One year, *Ohel* took the women on a trip to *Eretz Yisroel*. When they went to the *Kosel*, Ahuva asked: “Can you take a picture of me here, so I can show my Mommy that I am in the same place as she was in with my *Totty*?”

Ahuva had an amazing house mother, a wonderful woman who came at 7.30 in the morning and then walked home to her apartment at night. One night she had a heart attack on the way home and passed away. The *Ohel* staff came in the next morning to break the news to the girls. The psychologist asked Ahuva: “Do you know what happened to Mrs. --? Where do you think she is?” After a few minutes of silence, Ahuva looked at him and said: “Doctor, don’t worry, my *Totty* will take care of her.” When he heard that, the doctor started to cry. Ahuva hates when people cry, so she ran out of the room. The aide asked the doctor why he was crying and when he told her, she also started to cry. They called Miriam to tell her what had happened. When Miriam heard what her daughter said, she got chills—and also started to cry! She explained that she had tried many times over the years to explain to Ahuva where her father had gone, and was never sure if she truly understood. This was a big comfort to her.

Miriam concluded by telling me that special needs kids understand the world in their own unique way. While we don’t always know what they really understand, they can certainly surprise us. “Ahuva’s *neshama* is so pure; she has never lied in her entire life! She doesn’t even know what a lie is. She is always happy,” Miriam says. She believes that it is her daughter, and other pure *neshamos* like her, who are going to bring *Moshiach*. We all join in her waiting and hoping for a speedy and complete *geulah, b’kavorov*.



Let's Get Educated

Floortime

Nechama Kay-Woitovich, MSed, certified floortime therapist

What is DIR Floortime?

DIR Floortime is a system that works with the strengths and interests of children to help encourage growth and learning. This method focuses on child-led play and relationship-building with your child to help support his social-emotional and cognitive skills.

What does DIR stand for?

D-Developmental Stages - This is where we break down social-emotional development.

I-Individual Differences - Floortime looks at all aspects that make a person unique and affect how he interacts with the world.

R-Relationship - This is the heart of the model, as solid relationships with your child encourage him to try new things.

Who developed it?

Dr. Stanley Greenspan developed Floortime in the 1980's as a teaching method, meeting children on their level to maximize communication, interaction, and learning. When a child enjoys his learning, and it is taught meaningfully on a level he understands, it is easier for him to remember and apply it.

Who benefits from Floortime?

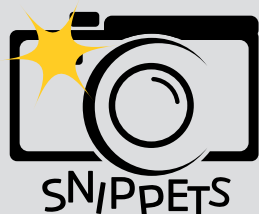
Everyone! However, it is most often used for children with autism as well as other neuro-divergences such as ADHD. Every child benefits from their parent or teacher being in tune with them and understanding what they need to learn and succeed.

Does Floortime work?

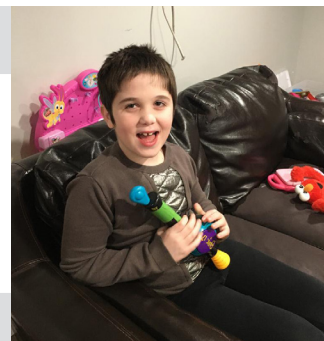
Many studies have been done to substantiate that Floortime helps improve the core issues faced by people with autism.

Floortime in action:

Chani is playing with a train, pushing it back and forth. Her mother sits on the floor with her and takes another train. She makes the train fly and crashes into Chani's train. This catches Chani's attention, and she looks up at her mother. Chani's mother's engagement encourages Chani to take her train and crash it back. Chani is having a back and forth communication with her mother through crashing and making train noises. She is also expanding her play and is learning to shift her attention from her mother to the train and back to her mother again. This is being done naturally, in a fun way, and is working with Chani's strengths and interests.



**I won!!!
Hard earned success!**



The Potential Within?

How Do We Measure It How Do We Actualize It

Rabbi Ezra Klein

These questions touch on deep, meaningful issues for all of us; not only our special children. How does anyone measure and actualize his own potential? The answer might actually surprise and humble us, but it's the key to engaging in any meaningful dialogue about our special children's potential.

As Torah Jews, we understand that words like "potential" and "actualization" only have meaning in the context of what Hashem calls accomplishment. We also understand that our purpose in life is not for the brief time we have in this world. This life is merely a preparation and a means to the everlasting life we hope for in the Next World. This actually makes our question even more pressing. How can my child earn a share in the World to Come if his disability prevents him from performing many *mitzvos* properly, if at all?

We need to have a mature understanding of the reward we receive in the Next World. It is not as if we earn tickets here and we trade them in for prizes in the next world. The *Mishnah* teaches: "The reward for a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*."¹ Besides the simple meaning that one *mitzvah* will lead to another, there is a deeper explanation. The reward for a *mitzvah* is the holiness and transformation we gain from the *mitzvah*.² This transformation enables us to become closer to Hashem forever. Our goal during our temporary lives is to grow and become close to Hashem, so much so, that when we transfer to the

Next World, we will *automatically* benefit and take pleasure in that closeness. And that pleasure is so great, it's impossible for anyone to even imagine what it's like.

The *Rambam* writes that Hashem gave us many *mitzvos* because, hopefully at least once during our lifetime, we might actually perform one *mitzvah* properly!³ As mere mortals, it's almost impossible for us to perform a *mitzvah* with all the proper intentions.

Similarly, the *Chovos haLevavos* writes that we owe so much to Hashem for all He does for us. Even if one were to do *mitzvos* as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach, it would not repay the smallest kindness Hashem gives him.⁴

Most of us are quite smug in our assessment of our life's value and the significance of our deeds. Yet, as we say in the morning *tefilla*, right before *korbanos*: "Master of the Universe, we are not asking to be answered because of our righteousness, but rather [we rely] on your great mercy, [since] what are we? What are our lives? What are our kindnesses? What is our righteousness? etc." Our actual deeds and accomplishments don't add up to much. So, besides the possible rare exceptional *mitzvah*, how can we expect a reward for all we do?

"*L'fum tzara agra*," according to our pain, so will be our reward.⁵ It's only our hard work that really adds up. "Whether one accomplishes a lot or a little, as long as he does [his best] for the sake of Hashem."⁶ The value Hashem places on our actions and on our lives depends solely on how hard we tried to utilize our potential. This concept is life-changing. How many *mitzvos* did we do? Irrelevant. How great were they? Doesn't matter. Only one thing matters. How hard did we work? How much toil did we invest? Did we do the best we could? *That* is the deciding factor in how great we will be in the Next World, for eternity.⁷

Hashem doesn't need many impressive *mitzvos*; He just wants to see that we're striving to be our best. Our longing and striving to do the will of Hashem is what will ultimately bring us closer to Him in This World and in the Next. Of course, we

¹ Avos 4:2

² *Alshich*, *Yeshaya* 62:10; *Shlah*, *Toldos Adam in Pesicha*; *Malbim*, *Beraishis* 22:11; *R' Tzadok haKohen*, *Yisrael Kedoshim* 10; *Shem mi'Shmuel*, *Vayikra*, *Kedoshim* תרעא

³ *Pirush haMishnayos LhaRambam*, *Makos* 3:16

⁴ *Chovos haLevavos*, *Shaar haBitachon*, Chapter 4

⁵ *Avos* 5:23

⁶ *Gemara Menachos*, 110a

⁷ See *Gemara Menachos*, 110a; *Tiferes Yisrael*, end of *Menachos*; *Gemara Berachos*, 5b; *Bais haBechira* (Meiri), *Avos*, 5; *Sefer Chassidim*, chapter 945; *Maharsha*, *Chiddushai Agados Berachos*, 5b, and *ibid* 17a, *d"h v'Shema Tomar*; *Tosfos Yom Tov*, *Avos* 4:10; *Seforno Kavanos*, *d"h v'Amru b'Mnachos*; *Ohr haChaim*, *Beraishis* 3:4; *Ohr haChaim*, *Vayikra* 1,17; *Ohr Zarua*, section 1, *Hilchos Krias Shema*, 6; *Chasam Sofer on Gemara Shavuos* 15a; *Magen Avos l'Rashbatz* 3:15; *Yad haMelech* (Landau), *Yesodai Torah* 3:1; *Sefas Emes*, *Vayikra*, year 5631 *d"h baMishnah ne'amar*; *Daas Torah*, *Shelach Ma'amarim*, "Doros Achronim," page 146.

The value Hashem places on our actions and on our lives depends solely on how hard we tried to utilize our potential.

try to perform as many great *mitzvos* as we can. But our future is not dependent on their completion.

Some look at our special children with pity. “How sad it is that these children can’t do great things like we can.” I would guess that there’s a greater gap between our deeds and those of *Avraham Avinu*, than between our deeds and those of our special children. They can achieve the same greatness that we can, by striving to be their best despite their challenges. We are all in the same boat. It’s all any of us can do.

The *Gemara* tells us that the Next World will look like it’s our world turned upside down. Many of those who were admired and honored here will be seen as people who are not prominent, and those who were looked down on will be the heroes of the Next World.⁸ Our special children, as we know, have obstacles in their way at almost every step. Yet they plod on, striving to be the greatest they can be, despite the fact that society does not appreciate their efforts. They are our heroes.

We, who recognize this truth, don’t have to wait for the Next World to recognize them as the heroes they are. We can do it right now. We can start by measuring their potential, not by what they “accomplish” relative to their typical peers, but by how hard they are trying to do the right thing. All of us are small beings, who can only hope to accomplish little in terms of concrete results, but who can accomplish a great deal in Hashem’s eyes. And that is what counts.

True, some of our children don’t look like they’re trying at all. They may even seem to not care. But that’s only because it’s

hard for them to try, or even to care. For all we know, they might be trying very hard to try and to care. Only our Creator can know the truth in anyone’s heart.

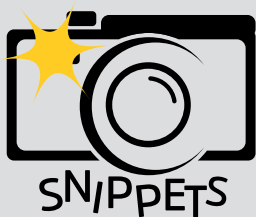
As a *rebbe* in a school, it’s my responsibility to grade my students’ report cards. But there’s one grade I always leave blank: Effort. How can I profess to know how hard a child is trying? Perhaps we can give a grade for *visible* effort; but not for effort in general. There are some children who want to, and try to, put in the visible effort, but just can’t.

Of course, we should try to help our children become walkers, talkers, socializers, etc. But the more deeply we internalize this message about what actualizing potential really means, the better we’ll be at staying calm, happy, hopeful, and encouraging to our special child, who is counting on us to help him succeed.

Encouragement is the key word we need to actualize his potential. Our child may keep failing, and we can’t blame him for throwing up his hands in despair and giving up. We may also want to do that at times. However, if we remember that it’s not the results we are after, but the effort, then our past attempts were not failures. They were successes. And for you and your child, to continue after all those failures is a monumental success, irrespective of what the actual results may be. Through this process, you and your child are becoming great people whom everyone can admire, in This World and in the Next.

