Neshamale magazine

נשמהלה

Sharing Our Special Experiences: Chizuk & Inspiration

THE CAMP ISSUE: /15

PARENTS' PERSONAL ACCOUNTS
EMOTIONAL PREPAREDNESS
STAFF PERSPECTIVES
PACKING TIPS

NEW COLUMN!:

NOW WHAT?

SPECIAL NEEDS GROWING UP
RABBI EZRA KLEIN / 26

ISSUE #23 // PESACH EDITION תשפ"ו

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

With much appreciation to our contributors:
Nechama Adler
Perry Binet
Batya Dancykier
Sarah Eliyahu
Rabbi Shneur Feldman
Hadassah Feuerson
Ricka Kirschenbaum
Rabbi Ezra Klein
Chava Esther Luria
Rabbi Boruch Rabinowitz
Raizy Sander
Gitty Weiss
Rabbi Akiva Zentman
Yehudis Zentman

Neshamale Magazine thanks

Leebeinu365

for sponsoring Issue 23

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

CONTACT INFORMATION
E-mail: **neshamalemagazine@gmail.com**
Mail: **112 6th St. Lakewood, NJ 08701**
Text: **848-299-2908** Phone: **732-436-9916**
To subscribe for free e-version:
neshamalemagazine@gmail.com
To subscribe for printed magazine, view the current issue and explore archives:
https://www.ramapost.com/neshamale

Table of Contents:

In the upcoming issue will be

Simcha & Song

When our special children are around, Simcha and song seem to abound, What is it that brings out the joy? How has music affected that special someone in your life? Or your own? Please share with us!

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: **May 12**
Email: **neshamalemagazine@gmail.com**
Mail: **112 6th St. Lakewood, NJ 08701**

Dear Readers,

A friend of mine recently gave birth to a baby with Down Syndrome. Everyone assumed I'd have just the right words to say to her, that I would understand her so well. Actually, I had a hard time remembering what it felt like to just have been told that my child has special needs. I vaguely recalled the overwhelming feeling that life as I knew it was over, that everything would be different, how uncomfortable it was dealing with everyone's reactions, and the endless doctor appointments and therapy sessions.

It took a lot of thought and effort to try and put myself back into the shoes I had worn ten years ago. As the memories slowly resurfaced, I realized that those shoes simply didn't fit me anymore – I have long outgrown them. At this point, special needs is not special – it's my normal. I'm now comfortable in this world.

I know this shift didn't happen overnight. It took many years. I can't even tell you how it happened; it wasn't a conscious moment of: "You have arrived at your destination." Life happens, and we grow with it, whether we intend to or not. I recently saw a quote: "Maybe you don't realize how far you've come because you keep raising the bar." I think this is so applicable to our situation. Until I had to relate to someone who was in that brand-new special needs baby stage, I didn't appreciate how far I'd come.

Take a moment to pause and remember what things were like for you when your child/sibling was first diagnosed, whether it was at birth or years later. Remember the worries and tears and desperate *tefillos.* Appreciate how far you've come, in acceptance, in strength. Recognize that when we think that we are not "there" yet – that's only because we keep raising the bar. I think that my years-ago self would be very proud of where I am today, and I'm sure it's like that for you, too.

Of course, I still have plenty of mountains to climb, and as our children grow, brand new terrain keeps cropping up and we have whole new paths to tackle. But that doesn't take away from appreciating how far we've come. In fact, realizing how far we've come will give us the courage and confidence to keep going!

Sending a child with special needs to camp is a great example of where we mellow, bend, and change as we grow along this journey. I distinctly recall the first time (when Avrumi was three years old), that I heard a friend's five-year-old child with special needs went to a sleep-away camp. I thought my friend was either beyond desperate or crazy.

Then life happened. I saw how hard the summers were for Avrumi. There was much less programming available. Most of our volunteers were away in camp. His very busy mommy seemed to have a full-time occupation driving camp carpools and emptying kiddy pools. As we watched Avrumi's boredom and dealt with his declining behavior, we started realizing why young children with special needs might do well in camp. By the time he turned seven, Avrumi was registered for sleep-away camp for the coming summer. I was still very worried and unsure, and felt kind of forced into it for lack of a better option. But those feelings only lasted until he left for camp.

Once he was there, living up every moment of camp life, the doubts disappeared and appreciation for this gift took over. Camp gives Avrumi something that I can't – freedom to run and touch and play in a way that can't be done at home. His devoted counselors smothered him with love and joy in a way that wasn't always possible at home. The sensory immersion (swimming is his favorite!); the way the therapy is painlessly present throughout the activities; the fun, happy atmosphere – everything about the place made him shine. My daughter maintains that she can glance at a photo of Avrumi and tell you where it was taken – his camp pictures always have a special glow and the biggest smiles!

Having shared my personal experience, I want to make it clear that this issue's theme is not here to convince you to send your child to camp. Everyone's situation is different, and only the parents should be making the decision of if and when to send their child to camp. I personally know a lovely girl, over twenty years old, who has special needs and never stepped foot into camp. She had beautiful summers spent doing wonderful things, and is doing just fine. The idea here, as it is with all *Neshamale* topics, is to share knowledge, experiences, and tips. I was determined to share everything that came in about camp, not only the good – although I have to say that 99% of it was genuinely positive! So, in case it sounds like we have an agenda, it's simply the truth speaking for itself, and nothing else.

I will end by sharing that just recently, while cleaning for Pesach, I came across a scrapbook. It was from over 20 years ago, when I was a counselor for a bunk of special needs girls, ages 15-21, in a mainstream camp setting. Looking at the photos and reading the captions brought back so many happy memories. We truly had a blast with those girls, gave them our all our hearts, and received even more in return. There was also a letter written to me by one of my campers. Her sweet words reminded me of our warm relationship, and of how much I enjoyed interacting with my campers. Now that Avrumi and I are on the receiving end of the counselors' warmth and devotion, it was nice to realize how these camps are such a win-win for both the staff and the campers.

May all of our precious children will have the most productive, safe, and happy summer possible, wherever they may be.

Chayala

Chizuk Boost #14

Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz

Overcoming Despair and Singing Shira

Shvi'i shel Pesach is not a *regel b'fnei atzmo*. While *Shemini Atzeres*, which we think of as the "second" days of Sukkos, actually has its own *tefillos* and *korbanos*, the *yom tov* of Pesach is one long continuum. It is the events in *Mitzrayim*, and ultimately *Yetzias Mitzrayim* itself, which established the foundation for *Klal Yisroel's* development of *emunah u'bitachon*. That basis of trust in the *Ribono shel Olam* allowed us to achieve the level of being *zoche* to *kriyas Yam Suf*, of being able to move forward at the *yam* on *shvi'i shel Pesach*.

Bnei Yisroel found themselves facing the vast waters in front of them; there was simply no way forward. At the very same time, the *Mitzriyim* were closing in on them from behind. No matter which way they turned, they saw only their own demise!

Targum Yonoson ben Uziel in *parshas Beshalach (14:13-14)* tells us that the *Am* split into four different groups, each with its own response to this enormous *nisayon*.

One group of people felt total despair: "Let's just give up and jump into the ocean to die."

The 2nd group reminisced about the wonderful fruits and vegetables they ate in *Mitzrayim:* "We should turn around and go back to the way it was in the good old days."

Group #3 said: "No, we will fight the *Mitzriyim!*"

The 4th group of people suggested that everyone scream and shout and pretend they are an army of warriors to scare the *Mitzriyim* away.

ויאמר משה אל העם – *Moshe Rabbeinu's* response to each group's idea gave *Klal Yisroel* the key to *emunah ba'Hashem*.

To group 1, who thought of committing suicide, Moshe said: אל תראו התיצבו וראו את ישועת ה' "–Don't give up! Have no fear! Stand back and watch the way Hashem makes events unfold."

כי אשר ראיתם את מצרים היום לא לספי לראתם עוד עד עולם – "Don't go back," Moshe told group 2, who suggested a return to *Mitzrayim.* "The suffering you went through there will not recur. And in truth, it was not as good as you are remembering it now. You simply can't go back. Move forward!"

To group 3, who wanted to physically fight their pursuers, *Moshe Rabbeinu* said: ה' ילחם לכם - "Hashem is the true warrior." Just leave it up to Him.

And to group 4, who wished to make noise to scare the *Mitzriyim,* Moshe responded: ואתם תחרשון. "Stay quiet, accept your circumstances, and let Hashem be in control."

Klal Yisroel heard. According to Rabbeinu Bechaye in *Pirkei Avos*, each person individually took a "leap of faith" as he stepped into the water, and the *Yam* split specifically for him in the *zechus* of his *emunah u'bitachon!*

Moshe's words were *chizuk l'doros* and they should inspire us as well. We can all relate to moments of such supreme *yiush* that it feels like life is over and we just cannot go on anymore. "If only everything would go back to normal," we think. But no, we cannot give up! Each *nisayon* can be an opportunity for growth, and our job is to move forward. דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו

Take a leap of faith! Give it over to Hashem! We need not, and we should not, go it alone. We can work on quiet acceptance of our *nisayon* - כי מה' יצא הדבר, and yet turn to Him over and over again in *tefilla*. עמו אנכי בצרה-- Hashem is with us and He is taking care of us. אלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אינו יכול לו.

With absolute *emunah* and *bitachon*, with the knowledge that with every *nisayon* Hashem sends us He also gives the *koach* to be *omeid b'nisayon*, with the certainty that נם ליראיך נתתה להתנוסס -- that He gives us *nisyonos* only for our benefit -- we too, like *Klal Yisroel* by the *Yam*, can reach the level of אז ישיר – of singing *shira.* אשירה...אמונה...בטחון...ין אז אלא לשון שמחה, says the Midrash in שמות רבה כג.

Having *bitachon* and working to be *b'simcha* in the midst of our challenges builds *emunah u'bitachon* even further. Feeling a calm, secure trust in Hashem is, itself, reason to sing *shira* as we move forward toward *shvi'i shel Pesach* and the ultimate, final ישועת ה'!

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

Yehuda: Our Conduit for Good Things

Fraydel Dickstein

Yehuda is a special boy who, in every way, knows he has to be the conduit of good things. His mother writes *Smart and Safe,* which is a fairly popular column in the *Neshamale Magazine* for families with special needs children. Yehuda knows that his mother is always looking for new products and new innovations to share with her readers. She likes things hands-on and simple to attain (He may not realize it, but she also likes products that help promote a functional household).

It was Shabbos early afternoon, and Yehuda was so excited that we had so many guests for Shabbos. His excitement overwhelmed him, as it often does, so he retreated upstairs.

We enjoyed a beautiful, lengthy seudah. It did cross my mind to wonder how Yehuda was keeping himself busy for so long, but I need not have worried, right? Therapists and teachers spend hours upon hours and lots of money creating schedules and activities for him. The talent it takes to come up with things to keep him busy is huge. Their methods to channel the strengths Hashem has given him along with his large scope of disabilities can exhaust anyone. It takes the elite of the specialists in this field to create activities and structures that meet all these criteria.

Yehuda did the unbelievable; he got his mother and sister to Pesach clean two entire rooms in the house for before Rosh Chodesh Adar.

Meanwhile, left to his own devices, Yehuda had found a sensory paradise, as well as an extreme strength-training activity upstairs. His fine-motor ability was working at peak performance. When I walked up to his room to check on him, I saw large strips of something white and chalky, not sure yet what I was seeing.

I walked into my son's room, and saw the entire bed covered in white strips with white powder covering everything. Yehuda had torn an entire case of diapers into neat strips which created an incredible mess of white powdery substance. Do you realize the precision involved, the strength this took?

The best part was yet to come; his slightly overwhelmed mother (I wonder why?) had been procrastinating about cleaning for *Pesach.* She just could not get it off the ground. But our special *tzaddik,* Yehuda, who is the conduit for only good things (whether I see it or not), finally got our *Pesach* cleaning going.

Needless to say, every area of the room, including all the linens and laundry, needed to be washed and refreshed, so *Voila!* We now have one room cleaned for Pesach! Each item was put into the washing machine or thoroughly shaken out. We not only did a regular *Pesach* job, but really went out of our way to do it *l'mehadrin.*

Yehuda, our conduit of good, really started the ball rolling. He revved up the engine of my 10 year-old, who attacked her room with gusto by the end of the day. Yehuda did the unbelievable; he got his mother and sister to *Pesach* clean two entire rooms in the house for before *Rosh Chodesh Adar*. Who would believe it? I am truly amazed.

All in all, I can recommend this super tearing fiesta as a great way to keep your child busy. I would suggest purchasing one of those indoor blow-up pools with high walls for this activity, so you can take full advantage of it, and perhaps hose it down afterward on your porch (JUST KIDDING! DO NOT TRY THIS! IT IS A TERRIBLE IDEA!).

This reminded me of something I heard from Rabbi Daniel Glatstein. He shared the famous *Rashi* that says the *Aron* carried its carriers – the *Leviim* who carried the *Aron* thought they were carrying the it, while the *Aron* actually carried them. I was tempted to reach out to a *Rav* to inquire if I can write the same thing about Yehuda and all the special *neshamas* like him. Can I say that even though it is often so exhausting, or even physically impossible at times, and we are sure we are the biggest heroes, these children are actually holding *us* up. Then I realized I don't need to ask a *Rav* this question. I know what you all know, which is that the *zechusim* that are generated by caring for our special children are carrying us in a way that we can't imagine. They are surely filling up bags and bags of diamonds for us in the next world. In this world there are times when we see the same thing with such clarity and there are times where we are sure they are our biggest liability.

What comes to mind is the chorus of a beautiful song a friend's husband sang at her son's Bar Mitzvah (I don't remember it exactly, so this is loosely written):

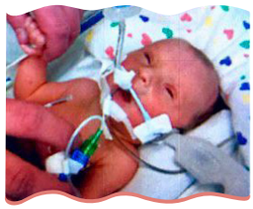
> Noach you allow us, Noach you endow us.
> It's the *chessed* you create...
> You fill our life with *chessed,* so much,
> You are so precious to us!

There is no doubt in my mind that the *zechusim* we accrue from caring for Yehuda is holding up our home in a very big way!

INSPIRING

It's All Good

Hadassah Feuerson



When I was expecting our second child, we were told to expect that the baby would have some health issues. Naturally, we were alarmed and worried. Thus, we worked at strengthening our *chizuk* in *emunah* and *bitachon*, trying to arm ourselves for whatever lay ahead. My father-in-law shared a meaningful story with us: *Rav* Ahron Kotler *zt"l* was in immense pain at the end of his life. His *Rebbetzin* would constantly say: *"Es vet zein gut* - It will be good." *Rav* Ahron would respond: *"Es is shein gut*– It's good right now!" As we made the practical preparations for the birth, we also tried to inculcate ourselves with the attitude of "It's already good."

The events leading up to our baby's birth were like a "teaser" in a novel – a precursor of what this baby's life would look like: full of drama, unexpected detours, and always remarkable *hashgacha pratis*. I went into labor in my eighth month, and we rushed to the hospital. The usual nerves over being in labor, compounded by the fact that it was early, compounded by our expectation of medical issues, made us incredibly tense. On the way to the hospital, we were in a serious car crash. The car was totaled, but Baruch Hashem we were fine. At least physically. Emotionally, I was a wreck. Shaking and crying on the side of the FDR, I didn't know what to do next. If we called an ambulance, they would only take us to the nearest hospital—but we needed to get to NYU, where our medical team was waiting to care for our baby's needs.

The family member who was driving us dealt with towing the car, while we tried calling an Uber to take us to the hospital. Just then, a *Chasidishe Yid* pulled up on the shoulder and asked if we needed anything. "Yes!" I answered, "We need to get to NYU!" He looked at us in surprise and said: "I drive patients to the hospital every day! I will take you there right now!" It felt like the sky suddenly lit up with lightening, giving us a clear glimpse of the *hashgacha* involved. We got into the car that Hashem had arranged for us and sped straight to the hospital.

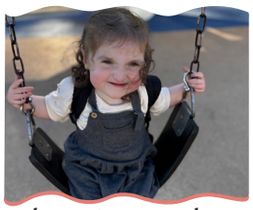
Our precious baby girl was born, and it soon became clear that the anticipated health issues were only the tip of the iceberg. When she was three weeks old, genetic testing came back to reveal a deletion of the 18th chromosome. She also had a congenital diaphragmatic hernia that was repaired at four days old. In the coming days, we added a cleft palate, hearing loss, and a metabolic disorder to the list of diagnoses.

There was no prognosis, good or bad, as her genetic deletion is extremely rare and has a varied prognosis. We have not yet found another person in the world with the same entirely unique genetic makeup as hers! On one hand, it was intensely overwhelming to know that we were dealing with many difficult medical issues with no instruction manual at all. On the other hand, there is something freeing about not having any idea of where she is "supposed to be." We have no choice but to simply take one day at a time!

When talking about names, I was drawn to name her after my husband's grandmother, whose name was Genendel. Although it wasn't the most common name, I thought it was beautiful. We debated about the name; but I really had my heart set on it. We decided to add the name Tova as an expression of *tefilla* and *emunah* that everything should be "good" for her always. I kept thinking of the story of Rav Ahron Kotler saying: "It's

good right now" through his suffering. Thus, our tiny preemie baby was now called Tova Genendy.

Two weeks after Tova Genendy was named, my mother-in-law sent a copy of an article to me in the hospital. It was written by Mrs. Genendel Krohn and she mentioned her own name. She said that the name came about from the nickname *"Gan Eden'l."* The root of the word Genendel actually comes from the German word *genada*, meaning merciful. In English, the "gn" combination always relates to birth, geneticist and genes. It took me a moment to process this – my precious baby's name literally meant "Good Genes." Medical jargon and genetic codes receded into the background as I felt myself enveloped in a huge hug from Hashem. "Your baby is perfect – she has good genes – I gave them to her, and it will all be good!" is what I heard Hashem whispering to me. My sky that had seemed so dark was once more illuminated with light.



Tova Genendy came home at three months, along with oxygen and a feeding tube. Nurses and appointments became a normal part of life. I tried very hard, maybe sometimes too hard, to push myself to be strong and happy and just keep marching along.

It took me a moment to process this – my precious baby's name literally meant "Good Genes."

At times it seems like we can really do this, and sometimes it feels like it's all too much. When people comment how "amazing I am," and: "You're always so strong," and: "You must have grown so much from this," I wonder. Am I really strong? Did I really grow? It doesn't always feel like it. It just feels like I'm doing what I have to do in the moment; more like survival. But as time goes on, I sometimes get a glimpse of how this life is changing me for the better. I'll share a personal example to show you what I mean. I hope it will help you recognize your own strengths and growth, too.

Hospitalizations are rough. The first time Tova Genendy had to be hospitalized (after her first long NICU stay at birth) was a few days before Chanukah. When Chanukah arrived, and we were still stuck in the hospital, I was pretty miserable. Why did she have to go back to the hospital? And of all times, why on Chanukah? I just wanted to be home lighting the menorah and frying *latkes.* In retrospect, it was me fighting for control – my plan vs. Hashem's plan – and I put up a good fight.

Three years later, we landed back in the hospital for an ordinary hernia surgery. Things turned very unordinary when Tova Genendy's stomach was mistakenly punctured during the surgery. Immediate corrective surgery was required, more complications arose, and time marched on. Our expected five day stay turned into a six-week haze of worry, pain, and fear. Chanukah arrived and I noticed something: I wasn't angry or hurt or upset. I wasn't *happy* to be in the hospital over Chanukah, but I had no questions of: Why now? Why me? I recognized that maybe I had changed after all; that the years of being a special mother had sanded down my "I'm running the show" perspective. I was so grateful to have noticed this, and to see the good that grew out of so much pain.

Though my usual operating mode is to smile big and sing through it all, there are waves that topple my fortitude. Crying is therapeutic and healing. When my daughter cries in pain, I don't tell her not to cry; I sometimes even find myself crying along with her. I can be honest and say: "It's so hard to see my daughter in pain, Hashem. I don't know what You want from us." I don't pretend to understand it, yet I fully believe it's all for a purpose. I believe it's all good. That doesn't necessarily make it easier, but it helps me accept it and not fight it.

I learned from Tova Genendy how to embrace the pain and move on. Whenever her blood is drawn, she screams and cries loud and strong. But the second the needle is out of her arm, she stops mid-scream and exclaims: "All done? Hurray!" and then she always asks: "Band-aid?"

Being a martyr can lead to burnout. My advice is to allow yourself to take from family and friends as much as you need and they are willing to give. My friends know that I am happy to receive care packages when I am in the hospital. My in-laws watch my other children when I am in the hospital and they do an amazing job.

Humor and cheer help diffuse tension and bring out the best in everyone. Once while talking with a doctor in the hospital, he asked me: "You're medical, right?" I answered him: "Not by profession, but by motherhood!" Apparently, I understood his medical jargon a little too well!

It's always a party when our other children come to visit Tova Genendy in the hospital. They aren't the easiest or quietest visitors, but it makes them so happy to see each other, so we make it happen. The nurses can get overwhelmed, but they also appreciate the joyous atmosphere that fills her room when the whole family is together.