Rabbi Klein is using a pen name. He can be contacted through Neshamale Magazine.

⁸ *Pesachim, 50a*



Y. Greenstien lives up to his name!





Memorable MISHAPS

Compiled by Fraydel Dickstein

This column lets us laugh about the hilariously funny things our children do (although they may not always seem so hilarious in the moment!). It's also nice to know that this is our "normal", and that we and our families will be OK!




False Alarm

We did it! We ventured out to Orlando with our delicious eleven year old low-functioning autistic son in tow. We went to a shul to daven and pull ourselves together for a few minutes before we continued on our journey. We brought our son into the bathroom to change him, and on his way out, he tried running out the back door. This was the door with the sign: Fire Door—Do Not Open! Naturally, the alarm went off, and the Rabbi came running, all hysterical about the police showing up. We stayed totally calm, not getting stressed; I guess we are immune to this kind of stuff! We helped him shut the alarm while reassuring him that the police would completely understand; in fact, the police never came. I'm just not sure how soon we will be going to Orlando again!



Baking Pro

Leah, (our yummy six year old with autism,) is a master chef and enjoys nothing more than cooking up a storm—or to be more accurate, a tornado! Leah was at her *Bubby* and *Zadie's* house for Shabbos. After the meal, Leah found *Bubby's* empty crock pot and decided to make delicious cholent. The cabinet above the *fleishig* counter has a huge lazy susan with all of my mother's spices and ingredients for baking and cooking—how convenient! Leah emptied literally every spice, coffee, rum and mint extract, sprinkles, food coloring, clouds of cocoa, etc. into the crock pot—Yum! Soon it was overflowing onto the counter, sink, and floor. The aroma alerted me to the delicacies being prepared. B"H *Bubby* was napping throughout this adventure!



Policeman Beware

It was one of the first days we were legally allowed to venture out to the park during the Corona epidemic. Of course, we had to social distance and the playgrounds were covered with "Caution" tape as they did not want anyone to play in them. However, our son Yehuda saw a playground and climbed right into it; the tape was meaningless to him. A police officer approached to tell

me that we couldn't play there. I responded that my son is severely autistic and I didn't know if I could get him out. The policeman said to Yehuda: "Don't go on the playground, it's not clean and you can get sick." You can imagine how far that penetrated Yehuda's consciousness! The policeman, to his credit, left right away and I think he really wanted us to be able to enjoy our day in the park. (B"H, I have had very good experiences with police dealing with special needs kids in Lakewood.)



Daily Cleanup Job

Yehuda loves to throw things out! This garbage can is the daily routine:

I finally did the unthinkable and removed the garbage can from his



bathroom and put it behind the locked door in my laundry room. It is super inconvenient, but the love we have for this little boy is so huge that it's just another adorable quirk, and it shows me how capable he is.

I am challenging everyone to figure out a useful skill we could cull this into. Can't wait to share the great ideas with you!



Fancy Footwear

The most adorable mishap I recently had was when I looked in from the ladies' section at my son's Bar Mitzvah. I burst out laughing because my special needs son AVROHOM'LE WENT TO HIS OWN BAR MITZVA IN . . . CROOOOOOOCS! I was loving every minute of it, because it couldn't get any more epic than that!

STRESS BUSTER TIPS

It can be very trying when you are in an embarrassing situation, especially in public among strangers. It helps to remember: Bushah m'chaperes! (Embarrassment atones) No suffering goes unaccounted for, and this includes embarrassment. Some people are better than others at being comfortable with others staring in horror at their kid's behaviors, but Hashem counts it all. These uncomfortable moments are being m'chaper for us and we will appreciate them one day.

Please send your Memorable Mishaps and/or stress-buster tips to: Neshamalemagazine@gmail.com, or text to: 848-299-2908. You can also leave a message. Give everyone a good laugh, and let us know that it's OK when these things happen—stuff happens to everyone!

VALIDATION Corner



David Rose

♥ OUR CHILDREN, OUR GEMS! ---

I was making some small talk with the guy sitting next to me on a flight. It turns out he was Jewish, though he seemed to have nothing to do with Yiddishkeit. It was a long flight and I thought to myself: "If my son David were here, by the end of the flight he'd be best friends with the guy!"

These are basically the words that my dear mother told me when I was a young, self-conscious teenager, trying to get involved in kiruv. The message came through loud and clear - my mother is machshiv me. She believes in me. I felt like a million dollars!

This is what the days of Elul and the Yomim Noraim center around – this is about teshuva and the close relationship we have with our Father, Hashem.

The days of *Elul* (the month preceeding Rosh HaShana) and the *Yomim Noraim* (High Holidays) center around *teshuva*, repentance, and the close relationship we have with our Father, Hashem. *Elul* stands for: *'Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li'* (I am My Beloved's, and My Beloved is Mine). The idea that we can do things wrong, yet Hashem waits for us to return, shouts out how much Hashem believes in us.

Validation like this is crucial. How much more vital is this for a child, and particularly a special needs child or a child with medical issues, to know that someone, especially his parents, believes in him. It is our belief in our children that shapes and builds them.

No matter how close our family or friends are to us, or how involved medical or school staff are in our child's life, there is absolutely no one who can care about our child as much as we, the parents, can. It is the parents who gave birth to their child, who cried and davened and invested so much into him. Nothing in the world can get in the way of a parent's love for his child.

Our son Zevy* was born four months early, with a host of serious medical issues. We were told by numerous doctors, both before and after his birth, that there was no chance he would survive. It wasn't easy, but with Hashem's help, we steeled ourselves against these dire negative predictions. Our son survived 24 hours (that alone proved a bunch of doctors wrong), then a week went by, then he started developing, then smiling a little, then playing with

toys, then laughing, then smiling even more... With every stage, more of the poor prognosis fell to the wayside.

There were times when the doctors were at a loss. My wife once suggested something and the doctor's mouth popped open – she hadn't thought of my wife's idea. Another doctor once told my wife: "I love your questions, they are smart, and they show you really care." The point is that, be it in a hospital setting, a home setting with therapists, etc., the more parents can be on top of the situation, the better care our children will get. It is not easy at all. But, we, the parents, are our children's strongest advocates.

Moreover, when we believe in our children and allow ourselves to see the innate good in them, there is so much *we* can gain from *them*! For example, when I see a child with Down syndrome come into *shul* my day gets brighter! They seem to have a natural bouncing joy, despite their challenges, which is just infectious! If we view our children with an eye for their strengths, their spiritual and physical potential become greater.

I recently read a story in [Powerful Moments](#) by Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger (Artscroll). There was a family who hired a *melamed* to teach their son. The boy was not too studious and was not learning anything. The boy's father announced that he was taking his son to visit the *Gerer Rebbe*. The teacher panicked—he knew that the *Rebbe* would test the boy on his learning, and the father would realize that his son wasn't learning well and would be upset.

When they returned from the trip, the teacher saw that the father was in a great mood. The father explained that the *Rebbe* had tested his son and reported that his son was doing "quite well." The *melamed* couldn't believe it! A while later, he traveled himself to the *Rebbe* and asked him why he said the boy was doing well when he clearly didn't know anything! The *Rebbe* responded: "With our limited understanding, there is no way we can know exactly how good or bad a person is in Hashem's eyes. If this boy is doing his best, then he is doing "quite well!"

What a monumental message. We can never truly gauge how great our children are. Everyone, no matter how it seems on the surface, can be great in Hashem's eyes!

** Name changed due to privacy*

RESOURCE GUIDE - Part II

Helpful resources you may not know about

Compiled by Dinah Wadiche

Being the parent and “case manager” of a special needs child is a daunting job, with copious amounts of information and advice to sort through and large bills to pay. Over the years I’d heard vague references about government programs, grants that fund therapy, etc. The leads pursued usually led to defunct programs, or to programs with specific requirements that the child didn’t meet. I knew there had to be some real assistance available for local families, and I was determined to find it.

Together with my sister, Esther Hazan, another devoted, tireless parent of a special needs child, we found a plethora of widely untapped funding to help manage the life of a special needs family. We combed through websites and brochures and did extensive research to create a pool of reliable information. Slowly, a listing of grants and available funding began to take shape.

By sharing our discoveries by word of mouth, thousands of dollars of equipment and assistance have already been granted. We feel driven to share this information, and hope the readers of Neshamale will benefit from this guide.

For information or assistance in applying to the grants or foundations listed, or if you have experience or more information about any of the resources, or to add to the list, please call/text: 848-326-1512. We also have paper copies of application available for many of these programs.

Email specialneedsqff@gmail.com for an automatic reply of the complete resource listing.

HELP WITH PREMIUMS/OTHER COSTS NOT COVERED BY INSURANCE:

1. United Healthcare Children’s Foundation

1855 MY UHCCF (1855-698-4223)

www.uhccf.org

customerservice@uhccf.org

This charitable organization provides medical grants to help with services not covered by parent’s commercial health insurance plan.

You can receive up to \$5,000 annually per child (\$10,000 max lifetime), for children aged 16 and under.

You do not need to have insurance through United Health Care to be eligible.

Grant covers approved items related to: deductibles, co-insurance and co-pays, as well as non-covered services (ie: therapies, durable medical equipment, hospital stays, medication, mental health services). Does not cover insurance premiums, home modifications, or experimental/unproven services.

Child must be covered by commercial insurance/insurance provided through a private employer. There is an income limit.

Child must live in US and face a health-related challenge. You will need your doctor to fill out a form with your child’s diagnosis and recommendations (for therapy, surgery, equipment, etc.).

Separate funds are available for diagnoses such as: Cystic fibrosis, Leukemia, Cancer-related Behavioral Health, Gout, Hepatitis C, Melanoma, Neuro-cognitive disease with Psychosis, Hyper-cholesterolemia.

Use the above contact information to access a full list of diagnoses that they cover.

3. Pediatric Assistance Fund

800-675-8416 | www.healthwellfoundation.org

A branch of the HealthWell Foundation (see above).

Offers assistance for medication, all therapies, and co-pays (will also help with therapy or doctor visits not covered at all by insurance) for all other diagnoses, such as CP, Down syndrome, autism, etc.

Parent letter with the estimated cost and explanation of diagnosis is required.

Income-based. Receive maximum of \$3,000 per year. It takes about 30 days to receive funds if approved.

They do a soft credit check (which does not affect your credit) to determine eligibility, or will require your most recent 1040.

Payments are made directly to pharmacy or provider.

Payments will backdate for costs up to 30 days from when you apply, and for costs incurred up to a year. You can reapply yearly until the child turns 18.

2. HealthWell Foundation

800-675-8416 | www.healthwellfoundation.org

A foundation that helps with medications, co-pays, and insurance premiums.

All ages, including adults.

You must have insurance, as they will help with copays but will not cover the entire bill.

They help in other areas, depending on the diagnosis. For example: for gout, they offer a travel fund (Uber/taxis) to and from appointments.

4. Dental Care for Children with Special Needs Program

614-933-0711 | www.hfgrotto.org

Helps pay a certain percentage of your child’s dental bills.

Up to 18 years old.

All special needs children can be automatically enrolled, with the exception of those with autism, who will need to fill out a form to determine the child’s IQ learning level.

Dental work needs to be pre-approved in order to receive funds.

They will help pay for the evaluation and x-rays you had

continued on page 16

Q

IN SESSION

Dear Shira,

I'd love to hear insights about grieving (for all of my lost hopes and dreams), while feeling guilty because my child is very much alive.

A

Dear Parent Who is Having Real Feelings,

In two past editions of *Neshamale Magazine* (Issue #4 and Issue #8), the grief experience of the death of a dream was discussed. To summarize: When a parent finds out that there will be a baby, the parent begins to dream about the child and fantasizes: the child will be smart, beautiful, handsome, friendly, tall, musical, talented, artistic, the life of the party, etc. When a special needs baby is born, or when a parent discovers that their child has special needs, the parent experiences the death of this dream.

Similar to when someone dies, the grieving person goes through the cycle of grief: denial or isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Originally, it was believed that these stages were linear, and that one had to reach the 'finish line' by achieving acceptance. We now realize that grief is a cycle, with no definitive segments or length of time, but that the parents will experience these stages throughout their lifetimes.

Recently, I attended a two day grief summit, with experts on grieving providing a lot of information about the process. For two days, each part of the program provided new and meaningful information. The logo of the program had a fingerprint, with the words that every person's grief is as unique as their own fingerprint.

Many of the presenters described how grief is magnified because people felt so isolated and alone in their grief. Additionally, they did not feel validated or supported. At the beginning of the Covid pandemic, when everyone was in isolation, our community was unable to show the usual support for those sitting *shiva*. The family members sat alone and did not receive the expected communal support. Perhaps you can relate to this. How much support and validation have you received all these years? To whom have you been truly able to share your feelings and experiences?

Of course, you are grateful for all the *brachos* that you have been given, and there is always another child/family whose circumstances are more difficult than yours. But, that doesn't take away the unique challenges that you have. Perhaps this can provide a perspective: This year, more farmers in *Eretz Yisroel* are observing *shmittah* than ever in 2000 years. They are *giborai chayil*, and they deserve our utmost respect. Likewise, we have to recognize their sacrifices, and support and validate them.

Lastly, I would like to focus on the grieving stage of acceptance. How is acceptance defined, especially in regard to the grief process? It doesn't mean denial, which could be the belief that everything is fine and normal. Let's distinguish between resignation and acceptance. Both terms have to recognize the reality. However, with resignation, the belief held is that the situation is hopeless and nothing will ever change. In short, 'it's over.' Acceptance, however, is recognizing the reality, but remaining hopeful. Although the original dream was not actualized, there can still be meaning and growth.

On a humorous note, every Jewish mother always feels guilty about something, or she wouldn't be a *Yiddishe Mama*. On a serious note, explore your guilt feelings. What is your true feeling that is being disguised as guilt? Perhaps this article can open some new vistas for you.

I wish you much *hatzlacha*, and may Hashem give you the continued strength to face the different situations and the feelings that arise.

Wishing you much *nachas*, 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

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Resources continued from page 14

previously; then you need to submit forms for work the dentist is suggesting. Once approved, you can go ahead with the actual dental work.

They do not cover surgeries in the hospital, but can help with the anesthesia.

5. Insurance Premium Reimbursement (NY)

NY will reimburse you for private insurance if you have Medicaid and OPWDD, SSI, or HCBS.

You will need to send in your insurance bill and a copy of your credit card statement showing that your bill was paid each month.

Two organizations that can assist you:

Pro Assistance: 800-866-6066

Pro assistance charges a fee. They are in close contact with Medicaid and follow up regularly.

UJO – United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg: 718-643-9700

This is a free service.

6. Payment of Premium (POP)

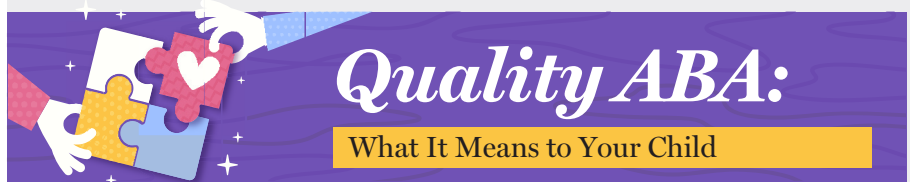
609-588-7150

Marcia.L.Harrison@dhs.nj.gov

This program is designed for Medicaid's medically fragile individuals under the age of 65 who could benefit from additional health insurance, while residing in the community or a skilled nursing facility.

The program pays monthly premiums for an individual carrier (or private carrier) of group health insurance when the addition is cost effective for NJFC. While participating in the POP program, individuals maintain health insurance coverage through a NJFC managed care plan.

To assess program eligibility, send the patient's name, date of birth, social security number, Medicaid ID and clinical diagnosis to the email listed above. If the Medicaid enrollment fits POP's eligibility criteria, more information related to health insurance and the current medical condition will be requested. If subsequently approved, and when POP's budget permits, the individual will be enrolled in the program.



Quality ABA:

What It Means to Your Child

Sara Miriam Pitterman

ABA, or Applied Behavior Analysis, is a mode of therapy used for clients with Autism. This column will explain ABA by providing a sample session to illustrate how the therapy is used.

Sample Session Two: Early Intervention

For better or worse, kids are getting Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnoses earlier and earlier, sometimes as young as 18 months. This diagnosis makes them eligible for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services. What does ABA have to offer a child this young?

The ABA model is likely to focus on discrete goals, recommending two or more hours daily, totaling between 10-30 hours a week. While traditional EI (Early Intervention) places a strong emphasis on parents doing the carryover, ABA focuses on skill repetition and mastery.

What might an ABA session look like? The following is an example of treatment modality of a young client.

Meet Esti:

Esti is a beautiful 21-month-old girl. She was a fussy baby, needing to be rocked and soothed more than others her age. Although a late developer, delayed a bit in meeting her physical milestones, at this point she is a good walker, runner, and climber. One concern that brought Esti to the pediatrician was her late language development. Moreover, she often seemed to stare blankly at her mother when spoken to. She spends most of her day running and jumping, never sitting down to play. Although Esti is attracted to the action of her siblings, she stays peripheral and doesn't seem to be able to follow along.

Shira Levine, ABA Therapist:

The challenge when working with young children is always in finding the exact balance of pushing them without stressing them out. Their goals also change rapidly and constantly, so I really need to be on top of the data. Esti's ABA session was designed in a 30-40 minute loop that repeats.

Although there may be some crying or discomfort as Esti learns new routines these should not dominate the session. Since the majority of the session is focused on interaction and manding (see below) which are child-driven activities and as we should be incorporating sensory sensitive learning techniques the session should be one that challenges Esti to learn without overwhelming her. Since Esti is young we cannot predict her learning rate but we would measure success by consistent skill acquisition.

GOALS	INSIGHTS
<p>Engagement and Socializing (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building rapport and connection. • Building Esti's motivation to be with others. • Associating positive sensory experiences with interaction. • Getting Esti to initiate interaction. <p>Activities: Tickles, being tossed in the air, being rocked or bounced, peekaboo, dancing, stop and go. The emphasis is on pausing and switching activities.</p>	<p>Some children's sensory systems make it hard for them to connect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish connection routines and songs such as high-five games and "this little piggy." • Use little or no toys, just the therapist's presence, touch, voice, and excitement. • Incorporate parents and siblings.
<p>Functional Toy Play (5-7 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause and effect connections. • Functional use: Every item has a way it is used. • Build attention span: Block play. <p>Activities: Focus on 4-6 toys until mastery occurs. Pop-up toys, light-up toys, roll a car, put a hat on your head, bang a drum. Building and crashing blocks.</p>	<p>When a child learns that items have a specific purpose and they know what to do with them, their whole world becomes more purposeful.</p>
<p>Expressive Language/Manding (10 minutes) Manding is a common ABA terminology that refers to the child communicating (verbally, gesturing, ASL, AAC etc) for the purpose of accessing something desired.</p> <p>Esti letting us know what she wants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach how to communicate (Does not have to be verbal). • Teach to point for items. • Increase vocalizations. • Gradually expand sounds into word approximations. <p>Activities: Any item that gets 'used up' makes it easier to get a lot of practice. Bubbles, wind-up toys, light-up toys, food, spinners.</p>	<p>Tap into the child's natural motivation to build language.</p> <p>When the child wants something, the therapist sets up a communication circle in which the child has to ask for the item she wants and therapist provides it.</p> <p>This builds the contingency that language is meaningful and helpful for the child.</p>
<p>Receptive language: (3-5 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-step instructions: Clap your hands, touch your nose, peekaboo. • Object ID: Where's the sock, sippy cup, fork, doll? • Body parts: Eyes, belly, toes, hair. • Imitation: Do this! (hands on stomach, blow a kiss) <p>Activities: These goals are run more discretely and aim for 10 trials per target. Reinforce with tickles, high-fives, rubbing noses.</p>	<p>This is the part that usually gives ABA a bad rap as being unnatural. Note that it's just a few powerful minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use natural language "make potchy henties" and tune. • Stay on the same couple of targets until they are mastered. <p>Why do we teach imitation? It's to give the child a new learning modality. Much of teaching is based on modeling: "Look! Hold the rolling pin like this." If we can teach a child to attend to what someone is doing, we have expanded his learning modalities.</p>
<p>Sensory and Routine Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Esti is young, so she needs to learn through moving her body. She also needs enough boundaries for her to be in control of her body and stay regulated. • Ready-to-learn routines: Singing hello, organized floor-play area, organized table-play area, organized sensory-activity area. • Incorporate music and dance. Consistent therapy spot and materials are super-organized and out of sight when not being used. <p>Other Possible Goals: Eating a variety of foods, using utensils, gross motor practice such as up and down steps, cooperating with hand washing/diaper changing.</p>	

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Illuminations

THE LAWYER FOR THE DEFENSE

As you know, I've served as the *chazzan* for Rosh Hashana *Mussaf* for many years. What you don't know is that I had an incredible helper, someone on whom I came to rely, as a key participant and assistant in the arduous task of representing an entire *shul* on Rosh Hashanah.

It all began almost twenty years ago.

I remember the moment like yesterday.

I was at the *amud*, finding my stride as I prepared to begin the opening words of *Heneni*, when I noticed Shloima standing nearby. Shloima was around eight years old at that time and a member of good standing in our *shul*. He was the son of the *chazzan* for *Shacharis* and I had known him since he was a little boy. One more thing you have to know about Shloima. He has Down syndrome. Shloima being Shloima, he approached me at the *amud* and I patted his cheek and gave him a smile. He retreated off to the side and I raised my voice and moved through the first few lines of *Heneni* as the *tzibbur* waited with anticipation for the *Kaddish* of *Mussaf*.