We try to see the funny side of things, even in difficult situations. Tova Genendy was born three days before Purim. Amidst all the upheaval, we sat down to have our Purim seudah in NYU's family lounge. Just me and my husband with some food that we were sent. Then my husband unveiled some other "guests": a Sukkos poster he had found that showed a long dais of Gedolim! We laid it across a couple of chairs and it brought more joy into our hospital Purim.

In general, keeping Shabbos and *halacha* in the secular hospital setting lends itself to humorous moments. Imagining what the nurse in CHOP thinks when she sees us setting up flowers and fancy paper goods on a tiny table, squished into a tiny corner of the PICU, makes me smile. And every time she comes in to draw blood, we are still there, eating another course!

The doctors and nurses in CHOP are exceptionally caring and devoted. Sick children with special needs can be very demanding, yet they are so accommodating. We have had surgeons sitting on the floor reading Tova Genendy a book, because she asked them to! Once when she was very sick and miserable, the only place she was calm was hanging out of the windowsill. The nurses went along with it and let her stay there… for four days!

Focusing on the good is truly the best way to stay happy. In my situation, it's easy because Tova Genendy is just like her name – she is such a good, delicious child and we have so much *nachas* from her. Despite the doctor's predictions – or non-predications – about her abilities, we are so grateful that she is walking, talking, and doing relatively well cognitively and physically. When we focus on that, her many medical issues seem less overwhelming. She attends a special education preschool and is so sad when she has to miss days due to appointments and emergencies. She amazes everyone with her resilience and natural *simchas ha'chaim.* She takes her pain and disappointments in stride, in a way that we adults could only wish to emulate!

I could fill an entire book with amazing stories since Tova Genendy's birth three and a half years ago. She was hospitalized once again on *Parshas Mikaitz*, where we read about the sweet spices transported along with Yosef on his way down to Mitzrayim. That was when we made our decision to seek out the sweet spices along our journey.

One chapter of the book I could write would be about financial miracles. One time we needed to cover a certain expense and didn't know how it would happen. That week, a volunteer driver asked me why I was going to the hospital. When I told him that my daughter was there, he said: "I want to send you something." That day he wired us $2,000. Another time, our van was in the repair shop for a week. We didn't want to rent a van, but we needed transportation. My father flew out on a business trip, leaving his car for us to use, for exactly the days that we needed it, no more and no less.

Another chapter of my book would be about the countless individuals – volunteers, doctors, and drivers who showed up seemingly out of nowhere, just when we needed them. Hashem knows what we need and sends us His messengers in the strangest of ways. I once desperately needed a cleaning lady but couldn't find one. One day I arrived home to find a woman waiting by my apartment door. She asked me if I wanted cleaning help, to which I responded, "Yes! But why did you come here?" She told me that she had worked at my address in the past and now she came back looking for work. This heaven-sent woman worked for us a few weeks and then stopped coming. That very week, a neighbor asked me to open her door for her cleaning lady. I asked her if she had extra hours, which she did. Once again, we were *zoche* to see Hashem's *hashgacha* in our lives!

I believe that we are *zoche* to open *hashgacha* because of Tova Genendy. This is exactly the message I give to people who have given birth to a baby with special needs. I tell them: "Mazel Tov! The *Shechina* just entered your home! Until now you lived with a certain level of *hashgacha pratis* in your life; now you've been upgraded!"

I will end with one last "sweet spices" story. When we were in the hospital on the seventh day of Chanukah, I noticed that Tova Genendy's wound vac's discharge was greenish/blackish instead of pink. When I pointed this out to the nurse, she agreed that something was concerning. She called in a doctor, who wasn't sure what the issue was. Throughout the day, nurses kept alerting the doctors, yet nothing was being done. We were in a top hospital, getting exceptional care, yet they seemed to be blind to this alarming issue.

Hours passed and nothing changed. At midnight, a resident walked in, took one look, and ran out of the room. He came back with a battery of emergency tests: bloodwork, CAT scan, and more. After a whole day of ignoring the evidence, they were taking this very seriously. It dawned on me that Hashem had them wait until *Zos Chanukah* to deal with this. We apparently needed extra *zchusim.*

After testing, they wheeled our daughter into yet another surgery to fix the issue. I was incredibly calm, having such a clear feeling that Hashem was running the show, while *davening* that everything would be just fine. The nurse then came out to tell us that it was simply a case of leaking fluid, and everything was good. Indeed, Hashem is always doing good with us and with our special little girl with the good genes, Tova Genendy.

Let's Get Educated

Summer Emotions

When Sending Children with Special Needs to Sleepaway Camp

Batya Dancykier- Special Children Center, Five Towns

Preparing for Camp

One of the most important tools I use to educate my students is having a conversation with them. In this article, I will outline some of the many conversations that are important to have with children with special needs before sending them off to sleepaway camp.

Some of the key components for a child going to sleepaway camp are:

Take care of his own belongings: discuss that other children will be there, no mommies, lots of the same t-shirts and bathing suits. Show him labels with his family name on them.

Know who his point person is (counselor, nurse, shadow): let your child know that there will be someone there for him at all hours of the day to tend to his needs, and that he should feel comfortable speaking up.

Maintain hygiene: let your child know what that means as far as brushing teeth and showering AND who can help him with these aspects.

Respect personal space: discuss that campmates are not like siblings, and he will need to be extra careful respecting the personal space of others.

Understand healthy boundaries: Think key words like: *private* and *touch,* matched with what is ok and not ok. (Use your discretion here.)

It is worthwhile to discuss each aspect and impart what it all means and who will be in charge of implementing it. It will give both you and your child comfort.

Contending with Emotions

Aside from the technical components, another big part of going to sleepaway camp is contending with emotions. A conversation about emotions is a great way to help children face what they are feeling. When a child misses a parent, the first thing a child needs to know is that the feeling itself is not scary. It is the stories we tell ourselves that create and exacerbate the fear: "I need my mommy to take care of me." "I need my mommy to watch me." "I need my mommy to feel safe."

It is completely normal to miss someone. Learning to sit with that feeling is an important skill. A good example: Let's say every morning you have cereal for breakfast, and then on Pesach you don't. Do you miss the cereal? Yes. Do you enjoy other foods, enjoy the Chag, gain from the Yom Tov experience? Absolutely. Highlight the missing feeling, and then let it be just that. Don't let it bloom into: "I won't have cereal ever again," "I won't find any enjoyment in my day without cereal."

Tools to Manage Emotions

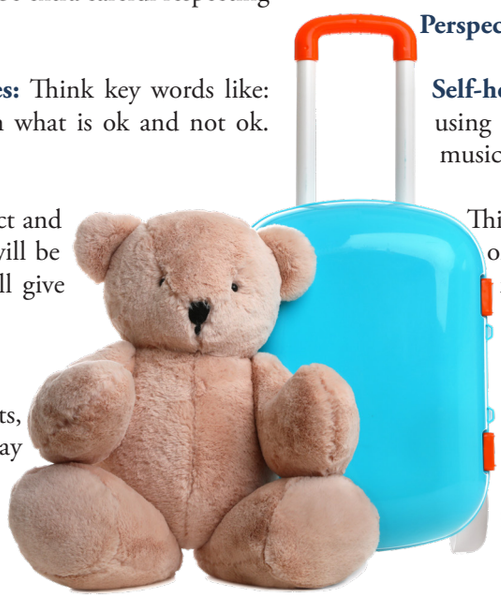
What are some tools we can impart to our children as they go to an environment where they may need to manage their feelings more independently?

Name it to tame it: Quite simply, label how you feel: "I feel sad," "I feel glad," "I feel scared."

Validate it: It is normal to feel this way.

Perspective: It won't last forever.

Self-help: Can you find ways to help yourself by using humor, talking to someone, listening to music, or finding a spot to relax?



This may seem impossible for children to do on their own, but they really can! It does need to be taught and reviewed. It's a great tool to pack for camp.

And of course, lastly, give your children permission to have the time of their lives! To dance, sing, make messes, make new friends, run around, have fun… all the good things while being safe.

compiled by Fraydel Dickstein

These special "Wow!" moments are often what keeps us going when things get challenging.

My 8 year old son Zevi goes to a school that is not religious. One day his teacher explained to the class that the assistant from the previous year was coming to visit.
She went around the room asking each student if he was excited to see her.
When she got to Zevi she asked, "Are you excited to see Talia?"
"Yes, yes, yes!" he quickly responded.
"Who else do you want to see tomorrow?" she asked.
Without missing a beat, he exclaimed, *"Moshiach!"*
This is not something we rehearse at home; it clearly came straight from his lofty neshama.

Eli, our eighteen year old severely autistic son, is a challenge that often feels superhuman, yet we love him in unimaginable ways. My husband is a professional barber and his shop is in our basement. One night I walked into his barber shop and there was Nosson, Eli's younger brother, helping my husband give a haircut to a customer: an older boy with special needs. What pure *nachas!*

Yossi, our sweet, delicious, special boy, has idiosyncrasies that we often find annoying and untenable. He loves taking toys with him wherever he goes. I keep buying toys, but it feels like it's to no avail. Toys are constantly getting lost and left places and I never seem to have enough toys to stem the tide of his demands.
One day my neighbor, who is a personal organizer, called me to offer quality toys in perfect condition. She explained that she had helped pack up a family who was moving, and found all these toys in the empty house, left behind for the garbage.
When she dropped off the toys I was awestruck; I could not believe how every toy was totally meant for Yossi. He loves coloring, but all his markers dry out as he does not put the covers back. He also cracks all his crayons. Yet, here was a jumbo box of crayons and markers! Yossi uses every hamper as a basketball hoop – and here was a small hoop on wheels! He spills out the huge container of Clics to find the *Nun* and *Gimmel* pieces we once got on Chanukah. In the batch of toys was a brand-new box of Alef Bais Clics! Yossi loves tiny baby dolls (*menchies*) — and there they were! He loves shooting rings; there was a container of plastic rings.
Amazingly, there was nothing else; every item was something he loved! I felt like it was a reminder that we never lose out with our special children. It was truly a hug from Hashem!

The little hugs feel so big and help us see that Hashem is always there with us. Just last week, I was feeling unwell. I had this secret dream that Faiga Malka would go away for Shabbos. I did not want to send her away to just anyone, but to a place she would enjoy going. I didn't feel comfortable asking anyone to have her as I was not going away for Shabbos, so I didn't feel I had a good excuse to ask for this favor.
I thought to myself, I can easily ask Hashem; I am very comfortable asking Him! I said: "Hashem please help; that someone I trust should call me to ask to have Faiga Malka for Shabbos!"
As crazy as it may sound, that Wednesday I got a call from Faiga Malka's very devoted morah, who sweetly asked me if she could have the privilege of having Faiga Malka for Shabbos! I had tears in my eyes and said: "Thank you Hashem for taking care of me!" This is the first time anyone ever called me up privately to ask if they could have my daughter for Shabbos. B"H, Faiga Malka had a great time at her Morah's home, and her mommy was able to get some rest.

One day Yossi came home limping and wouldn't walk. On one of his feet was a small green spot. Oh no! What were we going to do? Miracle number one is that even though the school nurse said it looked fine, I had a hunch that he needed a doctor. Miracle number two: Yossi's amazing aide was able to take him to the doctor during school hours. Miracle number three: the top doctor was able to see him that morning and said that although Yossi really needed a podiatrist, he would try to open the wound himself. The doctor removed a large deep splinter we didn't know was there. The biggest miracle of all was that Yossi was perfectly calm throughout this painful procedure, even though he couldn't put his foot down because of the pain the entire day before! Go explain it! It was all taken care of by Hashem – He knows exactly how much we can handle!

Productive Parenting
Parenting under Stress

Rabbi Shneur Feldman

Disclaimer: My experience does not include parenting children with special needs or the unique challenges facing their families. This article was written for any parents facing acute situations. I hope the Neshamale community, too, will find it to be beneficial.

The phone rings.
"The testing came back positive."
"Your son had a prolonged seizure, and we are taking him to the hospital. Please meet us there."
"We are sorry, but it seems our school is not the right placement for your child."
The phone drops from your hand as torrents rush through your mind. How did your whole life just turn upside-down in a two minute phone call?
The desire for our children's success and happiness is constantly weighing on us. When faced with a sudden or overwhelming stress, it is natural to fear our ability to adequately meet our children's needs. Nevertheless, we are the ones holding the keys to their future.

Setting the Record on Parenting

Parenting is forever; because "parent" is not what we do, it's who we are. We go though many stages in life, yet all of them come and go. Toddler, teenager, first job, *chavrusa tumult*, are all integral stages in making us who we are. We look back at those times with contentment or contempt as they fade into the rearview mirror, hopefully finding ourself in a better place on the way out than when we entered. Yet, while parenting may change and evolve, it's always there.

The founders of *Yiddishkeit* to this day are referred to as *Avos* and *Imahos*. They understood that their every action, word, or thought would impact their children forever. Each one of us on our own level, also reflects this reality. *Avos* and *Imahos* are forever.

The implications of this phenomenon are significant. We believe *b'emuna shlayma* that every challenge we face is custom-designed by Hashem to bring us closer to Him and higher in our *ruchniyus* pursuit. Recognizing that our parenthood is part and parcel of who we are, it follows that our children and how we parent them is also factored into every *nisayon* Hashem presents us with. Although Hashem considers every outcome and sub-outcome that will be affected by a *gezayra*, how we will respond *in our parenting* is a direct facet of the test we are facing.

Calibrating Our Outlook

This may sound overwhelming and even frightening. Our parental instinct yearns to shelter our children from adversity. Why should they suffer along with us? We feel trapped as unwitting partners in this impending doom befalling our precious, innocent children.

Accepting this reality, that our children will always be inextricably entwined with us, is also the beginning of a liberating and galvanized mind-shift. Instead of cowering behind a shield to protect our children, we can embrace with authenticity that this is their *nisayon*, too. We can perceive the purity and honesty of children as bastions of light that illuminate the darkness of these circumstances. We can share the growth that will happen through this challenge.

Our children may have to contend with less of our time, less of our focus, and more of our anxiety. And that's okay, as long as we absolutely acknowledge that our parenting is not dropping, it's rising. Just as we will notice our *tefillah* getting stronger, our *emunah* stretching, and our priorities shifting, we have to realize that who we are as a parent is growing alongside it, too.

How do we maximize these situations, the ones we never asked for, in our lifelong journey of parenting?

The Parent

There are no confines, no boundaries, no limits to being a parent. Being miles apart, physically or emotionally, doesn't detract one iota from who you are as this child's parent. Simply thinking positively about our role and our impression on our children will be felt and will affect them positively.

We may feel physically depleted, we may even be guilt-laden that we brought a tough situation on through our own poor choices, yet Hashem still created us as the parent - and the only father or mother - for this child. All hindrances and self-skepticism notwithstanding, they are still craving a parent that stands proudly in that position. The more we trust in ourselves that we are there for them in spirit and mind, the larger and clearer that image impresses in their hearts.

Rav Noach Weinberg insisted that his *talmidim* in the *kiruv* profession spend time with their own children, even if all they

continued on page 13

The Challenge of Loneliness

A Pesach Perspective

Akiva Zentman

When going through the *makkos,* one can easily understand the intensity and severity of each one. Starting with *makkas dam* – we picture people dying from thirst, experiencing frogs in bodies and food, the intense discomfort of the *kinim,* the loss of life and limb due to the wild animals, and so on. However, when thinking about *makkos choshech*, I just couldn't wrap my head around it. What was so terribly tragic for the *Mitzrim* in this *makka*? The best that I could come up with was that if a *Mitzri* that was swimming when the darkness took hold and froze him, he drowned. That was the extent of my understanding. Not great.

I saw a *vort* in *Peninim al HaTorah* that really opened things up and illuminated my darkness. In every *makka* that befell the Egyptians, they had one great consolation: they had each other. When they were hit with *dam,* each man was thirsty, *and all his friends and family surrounding him were thirsty, as well.* When they were besieged by frogs, wild animals, or dangerous hail, *they saw their fellow Mitzrim suffering from the makka along with them.* Although the *makkos* were deadly and terrifying, there was a modicum of comfort in the fact that their entire nation was suffering, that each man was not in it alone.

However, when we arrive at the *makka* of *choshech*, the rhythm changes abruptly. This affliction was different; each man suffered alone. It wasn't so much a physical pain as an emotionally one, a much greater form of suffering. They went through this *makka* without anyone else: not their neighbors, their siblings, their children, not even their spouses. They were alone. This type of suffering is on a different level; maybe that's why it came just before the final blow.

Changed Lives and Loneliness

Many of us began our marriages surrounded by family, friends, and neighbors; people with whom we enjoy spending time and sharing experiences. When our lives are drastically changed with the birth (or diagnosis) of a child with special needs, we also become changed as individuals.

As we are tested daily, we grow by being *omed b'nisayon* to the best of our abilities. Whether the *nisayon* is associated with the compromised health and vulnerability of our child, with behavioral struggles, or with trying to find appropriate help for our child, we are being tested extensively each day. It is a constant job - there are no off days.

There is a shortage of helpers, technical struggles, and emotional challenges. Others don't understand what we are going through. Sometimes when they call us, we don't have the strength or interest to even answer the phone. When we do answer, they might complain about things that have now become so trivial to us. They may try to offer *chizuk,* but it fails to inspire us, like a person with parents offering advice to a child grieving over the loss of his father. Our challenge can lead to feelings of loneliness, realizing that few can understand what we are experiencing, or what our situation is demanding of us.

This loneliness is difficult, but it can breed whole new friendships. With whom? With Hashem—and simultaneously, with oneself.

A Friendship with Hashem

When we find ourselves alone, with no one to understand what we are going through, we connect to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu.* R' Wolbe, *zt"l* explains that a person has an intrinsic natural desire to turn to Hashem. When we are struggling, and have the stamina to *daven* (even in our own words) during or after a long

taxing day, we really connect. We connect in such a genuine and intimate way; it just pours out. We know that He is the only one who can understand what we are going through when no one else does. We start to converse with Hashem on such a basic level: "Hashem you are also a *shutif.* We need you to intervene and show us you are there. Show us You are watching us. Show us that You know how hard we work. Show us that you admire us."

They went through this makka without anyone else: not their neighbors, their siblings, their children, not even their spouses. They were alone.

Our relationship and our *devaykus b'Hashem* thrives, despite and because of our loneliness. Our children see the *kirvas Hashem* we develop. They absorb it. They internalize it. Our marriages improve, since we have the *Shechina* with us in our home. Hashem begins to become a real Partner with us. It's not just lip service; He becomes an *Elokim Chaim*, a *Yedid Nefesh.* We share our struggles and our fears with Him. Sometimes we beg Him for some *ha'aras panim* to empower us to continue forward.

Friendship with Oneself

When we are challenged and put to task, the way to forge on is by tapping into the sources of unknown strength that lie within us. We begin to recognize who we are, what our *ma'alos* are, where we can improve. We navigate difficulties by asking ourselves: "What is making me scared?" or: "Why am I getting annoyed at this friend?" or: "How can I approach this Doctor in a respectable way, but still get my point across?"

Without anyone else who has navigated our unique situation and advocated for our unique child, we learn to dig deep and to trust ourselves. We develop confidence. We begin to feel better and better as we connect to ourselves. We focus inward on what really counts, what Hashem wants – and the outside world gets smaller.

The *Mitzrim* in *makkas choshech* didn't have this. They were each in utter darkness, paralyzed, and truly alone. We, on the other hand, are never alone. Although we may experience times that feel dark, times when we feel no one understands the depths of what we are going through, we always have Hashem at our side: כי אשב בחשך ד' אור לי.

Of course, one should reach out to those can give him support. There are many organizations and publications (like this wonderful one) that bring parents of children with special needs together; precisely so that they can support each other, share their feelings, and relate to each other in a way that outsiders cannot understand.

When we feel that our friends don't get it, we can utilize these moments to connect deeply to ourselves and to what we are experiencing. Then, we can reach out with those feelings to our *Tatteh* Who loves us and is waiting to hear from us.

מים עמוקים בלב עצה בלב איש, ואיש תבונה ידלנה. (משלי,ב:ה) Every person has so much depth in his *neshama*; an *ish tevuna* will be able to dig deep and access it. When we begin to connect with our *neshama,* we access its true limitless potential (since it's part of Hashem). This is true greatness, and is the *tachlis haberiah*: *dveikus baHashem*.

Yes, we have challenging lives, but as we dig deep and reach out to Hashem in our struggle, we become *anashim gedolim.*

Productive Parenting continued from page 11

could swing was a few minutes during the week. The concept being, that if your children are always on your mind, then even in a short interaction you can convey the love, the confidence, and all the nurture that a parent has to provide their child.

It doesn't mean that this *nisayon* will pass easily, and it doesn't mean that there won't be hard losses. It means that your child won't lose you.