There is something unique about the *Mussaf Kaddish*. It's one of the high points in every *shul*, as the congregation joins the *chazzan*, their collective voices soaring higher and higher, culminating in the words: "*V'imru, Amen.*"

We began the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* and everything was proceeding normally. Eventually the gabbai gave me the signal, and I began *chazaras hashatz* with my regular *nusach*. "*Mi kamocha baal gevuros u'mi doemeh lach...*"

I sang and the *tzibbur* sang along with me. Everything was the same as every year. The same tunes, the same songs, the same *kavannah*. It took time, but eventually we reached the three sections of *Mussaf* that are known collectively as "*Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofros.*" At the end of every section, the *chazzan* stops his recital of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *baal tokeia* lifts the *shofar* to his lips, and the plaintive cries of the ram's horn rise through the ceiling and up to *Shamayim*.

I was well into *Malchiyos* when my *kavannah* was suddenly interrupted by the feeling of someone or something slipping under my *tallis*.

Shocked by the intrusion, I looked down and found myself staring into the eyes of none other than Shloima, who had lifted up my *tallis* and positioned himself right beside me, as if he were the junior *chazzan* that Rosh Hashanah.

Shloima's father immediately ran over and tried to extricate his son, but Shloima was a stubborn kid. Barring crawling under my *tallis* along with his son, there wasn't that much Shloima's father could do. He tried pulling his son, but Shloima resisted. He tried motioning, but Shloima ignored him. In the end, Shloima's father had no choice but to admit defeat, and he returned to his place, leaving Shloima standing beside me beneath the *tallis*.

I came to the end of the section and recited the *brachah*, which was followed by the congregation's resounding "*Amen.*"

This was followed by total silence as everyone waited anxiously to hear "*Tekiah...Shevarim...*"

Meanwhile, Shloima remained right where he was, completely at peace with the world, well-behaved, and determined to remain beneath my *tallis*.

The *ba'al tokei'a* finished blowing the *shofar* and the *tzibbur* began to recite *Hayom Haras Olam*.

As I said the words "*im ke'baninm* – if like children," a thought entered my mind and wouldn't leave. As parents, we are proud of the child who does what he or she is supposed to do. They bring us *nachas* and we delight in their accomplishments. Sometimes, however, it's the children who have difficulties and challenges – the kids who have a hard time getting through school and the children who are born with physical or mental issues — whom the parents come to love most of all.

And I thought, *Ribbon shel Olam, Master of the world, of course you have nachas from those children who are perfect and do everything right. But so many of us, so many of Your children, are not perfect. We suffer from challenges and we find it difficult not to make mistakes.*

"*Im ke'banim,*" I sang.

Love us, Hashem, like human parents love their challenged and special children. Love us even though we don't do the right thing all the time, love us even though it's difficult for us to be perfect, love us even though we are not perfect, even though we are challenged.

Or maybe love us because we are challenged and it's difficult for us to get it right all the time.

I stood there *davening* and the thought went 'round and 'round my head. All the while, Shloima stood beside me unwilling to move.

Shloima, I thought, you are our lawyer for the defense!

Shloima remained by my side, unmoving, until the end of *davening*. And every time the *baal tokei'a* finished blowing the *shofar* and we said *Hayom Haras Olam*, I had the same thought: *Hashem, please love us more than You would love a regular child. Love us the way a parent loves a special child!*

And so it went until the end of *davening*.

If I imagined at first that Shloima's decision to join me beneath my *tallis* was a one-time deal, I would learn over time that he had plans for the both of us. What began with an eight-year-old joining me for *Mussaf* would become a tradition of sorts, as

the *shul*, though they didn't know the thoughts reverberating through my mind as I stood at the *amud* and cried my heart out. And while it was true that Shoima didn't know what he was doing for me, I knew, and maybe that was enough.

Then one year I arrived at the *shul* on Rosh Hashanah morning, and Shloima wasn't there.

At first I thought that he'd gotten up late and would arrive soon, but as the *davening* wore on and the hours passed, it became clear to me that Shloima was just not coming. As we finished *krias haTorah* and the *baal tokei'a* made his way to the *amud* to begin reciting *Min Hameitzar*, my eyes sought out Shomia's father. I gave him a look, asking without speaking where his son was.

Correctly interpreting my look for what it was, he spread his arms to an "I don't know what happened" gesture, and my heart sank inside my chest.

How could I *daven* from the *amud* without my little lawyer at

"Or maybe love us because we are challenged and it's difficult for us to get it right all the time."

Shloima grew older. A year later, he joined me beneath my *tallis* again, and though his father made a few halfhearted attempts to cajole him out, he knew and I knew that Shloima had made up his mind and that he was there to stay.

Eventually the child grew up and was no longer small enough to ease into his hiding place. Yet Shloima continued to magically appear during *Mussaf* every year. He took comfort in the regularity of our tradition, while I took comfort in the thought that first arrived when he'd crept beneath my *tallis* years earlier, and which I never ceased thinking about whenever he came to stand by my side. Shloima gave me assurance. He was the defense lawyer, not only for me, but for the entire *kehillah*.

While every parent loves a child who is naturally successful and does everything they should, sometimes they love the child who has a hard time even more...

That's us, Hashem, I'd think with eyes closed and soul aflame. That's us.

For fifteen years as both Shloima and I grew older, he was part and parcel of my *davening*. I knew it and so did the rest of

my side, without Shloima, my defense attorney?!

But there was nothing to do.

It was time for me to approach the *amud*. I stood there and opened my mouth.

"Heneni, he'ani mima'as..."

The sounds of the ancient words and *nusach* poured out, filling the space of the room.

"Mipachad yosheiv tehillos Yisrael...al amcha asher shelachuni..."

Where was Shloima?

"Yisgadal v'yiskadash, Shmeih rabba..." *"Amen!"*

From the corner of my eye, I glanced to the side to see if Shloima had perhaps appeared miraculously, but he was still nowhere to be found.

For the last fifteen years Shloima had been part of my *Mussaf*

and now, for the first time, he wasn't there. A piece of me was missing.

Yet there was nothing to do. The *davening* had to go on. I began *Chazaras haShatz* like I did every year, the words emerging from my lips sounding the same as they always did, but for me, it wasn't the same. It couldn't be the same, because Shloima – my little *tzaddikel*, my little lawyer – wasn't there.

Time passed. Songs were sung. My voice rose and fell with the *tefillas* of the day.

Then we were finally at *Malchuyos* and I was still hoping with all my heart that a certain someone would show up to stand with me, just in time for the *shofar* blasts and the words that followed immediately after “*Im kebanim...*”

It was not meant to be.

I made the *bracha* at the end of *Malchuyos*. The congregation answered *Amen*. Then total silence, as all waited for that first *shofar* blast to cut through the air, like an air-raid siren, like a baby's wail.

All of a sudden, the door at the back of the *shul* opened. I watched from the corner of my eye, as a man entered the packed room, a little boy's hand clutched firmly in his.

The little boy's name was Reuven.

He was a special child.

And he had entered my *shul* a second before the *shofar* sounded.

Nobody said a word. Nobody had to say anything. The *kehillah* reacted instinctively. As the *baal tokei'a* lifted the *shofar* to his lips, Reuven and his father were maneuvered through the crowded room until they were standing right beside me at the *amud*. Nobody told Reuven what to do. Nobody gave him any instructions. But the next thing I knew, that little boy was standing beside me, as if he had been there his entire life. The *baal tokei'a* finished blowing the *shofar* and the *kehillah* began saying *Hayom Haras Olam*. I said it too, my hand resting gently on Reuven's shoulder, his eyes peering up at me filled with love.

“*Im ke'banim...*”

If we are like Your children, Hashem... Not like the perfect kids who get everything right, not like the kids to whom it all comes effortlessly, but like the children who have a hard time, like the kids who have trouble just getting through the day. The kids with the challenges and the syndromes and the ADHD and the high energy and the low self-esteem. Love us like those kids, Hashem, like the kids whose parents

can't help but love them with all their heart, precisely because they give them trouble and make them work so hard...

Shloima hadn't been able to come (something had come up that Rosh Hashanah, not an emergency, but he hadn't been able to keep his tradition), but Reuven had arrived to take his place.

It was a miracle.

The *davening* wound its way to a triumphant conclusion. After the last *Kaddish* had been sung and the people were leaving the room, I turned to Reuven's father and said, “How did you know that I needed you to come at that precise moment?”

“Reb Binyomin,” he said to me, “trust me when I tell you there was no plan to walk through the door just in time. Reuven is a special kid. He has Down syndrome and can't sit still for the entire *davening*. But he's getting older and his mother and I want him to go to *shul*, at least for part of the *davening*. This year we decided that I would *daven Vasikin*, and that way I'd be available to take Reuven to *shul* for as long as he was able to sit still. I brought him to *shul* to hear the *shofar*. I hadn't dreamed that you were waiting for him to arrive...”

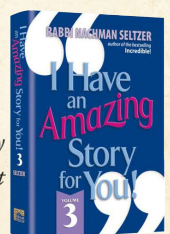
I was so overcome by what happened, that I felt like I needed to share my experience with a *gadol*. I visited Rav Yaakov Edelstein and told him the entire series of events—the tradition that began with a little boy named Shloima many years before, and how he never missed a year. How he hadn't come for the first time and how I'd been waiting for my lawyer to arrive, and how Reuven had come instead, just as the *baal tokei'a* placed the *shofar* to his lips. Rav Yaakov was overcome with emotion; he told me to publicize this story, as well as the idea that I had – that the *Ribbono shel Olam* should please love us and cherish us in the way that parents love and cherish the children who have the hardest time in life.

No doubt you're wondering what happened the next year. I'll tell you.

The next year, both Shloima and Reuven came to *shul* to stand by my side and give me *chizuk* during *davening*. Both of them, standing by my side: two pure *neshamos*, two precious *kinderlach*, there to help me keep in mind the thought and the *kavanna* that occurred to me all those years ago, and that has accompanied my *tefillas* ever since.

As heard from Rabbi Moshe Willig

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The Potential Within

Miracle Mommy: The Potential in Me

S.M.

With no stars or fireworks
No frills or lace
I am a special mommy
So I'm part of the *neis*

The miracle is every day
When it's all crazy, yet I hope
The magic comes on ordinary days
When I pretend to cope

When chaos is our normal
And no two days are the same
And I'm not sure exactly how
I remarkably stay sane

I am a magical mommy
Simply because I try
Even if I don't manage well
I manage to scrape by

No flashy streamers
are part of this show
The rockets aren't apparent
As you surely know

I feel cracked and splintered
And I don't know how
But Hashem does it all
And I'm part of it somehow

I feel magical when I remember
What I've been taught and told
That my every effort glitters
And all my toil is gold

While my reward is still concealed
And may remain unseen
My efforts still will sparkle
With a miraculous eternal gleam

When I recognize each moment
As a sparkling precious gem
I actualize my potential
And make a Kiddush Hashem



The Potential of a Brand-New School Year ...And What We Can Do to Tap into It



N.M.