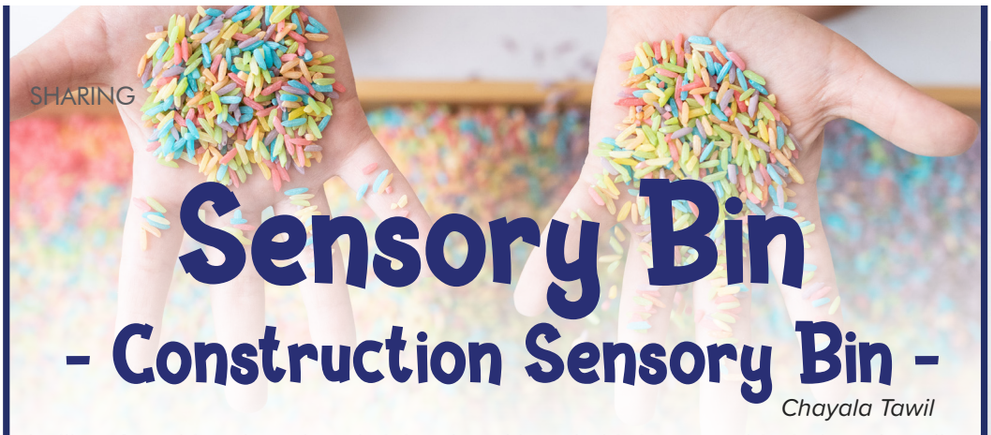
The Children

Children are much more resilient and capable of adaptation than adults tend to assume. Rav Reuven Feinstein points out that a baby always feels comfortable in their parents' arms, even when it looks precarious to everyone else. When everything seems to be crumbling around us, we can keep our children foundationally sound and remarkably well.

Often, the issues that are pressing most on their thoughts are far from the ones that we imagined. You may believe your son is concerned about his upcoming Bar Mitzvah, when in truth he's worried about summer camp. Astute children may be trying to guess all the details of an unspoken situation, while others prefer not to know at all.

Stop trying to guess what's on their mind, and instead trust that they have the intuition and ability to sort out their thoughts.

continued on page 14



Sensory Bin

- Construction Sensory Bin -

Chayala Tawil

I will preface this column by admitting that although this is a great bin, it doesn't really belong in the Pesach issue! But the same way that many women pull out their mixers the week after Pesach to restock their freezer, I'm hoping you will find this sensory bin an exciting way to transition back into *chometz* mode!

I created this bin while trying to come up with something new that Avrumi would enjoy. He loves water and animals, but we already did bins about those. I wanted something else that he could relate to and understand. When I thought of construction vehicles, I knew we had a winner! Avrumi is a big fan of these, especially when there are lights and noises involved!

Last summer the water pipes on our block were being replaced. For a few weeks, there were a dozen trucks parked along our street, accompanied by the deafening sounds of jackhammers breaking up the concrete and construction workers shouting instructions. Avrumi was glued to the front window from the minute he woke up until I dragged him to bed at night! The highlight of his day was when I took him outside to see the activity close up.

This bin has two simple "ingredients." I bought mini construction vehicles, actually called "cake toppers." I dumped one large container of oats into a box, and voilà– the bin was born. I put this together on an early Friday afternoon, and it kept my kids busy for the rest of the day. There were some oats to sweep up right before Shabbos, but no stickiness, no residue, no stains, no lasting mess at all.

Variations: Instead of oats, try kinetic sand. If you use the natural colored sand, it will look very realistic. You can also add mini construction cones for more playing options.

Wow! Moment: I wrote the above column on Sunday night (after putting the bin together on Friday). The next morning, Monday, we woke up to a world of white, and the exciting announcement of a snow day. Unlike other snow days, when schools were closed but respite managed to remain open, this storm was serious enough to completely shut down the roads, and Avrumi had no programs at all. With Hashem's help, we made it through the morning more or less intact (enjoying a few sensory bins).

In the afternoon, our devoted volunteer from down the block offered to have Avrumi over. We managed to carry him there through the snow, where he played for some time. When he returned home, I wondered what we would do next.

Instead of him getting into trouble, I saw that Avrumi was glued to the front window, so I went over to see what was going on. Outside, many neighbors were shoveling, but there was also a snow plow coming down the block. I don't know if I was happier that our street was being plowed, or that Avrumi was so excited to see the snow plow!

Amazingly, the snow plow didn't go down the street once and disappear—it went up and down the block, reversing and scooping snow for about thirty minutes straight! I have never before seen a snow plow go down a residential side street more than once or twice. But when Avrumi is standing by the window, Hashem can even send snow plows to entertain him. All for the sake of a special little boy who loves trucks!

And then be there, wherever they are, when they open up to you. Appreciate whatever it is that they are feeling and sharing. There is no right or wrong, only that they are your child.

The Occasion

In today's *chinuch* model, all growth, whether personal or spiritual, happens best when packaged in layers of sweetness. The intense journey that you are embarking on now with your family is no different. Load up the car with everything good!

Hashem has given you the tools – you just have to recognize them. You may naturally be a "camp guy" who makes everything super *geshmak,* or you may have a knack for deep connections with people. In truth, all that parents need to pump it up for their kids is the desire to do so and the belief that their children want to do it with them.

Every family has their way of making Yom Tov special and their way of celebrating a simcha. Hashem has destined that your family will be living in "special occasion" mode on a daily basis. Although much will be out of our control, we can make a huge difference to the memories our children will have of us during this time.

Rabbi Feldman of Detroit, MI, is the founder of the acclaimed MiYOUchad after school program, catering to each boy's talents, interests, and personality. He is a certified NHS practitioner and a sought-after parenting coach for positive and effective solutions.

Please send your parenting questions to neshamalemagazine@gmail.com, attn: Rabbi Feldman.

The CAMP Issue

A Mother's Summer Diary

A Peek Into a Mother's Heart When Her Son Goes Off to Camp for the First Time

Gitty Weiss

Wednesday, July 9

My heart is empty, the house feels so quiet. I can't believe that Dovi's in camp. It's surreal. ALL those months of thinking, deciding, shopping, planning... and now he's there. What am even supposed to feel? This morning Dovi didn't have any programs, so I took the day off to be with him. We went to Chuck E. Cheese early in the morning and had a blast together! It was nearly empty, and he ran around laughing and pressing all the buttons. I got some cute pics of him there! On the way home I picked up some cheese blintzes, his favorite food, and we ate together at the kitchen table. Then I turned on some music and Dovi sat in the playroom, fidgeting with toys and listening to the music.

Since it would be hard for us to part, I had Eli take him to the bus while I went to work. I gave Dovi a bracha and said goodbye about ten times. I tried to hug and kiss him, but he kept pushing me away and waving goodbye like he was so excited to go already! I think he understood on some level what was going on...

Thursday, July 10

I literally can't stop thinking about Dovi and what he's doing each moment. I can't help worrying about his eating and drinking. I spoke to his counselor who told me it took him a few hours to fall asleep, but that he was okay. It sounds like they are getting to know each other and warming up. I hope she understands him. I have to stay calm and give them a few days to settle down.

Sunday, July 13

We spoke to Dovi on the phone on Friday. He was laughing and sounded really happy to hear our voices! The camp sent a slideshow of photos, and it was so exciting to see Dovi doing activities with a huge smile on his face! It really looks like he is living it up there! I went into Shabbos so calm and grateful.

I can already see results for the family by having Dovi in camp. Shabbos was calmer and quieter, the kids could play undisturbed. I wasn't drowning in guilt Shabbos morning for not taking him out of bed earlier. (What time do they wake up on Shabbos in camp?) I wasn't sure what to do with myself during the meals without Dovi to feed and entertain. Definitely a calmer day, but I missed him all the same.

Wednesday, July 16
I got a picture of Dovi in pajamas, looking clean, calm, and happy at the end of the day. Baruch Hashem he sounds so settled and happy. Really, what could be better for him than a big open field of grass to run in and a pool to swim in? It's a dream come true for him. When I think about it, it's hard to understand why I even hesitated to send him to camp in the first place!

Friday, July 18
It's supposed to be pressure-free, but some things are so part of your programming. This morning, I went to get Dovi's medicine after I ate breakfast, then reminded myself that he's been in camp for ten days already... Even when he's not home, it's hard to let go....

Sunday, July 20
I realized today that Dovi is not the ultimate excuse. To explain, on Shabbos I was in a lousy mood for no good reason. My husband came home late from shul (which always make me cranky), but I couldn't even say: "You know I'm home with Dovi and he's out of control and I'm waiting for you!" I always equate my stress with Dovi, but now I see how I can easily be overwhelmed, in a bad mood etc. even when he's not home!

Wednesday, July 23
A few times a week I call Dovi before bedtime and "schmooze" with him for a few minutes. I sing him all of our goodnight songs and say Shema. It makes me feel like I'm still his Mommy.
I have these plans in my head to send packages every week, but somehow it never actually happens. I guess life is still hectic, even without Dovi home.

Sunday, July 27
The erev Shabbos pics the camp sent were heaven! They dressed him up and took these professional-looking pictures by the lake. He looks so gorgeous and yummy and I can't believe that's my son. I really miss him so much!

Monday, August 4
Yesterday was the unofficial visiting day. They don't encourage parents to come, but they do allow it. We thought it might make him sad to see us and then say goodbye again, so we decided not to go. Then I got a text from a friend saying that she was visiting her son and she saw Dovi and he hugged her and looked amazing! I felt so jealous that I was not there to get that hug! I really doubted our decision, but in the end, I decided it was ok. In the slideshow they sent, he looks beyond happy and heaven.

Thursday, August 7
It's interesting to hear the other kids' comments about Dovi not being home. Moishy is concerned that he is missing the family Bar Mitzvah and wants to save nosh for him! Moishy draws him pictures and asks me to send them to him.
Yehuda, on the other hand, says: "I don't miss him and I hate him." Ouch.
Watching my kids getting ready for bed, free and easy, no manipulating, no hurting... it's so nice. On the other hand, it's painful realizing how this is not their usual normal. We just have to enjoy it while we have it. Of our kids, the youngest ones are gaining the most. And Dovi, himself, of course, being away in camp.

Tuesday, August 12
I showed the kids the slideshow that the camp sent and it was so exciting to spot Dovi. The best pics are the ones were he's just in the background – not even intentionally in the picture. That's where I can see that he's really happy!

Thursday, August 14
Before camp, I spent hours trying to get someone I knew to be his counselor. There was a lot of back and forth and plans kept changing. In the end, he was supposed to have someone we didn't know first half, and someone we knew for second half. But the second half counselor couldn't come in the end and it's really all for the best. He is so happy and settled with the counselor he has, that I wouldn't even want to switch now. Hashem orchestrates everything and this summer is just one time where I can see that so clearly.

Tuesday, August 19

It's the night before Dovi comes home. It's kind of anti-climactic, this night before. I am looking forward to seeing Dovi again, to being his mommy once again, to caring for my precious neshamale. I'm also somewhat nervous about going back to the old ways – the overwhelmingness of his needs on a minute-to-minute basis, the kids crying when he bothers them, the need to be in three places at once.

One thing I definitely learned is that it's hard raising a family, even without Dovi here. I blamed so much – too much – of the daily stresses and challenges on him – and now I see clearly that it's not just him. Of course he adds a hefty dose of stuff into the equation, but it's not all about him. It's supposed to be hard. Nothing good comes easy. And something as amazing as raising a Jewish family has got to be a struggle.

I had a whole schmooze with my kids tonight, explaining about Dovi and how we mustn't make fun of him, even when he's different. They took it well – let's see what tomorrow brings.

It was so sweet how Moishy really missed him and got so excited about talking to him on the phone. He has such a huge heart!

I am so grateful that we had this opportunity, that this whole camp thing really worked out. That he was happy, wasn't homesick, behaved and enjoyed. That his counselor was so devoted, that she was easy to talk to, and did so well with him. That we enjoyed his time away without feeling too guilty.

Thank you, Hashem, for this incredible experience!

Wednesday, August 27, One Week Later

Eli and I picked up Dovi together, and he was beyond ecstatic to see us, hugging and laughing hysterically and all. Then he jumped back to his counselor and waved goodbye to us!

Bringing Dovi home was a hard adjustment, for all of us, but I think hardest for him. He really missed camp and wasn't used to being home. Funny thing was he went straight to the cd player in the playroom, asking me to turn it on – exactly what he was doing the morning he went to camp. So, back to normal!

He came home with a yarmulke on his head, which was so super exciting. He looked so cute and big. But within two days, it was over. On Shabbos he was using it as a bowl for his pickles!

On the second day back, he had fever and got strep, so that could also be why he was so unhappy.

A week later, however, he was back to his old self, for better or for worse. I hope we can learn how to incorporate some of the new skills and habits he picked up in camp and hold on to them. It's incredible how a few weeks can have such an impact on the whole family. We will surely send him back to camp next summer!

So, so long till next year, when I'll have time to write again!

N.M.

1. Send along familiar items. A favorite toy or blanket will bring comfort to a child adjusting to a new environment. If your child has a favorite snack or food, you can send some along to start off the summer as they get used to the camp food. A beautiful idea is to send along a family photo collage for their wall, or a photo book to read at bedtime.

2. Don't second-guess your decision. Once you've made the decision to send your child to camp, and did the research as to the best camp for your child, move on. Thinking and speaking positively both before and during the camp experience will only benefit you and your child. Project confidence that your child will do well and enjoy camp.

3. Label everything! "Everything" means every article of clothing, every piece of equipment, every bag, toy, and toiletry. Things will still get lost, but at least you are doing your best to ensure that your child has all that he needs. Send along extra labels for staff to label items acquired in camp.

4. Prepare the staff. The best way to do this is to take notes during a regular week, a few weeks before camp starts. As you go through your days, write down whatever comes up that you think they should know about. Some ideas to include: mealtime details, bedtime routine, sun/water safety needs, medications, behavior triggers, calming techniques, therapy goals, spiritual safeguards. After a week of notes, type it up clearly and send it to the camp. Keep a copy for yourself. You can use it as a reference when you meet with the counselors. Check in with the camp to make sure they passed it on to all those staff members who will be working with your child.

5. Try to meet the staff in person. This is not always possible, but when it can happen it's very valuable. Try to arrange to meet in your home before camp.

continued on page 19

Parents Speak

Sending Yehuda to Camp

Ricka Kirschenbaum

I sent my son Yehuda, who has Down Syndrome, to camp the summer he turned seven. I must admit that, in the past, I was one of those mothers who was extremely shocked and judgmental of parents who sent their young children to camp. I just couldn't wrap my head around it! Who sends their baby to camp?!

That year, I developed pneumonia over Pesach and couldn't recover for weeks after. I was weak, had no *koach,* and my son saw it and took advantage of it. At some point, I realized that, in order for me to rest and recover, I needed to send him to camp. His teacher helped me tremendously, securing him a spot in Camp Yaldeinu. Yehuda had an amazing summer and loved camp, yet was extremely homesick. I heard it on the phone and felt it in my bones. Yet, once he came home, all he talked about was going back to camp! I realized that I had not prepared him for camp properly.

This past summer, we sent him to Camp HASC, where he turned eight! He had the most AMAZING summer. When we called him for Shabbos the first week, he told us: "Come visit me." I knew he was happy, settled, and not homesick at all. Today, I highly recommend parents to be open-minded!

Yehuda grew SO much in camp, in so many ways. Meanwhile, my family at home grew and developed in ways I did not anticipate at all.

Sometimes when you are on a rollercoaster, the ride just keeps moving forward, you can't stop to make adjustments or see the whole picture. You just keep going and running. For us, when the train paused, we suddenly realized things did not have to continue as they were. We could make some tiny changes here and there, and we'd still be okay, if not better! It truly opened our eyes! My kids enjoyed the extra attention and the activities we did with them, yet they missed Yehuda terribly, and couldn't wait for him to come home!

Here's two tips I would give a parent sending to camp for the first time:

1 Make your child a calendar of the summer. Start it before school ends. Put in pictures and fill in important dates. In June, hang the calendar near his bed or the kitchen table, and every day point to the days of the week. We are here, next week school ends, the following week is vacation/program, and after that we go to Camp _____.

Take time to go through the whole calendar, pointing out birthdays, visiting day, and most importantly, the last day of camp. (If your child is going for two halves and there will be a change of counselor, make sure to explain that and include the switch date in the calendar, too.) A friend helped me put pictures on the calendar, and for school days I had pictures of his school. For going to and from camp, I had pictures of my car, and I always said: "Here is when Mommy and Tatty will pick you up!" Make sure they know, and trust that you will pick them up. This is super important! Talk it through, explain it, and then have the counselors go through the calendar with him each night and cross off the days, showing him when he will be going home.

2 Write up everything about your child: how he eats, sleeps, gets bathed and dressed, his behaviors, etc. Laminate the pages and hand your report to each counselor when you see them. DO NOT RELY on the camp

Top Ten Tips continued from page 17

to give it to them. Ask them to please read it thoroughly, so they can understand your child.

Ricka Kirschenbaum can be contacted through Neshamale Magaizne. She is happy to answer any questions or concerns.

Another way is to bring your child up to camp and meet the staff there. You may want to give them a small gift or tip to show them how much you value the role they will be playing.

6. Prepare your child. We can prepare our children according to their level. Ideas of topics to discuss are who else will be there that they are familiar with, what will be similar or different than school, and activities they will do there that they enjoy. If appropriate, you can show them a calendar marked with the dates they will be leaving and coming home.

7. Evaluate how to keep in touch with your child. Think carefully whether calling your child often is best for them. Does a nightly good-night call reassure them and help them sleep better, or does it make them homesick? Perhaps calling once a week on erev Shabbos will work best. You may need input from staff to know how your child reacts when they get the phone. Think even more carefully about visiting in person. Transitioning back into camp life after seeing the family can be very challenging.

8. Communicate with the staff. Let the staff know what your preferred method of communication is and what you would most appreciate (ie: photos, therapy updates, a bi-weekly check-in). Understand that the staff is very busy and does not always have phone/computer service in the mountains. Don't panic when you don't hear from them – usually no news is good news. If you are not happy about something, reach out and express your concerns. Don't forget to communicate your appreciation, too! Take the time to send quick thank you texts and compliment their devotion and efforts.

9. Accept your emotions. Sending a child to camp is overwhelming. Sending a child with special needs to camp, especially for the first time, can be very overwhelming. It's normal to feel relieved, guilty, anxious, hopeful, happy, fearful, and worried. It's normal to miss your child and think about him a lot. At the same time, recognize that you did your part to keep your child safe and happy; now you can use this time to recharge yourself and your family. Missing your child and enjoying the fact that they are away are not contradictory emotions.

10. Prepare for the Homecoming. Give yourself and your child time to adjust back to his regular home routine. It's normal to have some regression, or to feel that your relationship is "off." Realize that this is normal and that things will realign themselves soon enough.

Sending Faiga Malky to Camp

Raizy Sander

When Faiga Malky was a toddler, I thought that mothers who sent young children with special needs to camp were selfish and inconsiderate, maybe even abusive. It just didn't seem like a normal thing for a parent to do. After having experienced the benefits of camp, I am now a staunch believer in sending our children to camp, even at a young age. My attitude has changed 180 degrees. I now see clearly that my fears and worries were completely unfounded. Not only was no harm done, but there were so many significant gains. I share my story, hoping it will encourage other families to be brave enough to try it.

I remember, when Faiga Malky was a baby, talking to another mother of a child with Down syndrome. The girl was sixteen, and the mother told me that she hadn't ever sent her to camp because she was so attached to her that she simply couldn't bear to let her go. I was relieved to hear this "selfish reason" because I already knew I would never send my daughter to camp—I was glad to learn that I wouldn't be the only one!

The year that Faiga Malky was five was rough. She got sick constantly. A virus turned into pneumonia, and she landed in the hospital for a week. She came home and recovered for a few weeks, and then the cycle started all over again. Faiga Malky was home a lot and it was very challenging. She is the kind of child who needs constant stimulation and social interaction. When she was well, she thrived in all of the programs we had available: Shabbos, after school, and Sunday. When she was sick, I got a glimpse of what it looked like to have a bored Faiga Malky home for so many hours, and it wasn't fun. I realized that none of these programs ran in the summertime and wondered how we would manage.

During this time, Faiga Malky's teacher kept talking to me about sending

her to camp. I resisted, but she persevered, and I finally agreed to look into it. I was impressed with what I heard, but was still very nervous. The camp director told me: "Even the best mother in the world can't give her child what we can in camp. Here we have five or six staff members all taking care of your daughter. At home, you have one mother taking care of a whole family." I made them promise that they would call me if she got sick and allow me to take her home. I arranged for a teacher we knew to be Faiga Malky's *Morah* in camp. I felt slightly better knowing that there would be a familiar face there for my daughter.

As the day drew nearer, I grew more and more nervous. I refused to send Faiga Malky with a ride and we drove her up ourselves to see the campgrounds and meet the staff. The nurse seemed very capable and willing to do whatever we asked of her, vitamins and all. We drove home, leaving Faiga Malky in camp. It was the strangest feeling in the world. I had never before sent her away, even for one night. Suddenly, my baby who had never left my side in five years was far away, being cared for by strangers.

The next morning, I woke up feeling empty. The whole day I wandered around in a daze. I thought about Faiga Malky and tried to picture what she was doing, waiting for the phone to ring. By the second day, I couldn't take the suspense and called the camp. "How's Faiga Malky?" I asked. "Why didn't you call?" "We call the mothers once a week," was the response. "And Faiga Malky is doing great! She is happy and enjoying herself! You have nothing to worry about."

Before camp, one of my major concerns had been Faiga Malky's eating and drinking. At age five, she still ate only pureed foods and drank from a bottle. She had to drink in a very specific position, which only worked in her stroller, so that she wouldn't aspirate. I sent up the stroller, the bottles, and some pureed food to start her off. I planned to send another load when she ran out. But when I finally spoke to Faiga Malky's counselor, she told me that Faiga Malky had started eating solid food! I was shocked – this was a major step up! As the summer progressed, they worked on her drinking skills and taught her how to drink from a cup and straw without aspirating.