Communication

As in so many areas of life, communication is really the #1 step towards doing our part to reach success. Before the school year even begins, we can contact the school to inquire about our child's placement. Expressing interest (even if we will not "do" anything about the information we receive), shows the staff that we are involved parents who care about what is going on.

Once we know who our child's teachers and therapists will be, we can reach out to them. Again, by being proactive, we send the message that we want to partner with them. We can set a positive and appreciate tone *now*. Then, if we have to call when problems crop up, the potentially negative phone call won't be the first time we are speaking with them.

It's important to realize that these staff members are spending a lot of time with our child each day, possibly more than we do! The relationship that we have with them can impact their relationship with our child.

Another tip is to create a sort of "cheat sheet" with basic information about our child to send along on the first day of school. Information that seems simple to us, who know our child so well, may be a gold mine for the new staff members working with our children. Things to jot down can include: what makes our child feel a certain way (i.e. excited, comfortable, cry, or "shut down"); favorite items (foods, toys, activities); basic family info (what the parents are called, siblings, etc.); some personal information about our child that they can discuss (what he did in the summer, his upcoming birthday, our goldfish just died, etc.) Why make them dig for weeks to discover what we can tell them in minutes? It's only for our child's benefit.

Setting Goals and Expectations

It's common for teachers and therapists to ask us what our goals are for the school year. Really think this through before you answer—your response may be the key to unlock a piece of your child's potential this year. We parents have the right to determine what staff members should work on with our children. We need to be realistic and determine our top priorities.

Setting a completely non-verbal child's goal as talking sentences by the end of year would obviously not be realistic. The question is – what do we want their efforts in communication to focus on? Is it working on producing sounds, teaching signs, or using an AAC device?

Parents sometimes fall into passive mode and assume that the professionals know best. While it's true that

they may know their methods much better than us, we still need to communicate with them which skills we consider the most necessary. Once they have that clarity, they will hopefully be able to use their training, knowledge, and experience to help our children grow in these areas.

Unless we tell her, the PT won't know that it's important for us that our child learn how to go up the stairs, ride a bike, or navigate monkey bars, for instance.

Our Role as Parents

Let's let the school do its job and let's not think that we are the "assistant teacher" when our children are home from school. Here are three things that we, as parents, can do to help our children reach their potential in the school setting:

1. Be supportive.

Our children work very hard in school, and don't need to come home to more assessments. When they come through the door, they need mega doses of validation, encouragement, and pride. We need to celebrate their hard work, their efforts, and their small steps of success. Most of our kids work tremendously hard just to get through the whole school day, and we need to appreciate and applaud that. If we believe that our children have the potential for greatness, and convey that belief to them, it can be more valuable than hours of therapy and lessons.

2. Have some fun.

School is hard work, so let's have some fun at home. For at least some time each day, let's let our children (and ourselves!) just relax and enjoy each other. We really don't have to spend every waking moment trying to modify or analyze our children's behaviors. We can color or paint together, cuddle under a throw on the couch, go to the park, or have a pillow fight. Whatever works for each family, let's make a point of forgetting about the "special needs" and just have fun together.

3. Daven for Siyata Di'Shmaya.

When we think about the potential of our child, and the coming school year, it can be overwhelming. The possibilities are exciting as well as anxiety-provoking. It helps to remember that no matter what we do, or who our child's teacher may be, it's not in our hands. Hashem determines all outcomes. Our main effort should be in the area of *davening*. Hashem loves our children even more than we do, and can make them succeed even beyond our expectations.

May we all be *zoche* to a year of growth and success in all areas!



Hidden Potential

S.K.



It's an ongoing struggle within and without.

Who is my child?

When his *morahs*, therapists, and the world at large look at him, what do they see?

They see an adorable, yet challenging child. A child who is different, who has special needs.

They see the tantrums and outbursts he has for no apparent reason. He cannot sit, he definitely cannot learn. He is so unregulated, it seems he can't do much!

They say: "Let's just work on keeping him calm and controlled; let's take it slowly. Eventually one day, hopefully, he'll be able to learn, to grow, maybe even to socialize. For now, just love him. As long as he's contained, he's ok."

They try to calm me, tell me to have more patience, to see his reality for what it is. Of course he has a limited potential. After all, he is special needs.

Yet I see something else.

I see my child, a deep feeling child, sensitive to what's going on around him, yet unable to express himself.

I see a loving child with a huge heart, who yearns to play, to accomplish, and to be involved.

I see a child with blockages, delays, and limits, and a very fragile self-esteem. A child who is burned from trying, yet when he is motivated can do anything.

A child who tantrums, frustrated that he is misunderstood, because the world is so confusing and he so is different.

A child with a vast, shining potential that is deeply buried and hidden. He gives us a glimpse so rare, yet so breathtaking it shocks us, encourages us, and reminds us to keep digging for it.

I see a child who has many challenges, but underneath is really not that different, after all.

Sometimes I wonder, am I right to fight this fight, little me against everyone else? Maybe I'm wrong to have such high expectations of my precious child? Maybe I should just love him and give it up?

It's really so much easier to accept what they say. Yet can I give up? Who then will believe in this child, if not I? Sometimes the load is just too much to bear!

And then I remember.

There is Someone on my side! I am not alone in this fight. He Who created my son knows him and loves him more than I or them. I can't give up but I can give over! He knows my son's potential and can help him to realize it better than I ever can.

I take out my *Tehilim*. Please, Hashem, help our son reach his potential, and help us accept whatever we should until he does. Let this struggle finally be over. Let the world see my child for who he really is. Let HIM see who he really is. *Even ma'asu ha'bonim ha'ysa l'rosh pinah!* (The stone the builders despised became the corner stone.)

The Power of Potential

L.M.

"No potential." Two words, callously spit out of the mouth of the evaluator. The vapor of his breath hung in the air an extra second, then dissolved into nothingness. The sound waves reverberated and bounced around before crashing at my feet, shattering into a million shards. The words stung. My beautiful son, my pride and joy, has no potential!

But I know that's not true! That knowledge fills my heart, and floods in torrents through my body. I exhale the horrible awfulness and try to inhale some hope.

I am not in denial. My son is like a seed submerged in mud, waiting to bud and flower. I know he can succeed if given the right tools in the right environment.

I want to fly away to a blissful place where they accept my child with all his limitations and embrace his strengths. A place where they value his strengths and accomplishments and tap into his infinite power and potential. A place where they do not limit him by his diagnosis, but empower him to grow and succeed with the countless gifts that Hashem granted him.

Does such a place exist? Will someone recognize that, within the confines of his disability and weakness, there is a desire to learn and grow and succeed despite his limitations? Can someone tap into his natural curiosity and love and use that as a catalyst for his success and achievement?

We ourselves can nurture his potential and enable him to accomplish and reach great heights. We can create a hopeful future out of love and acceptance and utilize that to challenge him to grow. We can shower him with the confidence that he can achieve, and help him tap into his own powers.

But we need to believe in him.

And love him.

And make sure he feels it, with every fiber of his being.

He *has* potential. Those words fill the air and envelope me in a comforting cloud. My dear son has potential, and those words pull everything along with it.

What gives me the strength and wisdom to deny a prognosis so crippling and terrifying? It is the hope and love and courage that shines through in the most difficult moments, the truth that forever infuses my soul.

I believe in success. I believe in hope. I believe in prayer. I believe in my son.

I believe in Hashem, the Master who created and continues to create.

1.

Believe in the power of change.

When a prognosis limits your child, throw it out or get another opinion.

2.

Advocate for your child.

No one knows your child as well as you. Only you can push, fight, and persevere.

3.

Know your child's limits, but don't allow that to limit him.

When you push and fight too much, and realize it's not getting you anywhere (but only emptying your pockets), know when to give up.

4.

Respect your own limits.

Never forget that you are human, and take care of yourself too; not as a goal, but as a means to achieve your goals.

5.

Daven, hope, and accept.



Chayala Tawil

Photo Books

Photo books are fun to make and fun to look at. They can also be a great educational tool with our children. When Avrumi was about two years old, I made him his first photo book. The goal was to familiarize him with his siblings names, matched to their faces. It went like this:

Cover: Who loves Avrumi? [family photo]

Page 1: Who loves Avrumi? [photo of Avrumi]

Page 2: Malky [individual photo of Malky]

Page 3: Malky loves Avrumi! [photo of Avrumi and Malky together]

Page 4: Yaakov [individual photo of Yaakov]

Page 5: Yaakov loves Avrumi! [photo of Avrumi and Yaakov together]

The book continued on in this vein, naming and showing each family member, including parents.

Last page: Everybody loves Avrumi! [another family photo]



This book was so simple, yet so easy to read again and again.

Each of my kids felt special for being in "Avrumi's book" and

loved reading it to him. We still use it today!

Here are some tips to keep in mind when creating a photo book for your child:

Ideas of topics for books include: going through daily routines, special routines (such as: "What Yossi Does on Shabbos"), memories of a special trip/occasion, or special people in your child's life.

If you are having a hard time coming up with ideas, use published toddler books for inspiration. Find one at a good level for your child and recreate it using your own photos, making it exciting and meaningful for him.

Repetition is great. Come up with a line to use again and again, such as in the above example ("X loves Avrumi"), or: "Yossi loves to go to the park, Yossi loves to go to school, Yossi loves to go to shul..."

Comb through past pictures to see what you have to work with. You'd be surprised how many pictures you already have. Make a list of the photos you need to take to complete the storyline, then take them.

Snapfish and Shutterfly are both user friendly programs with reasonable prices. Or if you are artistic, you can create your own scrapbook-style photo book.

Happy reading!

During a period when we were in the hospital for months at a time, every Friday afternoon, for months, a warm kugel was left on our porch, from an anonymous kugel maker. I felt so comforted. B.M.

The nicest thing that anyone can do for us is to make our child and family feel included or invited! B.G.

Every afternoon last year, I waited outside for the SCHI bus to come and for my daughter to come off the wheelchair lift. In May, a woman came walking up to me holding a package. She said: "I see you waiting every day with a smile on your face. I have a business making cheesecake miniatures and I wanted to give you a treat because you are such a special mommy." She gave me a package with 6 fancy mini cheesecakes. I had never exchanged a single word with this lady before. That really made my day! I thanked Hashem for sending me that *chizuk*. Chaya W.

The nicest thing people do for me and my daughter, is when they treat her as a human being; when they see her potential within, and not just her diagnosis of Down syndrome. Raizy Sander

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Lev with Love volunteers, not only for taking our precious child out, but for doing it with love and joy! For saying how cute he is afterwards and for coming back week after week! That someone wants to be with our special but quite challenging child means the most to us! To all those who work with my child, you cannot begin to imagine what giving a compliment about him does for us, and for the *chizuk* it gives me, his mother, who puts in so much but doesn't always see the results. T.S.