The night before visiting day, I couldn't sleep at all. I was so excited to see my Faiga Malky! Visiting day started at 2pm. At 1:45 I was waiting at the gate, begging them to let me in early. After an endless wait, I finally spied Faiga Malky from afar. She was walking down the hill with her counselor. Although I knew it was her, I could hardly recognize her. She had changed so much in the last few weeks – a real metamorphosis from a

We have a 37 year old severely handicapped son who is difficult to feed.

For a number of years, this was a particular problem at camp. He wouldn't even open his mouth for food and would go on a "hunger strike"!

At home, his devoted aide takes the time to feed him, and he does very well when eating with her.

I decided to have the aide come the first day or two to feed our son, and to show the staff how to feed him. This way, they will see him as a person who is capable of eating, and not give up by saying he just doesn't eat.

This idea worked well, and he ate much better this past summer, since the counselors now had the know-how to get him to eat.

Chavi Wealcatch

I look forward to camp from September 1st. It's our family's time to live like the other half lives. The relief from the constant stress of caring for my beloved child is incredible. These days, my son attends Camp HASC. Camp HASC is a tried and true institution, and I feel confident that they are keeping him safe. The counselors are male, giving my son the masculine camaraderie that he craves. I strongly encourage every special mommy to send her child to camp.

Chaya Friedman

Regarding camp: we sent our daughter for the first time last summer and are excited to send her again this year, iy"H.

That being said, camp is fantastic and my daughter loved it, B"H, but it's not necessarily life-changing for your child. Don't expect major changes or improvements, just be happy if your child doesn't regress. With lower expectations, you'll be much happier.

A Reader

baby into a big girl. Most importantly, she was beaming, a huge smile lighting up her entire face. She looked like she was truly in her happy place! When we finally got to spend some time with her, we were able to see how true this was, how mature and independent she had become.

On the way home, I felt I could finally relax. I saw for myself that Faiga Malky was in good hands and enjoying so much. I realized I should use this time well and not waste it worrying! I worked on myself to have *bitachon* that she is okay and tried using the time to relax and recharge.

When camp ended and Faiga Malky me home, the whole family welcomed her with open arms. We were so pleased to see the many positive changes that happened over the last seven weeks. Her impatient, needy nature of the past – always grabbing and throwing – had disappeared. Now she could sit and look at a book or build with Magna Tiles. The days of pureed food and drinking in her stroller were over. We sent away a baby and received back a calm, happy girl.

This past summer, Faiga Malky once again attended camp. This time her language exploded in ways we had thought impossible. It's amazing to see the concentrated efforts of the devoted staff yield such impressive results. The best part is that all of this "therapy" took place while Faiga Malky was having a blast. The pool, the activities, everything was tailor made to her level.

As you can see, my experience was very positive. In fact, every family I know who sent a child to camp also had a positive experience. The disparaging comments and negative things I heard came only from those who had not sent their child to camp. To them I say: "Try it and see for yourself!"

I understand how hard, even traumatic, it can be to let go. Maybe you need to be desperate to get to that point. But once you get there, you will never look back. To mothers who say their child is not ready, I say: "*You* are not ready!" When you are ready, your child will be ready. I have convinced others to send their children to camp, and every one of them came back to thank me.

One mother asked me: "I don't understand. Faiga Malky is your youngest. Why do you even have to send her to camp?" I answered: "Different things work for different folks." I firmly believe that every *Yiddishe Mama* deserves a break, and a mother of a special needs child deserves one that much more. There are so many amazing options these days; we have no excuse not to take advantage of this incredible resource. With Hashem's help, you and your child will only benefit.

Regarding sending to sleep-away camp: My child, B"H, gained tremendously in camp, even though she was at the highest level, in all areas, in the group the camp director placed her. B"H, it was at camp that she became fully toilet-trained, and she gained in a lot of other areas.

Hopefully I"H, this coming summer, we will send her to camp again, because I feel that my child could gain even more during the seven weeks that she's in camp.

I consider sleep-away camp a must for every child with special needs, even a child like ours, who is high-functioning, and from the outside, doesn't look like she has special needs.

Also, the rest of the family (the other siblings and parents) get a much-needed break, allowing the parents to focus on their other children while their special needs sibling is away at camp.

A Mother

We sent our 11 year old to camp for the first time last summer. For ten years we wondered how it would be possible for someone else to take care of him. He's nonverbal and relies on others for all his needs. When we realized how unfair it was to keep him home and deny him the opportunity to go to camp, we took the leap.

It was hard. We started videoing every aspect of his day. We took notes of all his likes and dislikes and body language and sounds, to the best of our ability. I spent nights worrying about how anyone else would be able to understand him.

When Camp drop-off day finally arrived, I worried how I would ever hand him over to his staff. B"H the boys were incredibly warm and welcoming. They eagerly listened to every detail, watched us feed and change him, and were delighted to have him.

When we arrived back home, to my great surprise, my kids looked at us accusingly and said: "How could you give him away?" I never realized that it would be this hard for my kids too. It was a long six weeks, and we all missed him terribly. For real. I never realized how programmed I was with his feedings until he left. I found myself startling every three hours, thinking I had to make him a bottle and feed him.

Two days after he left for camp, his counselor sent me a video of him squealing in complete euphoria after swimming. I could hear the counselor showering him with so much TLC that my heart felt at peace.

A few days in, the counselor sent us an early morning video of my son squealing at the top of his lungs and laughing. The caption said: "This is the greatest sound to wake up to every morning!" My son had an amazing summer, B"H.

Nobody can replace you, but the camp staff does their best and gives you and your family a reprieve. Things won't be perfect, but they can be good enough. Just communicate as much as possible, be positive, and thankful, and gracious—and then communicate some more. Remember, you are your child's voice.

N.C.

EXPLORING

SPECIAL STAFF *of a* SPECIAL CAMP

Interview with Mrs. Perry Binet of Camp Migdal

Please share with us some background about your camp and position.

Camp Migdal, in upstate NY, hosts close to 100 campers, ages three and a half to mid-twenties. The campers have a wide range of diagnoses and abilities, and we pride ourselves on our ability to cater to this diverse group of campers. Something unique about Camp Migdal is our extensive experience in this field. Camp Migdal has been around since 2012. (Before that, it was called Camp Mishkan.) I have worked here for over 20 years, starting as a waitress and moving up the ranks until I became the Director six years ago. We are blessed with an incredible experienced, devoting and very caring head staff team that truly works together for the benefit of every child.

You hear of very young children going off to camp – even four or five years old. How does a parent know when their child is ready for camp? What are some signs that tell you "Not yet," or "Let's go!"?

Sometimes the child is ready, sometimes the parent is ready, and sometimes the family is ready. The most common question I get is: Why should I send my five-year-old to camp? I would never send my typical five-year-old! My go-to answer is: We have 10+ people doing your job, and they do an incredibly good job of it. It's in your child's best interests.

Sometimes families have something that pushes them to send their child, be it a simcha, a vacation, or a new baby. Once they try it, they usually get hooked. Sometimes they see positive outcomes in only seven weeks. With concentrated effort, there is potential to meet goals in camp in a short time, for example: toileting, self-regulation, or communication. One mother told me that she was desperate for respite volunteers during the year. If she sent her daughter to camp, she would have a whole group of girls who already knew her child and would want to keep up with her. That is a benefit people may not think of.

Having said all that, I believe that camp is not for every child. The first step is to know your child's needs. If you can't articulate his needs, how can a camp begin to know if they can meet them? Goals and expectations need to be realistic. Not every camp is the best fit for each child, and it takes careful consideration to decide which camp, if any, can be the right match. Here are some reasons why a child may not fit in with a specific camp:

1. Medical needs: This could include seizures not under control, new ongoing developments with no known cause, frequent need of immediate hospital access, nighttime feeds/ medication, or any other significant medical need that not every camp can accommodate.

2. Ratio: The camp may not have enough support if a child requires a one-on-one nurse because he stops breathing often. Some camp environments can even be too supportive. If a child has no serious behavioral or medical needs, parents should look for a less restrictive environment, perhaps in a more integrated setting.

3. Behavior: Some camps will not be equipped to accommodate certain behaviors, such as a child who is aggressive to himself or to others, or a child who can't sleep at night and keeps others awake. Some camps have a stronger behavior support team. And some camps are set up to accommodate a specific clientele, such as having a sensory gym for children that need it, more outdoor space, etc.

4. Age: As children age, camp choice may change. As boys get older, they phase out of female counselors. As girls get older, they may phase out of camp altogether. I've seen older girls who are in camp just sitting on the side, not taking part in the activities. These are girls who are already working and are just not interested in being a camp kid anymore. Whatever their age, they should be enjoying what camp has to offer. It's not just a vacation or a respite home, though those can be beneficial as well.

5. Attachment: Homesickness is normal. A few days of adjustment are normal. But a child that can't separate and settle down can be a disaster in camp. It's usually a bigger problem for the parents than the children. We try to work with them. We send out social stories before camp and try to have all of the counselors meet their campers, so it's not all totally new faces.

If you do send to camp, and it doesn't work out, don't take it too hard. It may mean that your child is not ready for camp yet, or it may mean that this particular camp wasn't the right fit. Don't write it off forever. Similarly, if your child did great in one camp for a few years, don't assume that's always the best place for him. Consider whether he may have outgrown that program and can do better elsewhere the next summer.

I would assume that some of the typical camp activities like sports, singing and cheering for hours, etc. won't work as well with your campers. How do you fill all the hours of the day? What are some of your camper's favorite activities?

In short, we believe that fun has to be structured to be enjoyed. Everyone thinks camp must be loud and rocking and exciting – and it is at times – but a regulating, calm, loving environment is where it starts. For example, we begin each meal with 20 minutes of slow music.

During the day, we have five hours of school, with special education teachers and therapists. There are many enjoyable activities, with swimming, sensory play and music being favorites of most campers. Sundays are extra exciting, with a concert or trip. But we find that most of the campers prefer the more low-key activities. Another favorite of our campers and counselors is the Shema circle. Every night we gather with everyone in pajamas and sing good night songs together. It's so relaxing and such a beautiful way to end our day. (Once the campers are in bed and being watched by designated OD's, we have an optional staff program for staff to let go, recharge and have fun.)

What are some of the summer's biggest challenges?