Tips From The Experts *hey! that's us!*

What is the nicest thing that someone ever did for your special child (or for you, relating to your special child)?

Although I have been the recipient of a lot of *chesed* for my daughter, when I read the question, the following memory from almost twenty years ago immediately popped up. When my daughter was one year old, I took her to Chile by myself, to have her do an intensive with Ramone, a PT (my husband stayed home with my other children). A few days before I left, a busy *rebbetzin*, whom I knew from out of town, sent me a package for my trip. In it was a beautifully written card, an inspirational book for myself, a toy for my daughter, and some nosh. I was so touched by the gesture and the thought that went into each item that she sent that I never forgot it. M.G.

My three year old special needs Moshe loves to go to Sky Zone. He occasionally grabs other people's hands, wanting them to hold his hands and jump with him. I usually have to pull him away, as he doesn't understand the concept of strangers. On a recent trip to Sky Zone, Moshe grabbed the hands of a boy from a yeshiva group. All the boys started jumping and dancing with him. They used their own fun time to make my little boy happy!

Another time I was waiting at the doctor's office with Moshe, who was clearly agitated being there, and I could not reason with him. Another mother saw the situation and let us go before her. Doctor's offices are very stressful for us, and I was so touched by her actions. I didn't explain anything, she just saw the situation and said: "It's OK, I'm in no rush, you can go before me!"

In both of these situations, I was so touched that people saw and acknowledged that I have a special needs child, something that may be hard to notice at first with a child who has ASD. They showed me, without my having to explain anything, that they understood my situation, and helped make the situation easier. B.D.

It means so much when people look at and treat my child like a real person, yet at the same time accept him for how he is, and look away from anything he does that's not typical. Raizy

Question for the next issue:

My daughter refuses to allow me to brush her teeth. The last time we went to the dentist, she had seven cavities and they had to sedate her in the hospital in order to fill them. What can I do to avoid such a scenario in the future?

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

When I first saw this question, I wondered what it had to do with “Tips from the Experts.” Then I realized that we parents of special needs children really are the experts in receiving *chesed* from others and seeing the beauty of *klal Yisroel*. It always amazes me how our children bring out the best in others and create an outpouring of love and *chesed* that is just overwhelming. Whether it’s the devoted volunteers, the care packages, the *Shabbatons* and outings, the sibling events, *chizuk* gatherings, financial support, or just a kind word, there are so many creative ways that others find to support us. It’s not always easy to feel like a constant taker, but we can become “experts” in taking graciously, and appreciating the fact that it is our special children who are generating so much good in this world.



One Chanukah night I received the most touching Chanukah gift ever from Yehuda’s morah. She delivered to my home a stunning Chanukah-themed puzzle (put together by none other than Yehuda himself!) in a gorgeous frame, along with this beautiful poem:

Dear Totty and Mommy,

As you observe and enjoy
This beautiful puzzle I completed
Please know my dear parents
It was no easy feat I did

When I first saw all those pieces
It seemed an impossible task
Such overwhelming feelings:
Whom to turn to? Whom to ask?

But I accepted this challenge
Focusing on a few pieces each day
Realizing that I could tackle it
When broken up that way

I twisted and turned each piece
Until I found its proper place
For I knew each piece would only go
In its designated space

There were many times I felt
That I really got it right
But then I had to revamp my work
For the space was much too tight

During many of those moments
I felt like I should quit
But nothing can describe the ecstasy
When I got each piece to fit.

Boy am I ever proud
Of the obstacles I scaled
Because I can now present to you
My masterpiece, unveiled

There’s no need to go into detail
For the *nimshal* is so clear
As you twist and turn my “pieces”
With tender love and care

Although sometimes the many pieces
Seem so fragile and unknown
You continue to build and believe
That a beautiful picture will be shown

So it is to you, my dear parents
Who constantly put the pieces together
That I wish to present this puzzle
With all my love, forever

Love, Yehuda

Smart & Safe

THE LAUNDRY ROOM

Fraydel Dickstein

"Laundry, laundry, laundry... laundry, laundry, laundry..." I keep murmuring to myself as I hang up a few more shirts in my husband's closet.

"What?" my husband asks, "What did you say?" I look at him and say: "Shalom, when I get up there, after I tell them my name, I will say: "Laundry.""

Imagine if the heavenly court piled all of the blankets I ever washed onto my scale. I just did a rough calculation and I came short of 20,000 blankets that would weigh it down!

Yehuda loves blankets, as well as taking baths. He could easily take a new blanket for each bath, which gives me on average of three blankets a night that need to be washed, although there are times when I wash six blankets a morning.

Clothing is a whole 'nother story—Yehuda, as of late, is so proud (and should be!) of how he can get dressed independently. He makes sure to show off his skills by going through multiple sets of clothing a day. Honestly, I am so proud of this skill that I get excited as well. If you ever see him with his clothing on inside out and backwards, it's because I just don't have the heart to change it. His pride in his independence is worth more than looks!

I have always found laundry an exhilarating (and yes, exhausting and endless) task. As I lift each piece of clothing, I feel so close to Hashem and feel so lucky to have these wonderful people in my family who wear these clothes. I am so grateful that I can afford clothing for my children. When they are nice matching clothes, the feelings of gratitude are especially strong.

The laundry room is one room I have not yet touched in Smart and Safe, and the truth is that not everyone even has a laundry room. But I will assume that our readers have a washing machine and dryer, so I will start with that. I can't help but remember the time when Yehuda jumped into our washing machine when it was filled with clothes and water. I was really worried I would need a fireman to get him out. This was a top loader which currently is more uncommon. I believe the front loaders all lock when washing, so this should no longer be a problem.



(In case you are wondering, I manually pulled out the clothes, making it easier for Yehuda to come out.)

If you do have a top loader, and have someone who dreams of nothing more than a warm bath in it, I imagine either of these will, hopefully, help.

Safety 1st Prograde Front Loader Washer/Dryer Lock

(\$10.41 on Amazon)



Parent Units Safe and Shut Washer and Dryer Locking Strap

(\$7.95 on Amazon)

I firmly believe that it is worth investing in a lock for the laundry room door, if you are lucky to have a door. I have a combination lock on ours and use the room to store shampoo, Mr. Clean, and other hazardous cleaners.

Before I had a door on my laundry room, I kept my detergents on the top shelf of my linen closet, hidden under towels, in the hope that Yehuda would not find it. As far as I know, he never did.

Interestingly enough, when I finally got a door to my laundry room with a combination, I really had trouble for a while. For some reason or other, the kids always ended up leaving it open. I remember one time when my husband stocked up on laundry detergent at Shop Rite and we swam in soap puddles, as Yehuda spilled bottle after bottle (at least the towels I used to wipe the spills smelled terrific for a long time!).

There are some very helpful products I must mention when it comes to laundry. At certain points, due to accidents, I had a very hard time getting the linens (and sometimes clothing) to smell good.



Downy Unstopables In-Wash Scent Booster Beads with Tide Original Scent

(\$15.94 for 26.5 Ounce)

I found this to be very helpful. I would put a handful into any smelly load and it really helped. Although I find Tide pods to be the best laundry detergent by far, I am afraid to keep them in my house, as I am petrified that someone will think it's a squishy. The Downy Scent Booster helps and the

bottle says to give a glass of water if swallowed. It doesn't even say to call Poison Control, so I feel much better about it.

Clovercat Washable Reusable Pads for Bed Wetting

(\$18.99 on Amazon for a 2 Pack)



This is a phenomenal product that should really help keep the laundry down, as you don't need to wash the sheet and/or mattress cover every night!

This brings me to the subject of clothing and stains and I have a few things to share about it. Since Yehuda at this point uses his shirt as his napkin (we are working on it—no judgment allowed!), clothing does get stained. NOTE: I DO NOT SCRUB YEHUDA'S CLOTHES, almost ever. Years ago, a friend told me that she does not scrub her kids' clothes and it was the first time I had ever heard such a thing. I was baffled. She showed me different powders she would put into the loads such as Oxi Clean, baking soda, and others. I was very intrigued by this (I am getting a little unraveled writing this—I hope I haven't killed any shidduchim prospects!). I heard this advice at an extremely hectic stage of life, so I bravely decided to attempt it. I was pleasantly surprised to find that, with the right detergent, most of the stains do come out on their own. I now rarely scrub and I reserve the right to throw out clothes after one season, preventing them from becoming hand-me-downs. We also downgrade stained items to pajama level. I buy Yehuda lots of clothes, but somehow we still never have enough and the light colors get stained. But if you think about it, his pants are mostly dark colors, and his shirts are usually inexpensive.

I would like to share a bit about the difficult subject of avoiding stains. Shabbos was a real challenge, as Yehuda likes to wear a white shirt, and the cholent shows up in force. First, I bought a box of plastic aprons.

HUELE 50 Pcs Clear Plastic Polyethylene Waterproof Disposable Aprons

(\$6.99 on Amazon)



Shabbos morning came and I was so excited that I had finally gotten my act together to get these aprons! (Please don't ask how many months it takes me to actually take care of these kinds of things!) I put one on myself, gave one to each of my kids, and waited to see if Yehuda would be willing to go along with us. I thought it was brilliant that we were all doing this together, as Yehuda hates to be singled out. I made a big deal about how we are all wearing them so we would stay so clean, how it's so nice to stay clean, and whatever other positive things I could think of to say on the subject. I remember clearly how Yehuda went to sit on the couch chair. He was looking around and did not seem pleased at all. He stood up, clearly insulted, and attempted to rip my apron off. Yehuda is *bli ayin hara*, not an aggressive child, and I could not believe that he actually did that. It was very clear to me how insulted he was. Ouch, I felt so bad, but really I was very, very happy that he was able to express himself like that! At this point, I felt like all

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The Five Most Important Lessons:

From the Mother of a Special Needs Child

Ruth Carmel



Stop me if you've heard this one before:

A clueless first-time mom has a lifelong habit of denial, so her two-year-old can't possibly have a problem. Then: Okay, he has a problem, but it will fix itself (like everyone tells her). Then: She and her husband get him diagnosed and it's something called PDD, which means Pervasive Developmental Disorder—at least it's not that autism that seems to be sweeping the nation.

Only, of course, it is.

Fast-forward, and my son (call him Cory) is a teenager. Not a regular teen, but my beloved son, anyway. His speech is a little stilted, and he gets annoyed if he sees someone smoking on the street (because it could kill you, so why would you do it?). Life's not what it was supposed to be, but maybe it was supposed to be like this. True, it's much more challenging, but maybe what I'm paddling through is a sea of blessing. Who knows?

I'm in a contemplative mood. Rosh Hashanah is coming. For the last few years, I've made a note to myself before the holiday of what to request when praying for a good year. The other day, I checked out last year's list and realized how much progress Cory has made. Not a moment too soon, either. I'd been feeling low...some new medicine Cory is on, that's not the hoped-for cure-all. It helps to remember that the last 12 months were, indeed, productive.

Noticing the good stuff—that's just one thing I've learned as the mom of a special-needs child. So, in the spirit of the season of renewal, here are five key lessons from me to you:

ONE

Face what's wrong head-on. With apologies to the song, time is not on your side. Not if your child has a problem you need to address. When Cory was born, he seemed normal. About a year later, he began to withdraw and not make eye contact. My husband and I were freaked out. We finally faced the facts, months later than we should have, and found a specialist to evaluate and diagnose Cory.

Having your fears confirmed is terrifying. But sooner or later, you remind yourself that a diagnosis is just a label, not a sentence. And, with God's help, it's not unchangeable. When you know what to call a problem, you can start asking questions that lead to answers.

There have been plenty of missteps along the way. Early on, Cory was in a mainstream nursery school. We were looking for a special-needs setting but still clinging to

a secret hope that his issues would fix themselves. That episode was a disaster. But it showed me that Cory needed a school that was right for him, not one that fit some preconceived idea I had about where a child of mine should be. An ego-puncture can be a gift.

TWO

Get out there. This part is about showing up. The world is full of people and ideas that can help you; meet it halfway. Don't isolate yourself. Go to lectures about what your kid has. Network with parents in his school. After Cory's diagnosis, I heard about a group at the local JCC for parents of special-needs kids. The first time I went there I was so sad, so full of shame about my son's condition. And then I met these parents who, more or less, had gone through what I was going through. It was so heartening to learn I was no pioneer, that there were others who

had been where I was and could help me find my footing.

Over the years, I also found email groups for parents of special-needs kids. Night or day, I can ask any question or voice any fear, never having to sugarcoat my words, and there's always a parent to listen or share what she knows.

Feel as awful as you need to feel...up to a point. So you're not a pioneer. Still, you are unique, and your child's issues are unique to him. You don't have to adopt someone else's brand of optimism. Early on, family members would assure me that things would be okay. Sometimes that's exactly what I needed to hear. Other times, I wanted to dig a hole and descend to the bowels of the earth and disappear.

I eventually turned to therapy, and my doctor prescribed a little pharmaceutical help. I still get sad at times, but it's manageable. I'm better at figuring out what will make me feel better, whether it's prayer, a get-together with a good friend, reaching out to an online parents' group, or rocky-road ice cream.

Risk "No." If you need something for your child, keep trying to get it. When planning for Cory to start kindergarten, I took him for an interview at School A. They turned him down, feeling he was not ready for their program. My husband and I were disappointed, but chose School B. Before the school year started, Cory went to the summer program at School B. Soon we realized it was the wrong place for him. Mid-August, I told Cory's speech therapist how concerned I was. She suggested I call School A again. "What's the worst that could happen?" she said. "So they'll turn you down a second time. Cory has come so far since the winter; try it." I called the admissions person at School A. To my shock, he told us to come in. Cory was accepted and spent the next five years there.

Back to where we started: **Let the positive catch your eye.** It's easier to acknowledge the bad than accept the good. When your child struggles to do what should come naturally, you can find yourself so focused on helping him overcome his deficits that you overlook his strengths. But don't! Notice what your child can do that he couldn't do a few years ago. Notice things he can do that normal kids can't. Stepping back and taking perspective reminds you there's something to celebrate. Like Rosh Hashanah.

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was lost in terms of staying clean, and I was not sure what to do. Then, the simplest solution crossed my mind—we just put a sweatshirt on top of his white shirt before the Shabbos *seudah*. I wish there were always such simple solutions, but sometimes it works, and other times he needs a new shirt after the meal, and I get to wash it after Shabbos on a long white cycle with Tide and Oxi powder.

If your child won't be personally insulted to wear a bib, this one is voted by mothers as the best bib:



Silicone Adult Bib with Crumb Catcher (\$18.99 on Amazon for 2)

This bib comes in children's sizes too. I beg you to try as long as possible to keep bibs in vogue in your home! It will make life much simpler and will eliminate lots of stains and lots of laundry.



Shout Color Catcher Sheets for Laundry

(\$11.53 on Amazon, 72 Count)

Color Catcher Sheets are meant to maintain the original colors of clothing, even when washed in mixed loads. This product brings me to a touchy subject and I'm

wondering if anyone can relate? It's 12:30 AM and I am in my laundry room. Finally, Yehuda is asleep and I can now survey the damage. I have a pile of clothing that is from an accident which I just finished scrubbing. I want to cry; I am so tired. This pile contains some really nice clothing and it has darks and lights and I don't want to leave it until tomorrow, as the aroma is not pleasant. I also don't want to stay up another hour to change the load. Magic trick: I dump the whole load into the machine with a color catcher and go to sleep. Viola! The clothing really comes out nice, despite the mixing of colors. (I do not take responsibility for this, just giving out some tips!)

I wish I had some more actual laundry tips, but truly I am not the expert. My simple advice is: if the machine is ever empty, put something in it—there is always more to wash! And when it gets overwhelming, just picture your scale in *shamayim* (perfect for this time of year, when we need all the merits we can get!) getting heavier and heavier from all of those endless loads!



SWEET SPICES

Introducing “Sweet Spices,” our new column about seeing the hashgacha/providence in everyday encounters with our special children. The title is based on the following Torah medresh:

When Yosef’s brothers sold him into slavery, the Torah mentions that the caravan in which he traveled down to Mitzrayim carried sweet-smelling spices, as opposed to the foul-smelling cargo usually transported on that route. Rashi points out that this brought comfort and encouragement to Yosef, who understood that Hashem prepared these sweet spices to accompany him on his journey, and to teach him an important lesson: Although it was painful that he had been sold into slavery and sent down to Mitzrayim, it was not random. It was orchestrated by Hashem, down to the very last detail, and Yosef knew that he would not suffer an iota more than was destined for him.

As we journey through life with our special children, we need to remember that Hashem is the One planning this journey, with all of the bumps and jolts we may encounter. Let’s try to smell the sweet spices along the way, and be encouraged by the knowledge that nothing is random, and that we are on a journey to greatness!



Of Cars, Camp, and Caring

Y.Z.

It had been a long and tiring week, and it wasn’t yet over. Aside from the regular juggling of work, kids, and managing my son’s services, budget, and medicines, I had some cancellations of afternoon staff that had made my week pretty stressful. On top of this, it was Memorial Day Weekend, so I also had to deal with having Shaya, my special needs son, home on Friday and Monday. I pulled a late night on Thursday, and was exhausted by the time Friday rolled around. On Friday, I remembered getting reminder emails that our car was due for an inspection. I checked the date by which we had to have the inspection done, and saw that it was May 31st. Since the mechanic might be closed through Monday, I asked my husband if he could take the car for the inspection that day. My husband called, and the mechanic gave him a choice of three slots – 2:30, 3, or 4 in the afternoon. Since Shaya was home all afternoon anyway, we took the 2:30 slot.

As my husband was getting ready to leave, I asked if he would take Shaya with him, so that I could prepare for Shabbos more efficiently. A moment later, I took back the request. I realized that Shaya would be impossible in the parking lot—he loves cars, and goes absolutely crazy in parking lots, trying to open all the car doors. My husband, being the great guy that he is, agreed that it would be hard, but still offered to take him if it would help me make Shabbos. I couldn’t turn down the offer.

While the mechanic did the car inspection, my

husband, as expected, followed our son around, trying to entertain him so that he wouldn’t interfere with the mechanic. A neighbor, also having his car inspected, came over to say hello. He didn’t know my husband well, and didn’t know that we had a special needs child. As he watched my husband deal with Shaya, he expressed admiration at the way my husband was handling him. He asked my husband some questions about Shaya: where he goes to school and what he does in the summer. My husband told him that Shaya goes to a program in the public school system, and attends Camp Migdal (an amazing sleep-away camp) in the summers, which is the main break for our family. When our neighbor heard how much the camp cost, he said that he had a relative whom he could ask, who may be able to help us out with the camp tuition. My husband didn’t think anything would come of it, and when the car was ready, he came home.

On Sunday, we received an unexpected call from this neighbor. He said: “I told my relative how impressed I was with how you dealt with your son, and I asked him if he could help you out with camp. He said he felt there were other sources for help with camp fees, but that he wanted to make sure that the parents took a break while their son was in camp. So he is giving \$3,000 for you and your wife to get a real vacation while your boy is in camp.”

When my husband relayed the phone call, it brought me to tears. Not just because a vacation

like this is beyond our means and a real treat, but because I felt so clearly that all the time we were struggling with our son on that long weekend, Hashem was watching us and setting up a plan to show that He was with us. What were the chances that our neighbor would come to the mechanic at exactly the same time as my husband, and that my husband would decide to take Shaya along? Shaya usually does not come home until 3:30 on Fridays, and he has never ever been to the mechanic before. Our neighbor later told us that he had pushed off his inspection for six months and, for 'some reason,' had decided to finally take care of it that Friday.

We so clearly smelled the sweet spices that Hashem sent us, and we smell them to this day. As a matter of fact, I am writing this while my husband and I are on the plane to our long-awaited summer vacation! But long after the vacation is over, I hope to cherish this feeling – that Hashem is together with us on our journey of raising Shaya. Hashem is with us all the time, whether we see it or not, and He is looking out for us with love and *rachamim*.



WOW!

MOMENTS

compiled by Fraydel Dickstein

I was cleaning up the study and came across a paper in my son's handwriting. His *rebbe* has a program where the boys write down their hard questions on a piece of paper and then he answers it. My son's *shaila* was: "Is it *ribbis* to give a present to a therapist?" I was touched to see how having a special needs child in our home enriches our others children's lives in so many ways.



I took my children on a trip to Sprinkles one summer afternoon. While we are sitting and enjoying our delicious ice cream, we were excited to see a girl with Down syndrome entering the store. More and more girls came in, and I guessed it was the incredible Camp SuperStars, an in-town sleep-away camp for girls with special needs (in Lakewood). We were ecstatic to see them all. I felt Hashem's love for sending us such a good experience for my children, and for increasing their positivity towards those with special needs!



Our dear son Nesanel's Bar mitzvah was approaching! In honor of Nesanel's Bar Mitzvah, we brought him and all our children to Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky for a *bracha*. Nesanel is autistic and is in his own world a lot, but he was ecstatic to see the *Rosh Yeshiva*. *B"H*, Nesanel was on his best behavior. The *Rosh Yeshiva* asked Nesanel what he was learning, to which he responded: "Torah!" What beautiful words from my dear son's mouth!



Yossi has very frightening seizures! After one severe seizure, Yossi was on a respirator. The doctors wanted to wean him off the respirator, but Yossi was not doing well, his numbers were just not good. My husband and I decided to start singing *zemiros*, as Yossi loves the special Shabbos songs. Shortly after we started, the nurse came dashing in and said: "Whatever you are doing, keep it up! – his numbers are stabilizing!" We continued to sing Yossi off the respirator! His *neshama* is clearly connected to Hashem!



On our super-exciting vacation this summer, we were *zoche* to meet my sister-in-law's special needs neighbor, Yehudi. On our way home, we went to Mount Davos and up on top, in the stillness of the mountain peak, we met a woman with her son who has Down syndrome. Just a bit later we bumped into a man with a child with special needs. Hashem surely orchestrated this string of "meetings." When I meet other parents with children with special needs, it gives me so much *chizuk*!



HaNeshama B'Kirbi

Rickel Geffner

I looked at the note by daughter brought home from school and felt my smile grow. My daughter's class in *Shoshanas Yisroel* (the special education division of *Gan Yisroel*, with classes catering primarily to girls with Down Syndrome ages 10-17) was embarking on another major performance. My thoughts wandered back to the amazing show they had staged two years earlier, just before the world shut down from Covid. Their hour and a half program enthralled the standing-room-only audience. I was so happy to learn that they would be doing it again.

The excitement mounted among the students (and mothers!) as the date drew nearer. The teachers and staff put their hearts into preparing the girls and attending to the numerous behind-the-scenes details. As the girls practiced, they enjoyed the camaraderie and boosts in self-esteem. They learned lessons of *mitzvos* and *middos*, which they acted out in different scenarios shown during the video segment. The event also displayed the different skills the students learn and practice during the year.

Finally, opening day arrived! The curtains opened and twenty girls stood with beaming smiles up on stage. They looked absolutely magnificent, with self-assurance equal to that of students in a mainstream school play.

Entitled "*HaNeshama B'Kirbi*," (created by *Shoshanas Yisroel*'s principal, Mrs. Gancfried), the performance celebrated the inherent greatness, the piece of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* Himself, that resides in each of us, and expressed appreciation for the gifts He bestows upon us daily. The program was similar to a typical production, with splendid choreography, beautiful songs, props, custom hand-sewn costumes, and a video presentation. Yet, it was so much more heartwarming. The audience gained the perspective-changing lessons imparted by our sweet young performers, not only through song and dance, but through their very selves. Despite the exhausting schedule of three shows in two days, they rose to the occasion, and each time performed expertly. Our children enchanted the audience with their accomplishment, while treating them to an evening of wonder and delight.

Theme Song

*Hey, look at me,
What do you see?
Is it my face or my clothing,
Are we our looks?
Our pocketbooks,
Talents, or personality?*

*It's time for more,
Get ready to soar,
Remember the truth of who we are
A part of Hashem,
Sparkling gems,
You and I are each His shining stars!*

*Oh Neshama
She'nasata bi,
Hashem, You placed part of
Your very self inside of me
Oh, it's pure
My dignity
Eternally
This is who I am,
Tehora hi!*

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS APPEARING IN NESHAMALE MAGAZINE

Note: All words are in Ashkenasic (Eastern European) pronunciation. (Y) indicates term is Yiddish (A) indicates Aramaic

Alef-Bais – Hebrew alphabet
 Almanah – Widow
 Amen – So be it!
 Amud (in shul) – Stand on which Torah is placed for reading
 Av HaRachamim – Father of Mercy (G-d)
 B'Karov – Soon
 B'Simcha – Happy
 Ba'al Toke'a – Person who blows the shofar on Rosh HaShana
 Bais Yaakov – Jewish Girls' School
 Bentsh – to Bless (Y)
 Bli Ayin haRa – Without an evil eye
 Bracha/Brachos – Blessing/s
 Chazak – Strong
 Chazaras haShatz – Prayer leader's repetition of the Shemona Esrai, the main prayer service
 Chelek – Portion
 Chilul HaShem – Desecration of G-d
 Chizuk – Strength, encouragement
 Chochma – Wisdom
 Chumash/Chumashim – the Five Books of Moses/(pl)
 Daven/Davening – Pray, prayer (Y)
 Erev – Evening; referring to the time period before Shabbos or a holiday
 Fleishig – Pertaining to meat (Y)
 Frummer – Religiously observant (Y)
 Gadol – Revered, eminent rabbi
 Gedolei Yisrael – Great Jewish sages
 Gemora – Talmud (A)
 Geulah – Redemption
 Giborai Chayil – Valorous, possessing strength of character
 HaKadosh Boruch Hu – The Holy One, Blessed Be He (G-d)
 Halevai – If only
 HaNeshama b'Kirbi – the soul within me
 Hatzlacha – Success
 Kaddish – Prayer for the dead
 Kavanah – Intent (ie: concentration in prayer)
 Kehilla – Community, congregation
 Kinderlach – Children (Y)
 Koach, Kochos – Strength/s
 Kosel – the Western/Wailing Wall in Jerusalem
 Kriyas haTorah – Torah reading in synagogue
 L'Shana Tova u'Mesuka – To a Good and Sweet New Year
 L'Shem Shamayim – For the sake of Heaven
 Ma'asim – Actions
 Machshiv – To give importance to

Malach – Angel
 Mashgiach – Supervisor (ie: of Kashrus)
 Mechazek – to Encourage, give strength to
 Melamed – Elementary Torah teacher
 Mevaker Cholim – Visit the sick
 Mezakeh – To bring merit to another
 Middos – Character traits
 Misgaber – to strengthen oneself
 Mitzvah/Mitzvos – Torah Commandment/s
 Morahs – Female Teachers
 Mashiach, Moshiach – the Messiah
 Mussaf – Shabbos and Holiday "Additional" Prayer Service
 Neshama – Soul
 Nisayon/Nis'yonos – Test/s
 Nusach – Version
 Olam haBa – The World to Come, Afterlife
 Olam haEmes – The World of Truth (Afterlife)
 Possuk, Pasuk – Verse (of Torah)
 Pshat – Simple explanation
 Rachamim – Mercy
 Rachmana l'zlan – May G-d have mercy (A)
 Ratzon HaShem – The will of G-d
 Rav – Esteemed rabbi
 Ribono shel Olam – Master of the Universe (G-d)
 Seudah – Festive meal
 Shabbos/Shabbosim – the Sabbath/pl
 Shachris – Morning prayer service
 Shalosh Seudos – Third Shabbos meal
 Shamayim – Heaven
 Shemoneh Esrei – the Amidah, central prayer service
 Shitfus – Partnership
 Shiva – 7-day mourning period when family and friends visit to offer consolation
 Shlita – Blessing for long life (abbreviation), often appended to names of religious leaders
 Shmad – Apostasy; forced conversion to Christianity
 Shmittah – Sabbatical year, effecting agriculture in Israel

Shofar – Ram's horn
 Simcha – Joy; joyous occasion
 Tachlis – Intention, purpose
 Tafkid – Purpose, task
 Tallis – Prayer shawl
 Tehillim – Psalms
 Tehora Hi – It (the soul) is holy
 Tizku l'Mitzvos – idiom: May you merit to perform more Commandments
 Totty – Daddy (Y)
 Tzaddikel – Little righteous one (term of affection to a child) (Y)
 Tzedakah – Charity
 Tzibur – Jewish community
 Vasikin – Sunrise time for morning prayers
 Yomim Noraim – High Holidays (Rosh haShana & Yom Kippur)
 Yidden – Jews (Y)
 Yiddishe Mama – Jewish Mother (Y)
 Yom HaDin – Day of Judgment (Rosh HaShana)
 Zoche – Merit

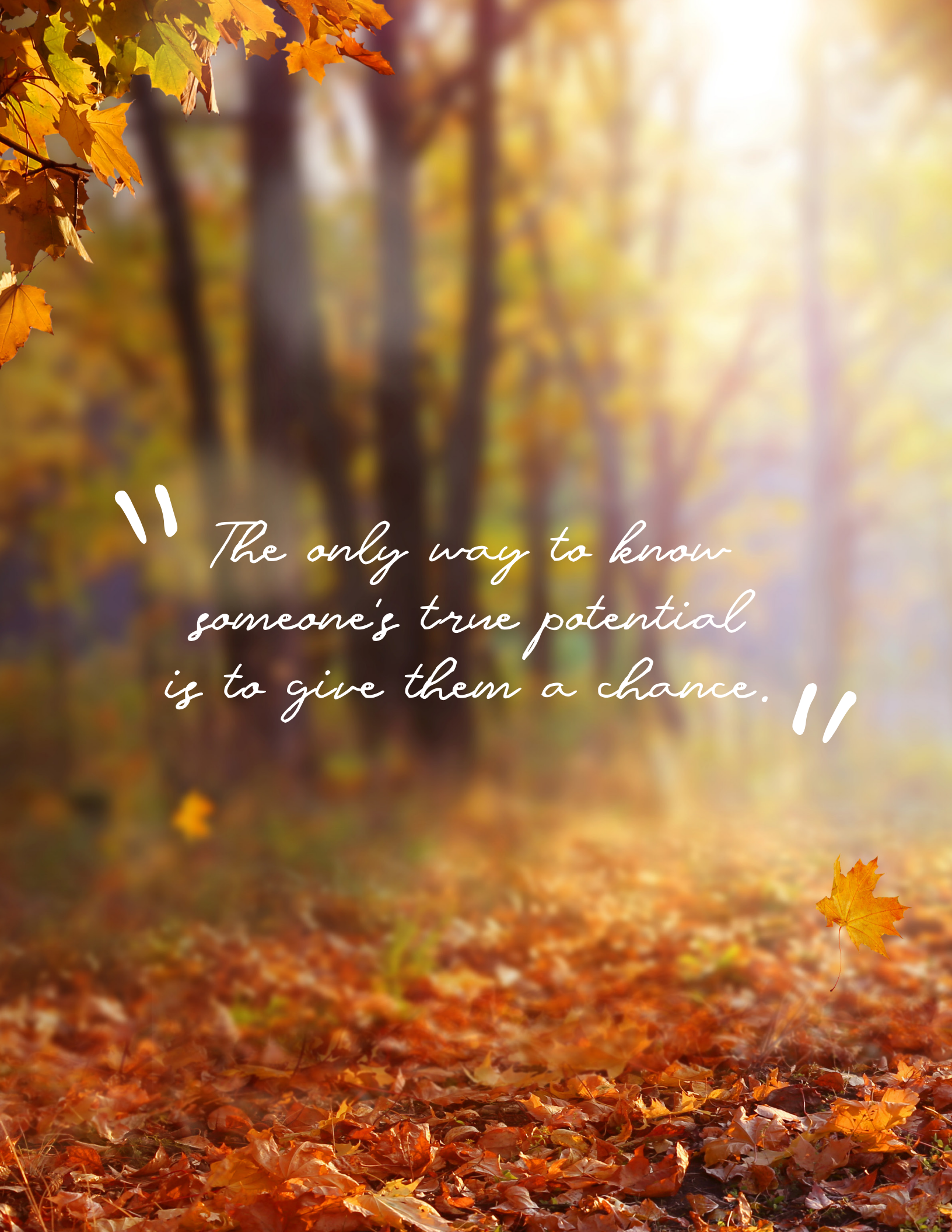
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