The first challenge is safety. And the first step is to acknowledge that there is a concern and identify ways to deal with it. We have a protocol for almost everything and try to be prepared for the Board of Health to come down any given day. We believe and see clearly how Hashem watches over us, yet we still need to put in tremendous hishtadlus. We plan for everything. We have safety meetings and post bulletin boards in every camp room outlining safety protocol for campers with seizures, special diets, running habits and every other need our campers may have, even something as small as which campers drink with a straw. While it may seem mundane, the smallest details are often most important. Mrs. Miriam Greenwald, the wife of Mr. Ronnie Greenwald from Camp Sternberg, would say: "If you're not nervous, you don't understand the magnitude of your responsibility." Every Friday night when I bentch licht, I daven for each and every camper. I am their mommy all summer long and I will worry about their safety, well-being, and overall needs until the last child is picked up on the last day of camp.

The second challenge is differentiation, and it's also a huge achrayus. When we accept a child to camp, the first question is: How are we going to meet their needs? If the kid is a picky eater, how are we going to make sure they eat well? The key is to think very individually and creatively. We don't believe in just accepting any child and having them fit a box. We do lots of work pre-camp to determine how we can meet each child's unique needs. We had one girl who didn't do well with change and had a hard time with adjustments. We had her start camp a few days into the summer, after everything and everyone was already in place and it was a much smoother transition for her. We had another girl who was kicked out of multiple camps. With more than a dozen communications with her support team before camp, we Baruch Hashem were able to individualize her needs and set her up for many amazing and calm summers, with lines of girls asking to take care of her.

What do you consider the biggest benefit to the campers?

The best part is that everyone is there for them. Campers are the epicenter of what we do. Whatever they need, the whole staff is there for that child.

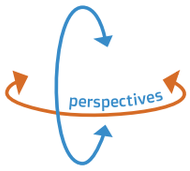
There was a 15-year-old girl in a wheelchair who applied to camp. I told the parents that it wasn't a fit, as we didn't have a good peer group for her. They said that no camp was willing to accept her. I felt bad, so I offered to meet her just to see if I could think of something. Her father said: "All she needs is dignity and respect." I said: "If you understand that she will not have a peer group and you have nowhere else to send her, we will take her and love her and respect her." We took her in, and toilet trained her. When her parents came up for visiting day, they took her out to the pizza shop. When they came back, the father came over to me and said: "You changed our lives. She can ask to use the bathroom instead of living a life of embarrassment." I said: "Hashem did it." He answered me: "Yes, but you had the power to say yes." So, to all camp directors, I would say: Give it a shot. In a moment, we can change a life for the better. It's very humbling.

What is something you wish every parent would know?

Communication is the biggest key to a successful summer. Some parents hide things because they think we won't want to take their child. But there's no way we can work with a child if we don't know what we are dealing with. Share it all: what triggers discomfort or anxiety, heat sensitivity, what temperature they like their food, etc. It helps us tremendously. Even if something does not seem important, if it's important to you, then it's important to us. I would also ask: Please don't send expensive clothing – this is camp, after all!

I want to mention that we love feedback! Not gifts; just tell us how it's going. When we get a call after camp that the camper is singing the camp songs at home with the motions, it makes us so happy! When you let us know how our efforts were successful (Is your child sitting independently? Dressing himself?), it gives us momentum to keep going.

Most importantly, I want parents to know that each camper is truly an individual, and is cared for and loved tremendously. We appreciate you sharing your child with us! There is nothing we want to do more. Not only does your child and the family benefit from camp, we the staff benefit as well; we become changed people. By sharing your precious children, we have a part in the magic, and that's why we come back each year! We are grateful to Hashem for being gifted with your precious *neshamos* and are humbled at the families that do our work all year long. May Hashem give you all continuous strength!



The Counselor Perspective

Nechama Adler

Sleep-away camp.

For lots of high school girls, it means a month or two of fun, sports, trips, late-night DMCs, Color War, dancing, cheering, theme songs… A break from the intense academic year, a chance to recharge.

What happens to their camp experience when you add wheelchairs, g-tubes, and various kinds of special needs to the mix?

We reached out to several incredible counselors in special camps to hear about their experiences.

The general response was: **"It's way better than regular sleep-away camp!"**

"I loved it!! Those summers were the best ones in my life, much better than going to regular sleep-away" says Shani Cohen* about her experience in Camp SCHI Girls.

"I went to a special needs camp for the first time when I was 14 years old, and that was the end of regular camp for me!" says another counselor from Camp SCHI.

"I loved the atmosphere, and the amazing crowd the camp attracts," says a Migdal counselor.

Amelia from Camp HASC defines it: "Camp was the definition of hectic and crazy, but really fun!"

Leah Posen gives credit to the head staff. "I think a huge part of what made my experience so amazing was the amazing staff and atmosphere. It's really amazing to be part of the special needs community, and I gained truly invaluable experience."

Let's backtrack and find out… **What brings girls into the world of special camps?**

Some girls have a relative or sibling with special needs, and choose to get to know some more yummy people during the summer. Others are brought by friends, advertisements, and of course, Hashgacha Pratis.

Here are some other responses we heard:

"I was hooked after a school trip to Hamaspik."

"I decided to study special ed, so I figured I'd get a feel for it…"

"I started through a high school chessed program…"

"I got into it because it interested me…"

"I've always known about HASC, and I've been involved in this world my whole life because I have a brother with autism."

"There was an ad in the paper…"

"By mistake!"

Everyone has their own story of how they ended up in camp – but they're all happy that they did. The main challenge mentioned was **the initial adjustment:**

"The first year was hard, but I loved the challenge. My camper didn't give up on me! By the second year, I was able to treat my camper even better and actually see her for who she is. By the third year, we had a party! I learned what she loved, we would sing and swim and nosh and get hyper together! I miss her." - Raizy Stein*

"I came in not knowing my camper at all and not having any experience with autistic teens; I only worked with little kids until then. The first couple of days were really hard, but once we got to know each other, we had a blast! I have such good memories of putting my camper to sleep and getting to spend a special few minutes bonding. I also loved it when we would just laugh together." - Shani Cohen*

The highlight for counselors is the magical **Camper-Counselor Bond** that is formed. There's a special connection that comes from caring for one child for a few weeks straight. It's not the same as taking a child for a Shabbos, or teaching them in school. Camp is a different planet, a magical place where things go beyond the natural. It's the place where a counselor/camper duo can be found enjoying the swingset at six in the morning or jumping together on the trampoline during their free time.

Raizy Stein* shares a memory: "One rainy Shabbos afternoon, we were stuck in the lobby for hours because it was pouring outside. We schmoozed for a bit, then I started reading a magazine on the couch and my camper was sitting near me, looking out the window. At a certain point, my camper stuck her hand between the couch and the window, pulled out a magazine, and put it on my lap! (Her typical response to papers is to crumple them and attempt to eat them…) That showed me that connection doesn't have to happen through perfect participation in activities, or glorious weather swimming. We ended up giving up on the rain, and we walked up the hill in the downpour singing: "It's raining, its pouring..." We were giggling all the way to the bunkhouses!"

Beyond fun times and hard work, **some gains are there to stay forever…**

"I thrived in camp," one girl shares, "I'm not the ra-ra, party, cheer-until-you-lose-your-voice-and-dance-at-lunch-instead-of-eating kind of girl. I don't excel at sports, and regular sleep-away, while fun, cannot begin to compare to my treasured memories of being in Camp Migdal. It takes a certain maturity to be a counselor for a child with special needs, and the social scene in camp was just what I needed. I made some of my best friends in camp, both staff and campers alike."

One counselor shares that it was her camper's connection

to ruchniyos that stays with her. When she sat them down and started explaining why they were fasting on Tisha B'av and about how the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, some of her campers starting crying. Their davening and yiras shamayim was so genuine and sincere and inspired her in a lasting way.

Chayala Pascal shares: "I had a really challenging camper with a lot of needs (including medical), which required me to be up several times throughout the night to care for her. But I would never trade that experience for anything in the world. It taught me so much, and as much as I could ever have hoped to give my camper, she gave me so much back! She taught me what it means to smile even when things are not going well. She taught me that age, intelligence, physical appearance, social status, etc, are not important considerations when becoming friends with someone."

Another awareness that a lot of girls mention was gaining an appreciation for their camper's parents and year-round, daily caregivers. As one girl put it: "In camp, we have just one child to care for… with a cook, waitresses, someone to clean up after meals, a group leader, plus rotators, OD's, breaks, planned activities, an infirmary, and laundry service!" With this awareness, many girls go on to keep in touch with their campers and provide respite for the families through the long winter months.

As Amalia from Camp HASC summed it up, "In truth, we gain more from the campers than they gain from us."

Thank you for sharing:
Rikki B., Camp Migdal; Chaviva Baver, Camp Migdal; Leah Posen, Camp Migdal; Shani Cohen,* Camp SCHI; Raizy Stein,* Camp SCHI; Amalia L., Camp HASC.*

An Integrated Camp Experience

A Conversation with Mrs. Chava Esther Luria of Camp Ashira

I run a program for young adults on Camp Baiseinu's grounds in upstate NY. The bunk is actually a program of Rayim and so the campers are primarily members of Rayim's year-round Dayhab program called Ashira. It's a pretty high-functioning group of over 20 girls. (Our girls are independent with showering, dressing, etc.) We run our own program parallel to the camp's program, joining with the rest of the camp as much as possible. The program runs the full summer, about eight weeks.

Our daily schedule is created around the rest of the camp's schedule. Whatever they are doing that would work well with our campers, we join. When it's something that won't work, I add in our own fun activities. Ninety-nine percent of the time we can make it work to stay integrated. My girls' favorite activities are baking and crafts. And of course, trips together with the camp! The main thing is that they are not left out of anything major that the camp is doing. If a major trip runs until 4 am, they must be part, even if they won't go on a single ride. If the camp is giving anything out, they need to receive the same thing. Last year we went on a trip to a water park on our own, and one girl was insistent that we not go if the rest of the camp wasn't going, too!

The biggest challenge in my position is giving the girls independence while supervising them and making sure they are all safely where they ought to be. Some campers like to go out on their own and we want to give them space, but we also must make sure they are okay. The only way to do this is to treat each camper as an individual and see what they need and how to make it work for each one. We had one camper who would sneak out the back door as we were getting ready for bed and run back to the hall to join in the camp's night activity! Our goal is to let them be where they want to be as much as possible, while maintaining rules and routines. This is more challenging in a camp setting than year-round.

The satisfaction far outweighs the challenges. The best part is seeing how much the girls thrive from the fun atmosphere and the integration; they just love it! They are a bunk in camp, they feel like they really belong. And they can be kids again!

Camp brings out the girls in ways that won't happen in their usual environment. We had a camper who was very quiet and reserved, but she thrived in camp. She was more alive, more talkative, and other girls were able to connect with her better in the camp setting. I walked into the bunk house one Friday night at 12:30am, and a whole group of girls was sitting around her bed as she led a kumzitz. When another girl started *kvetching*: "I need attention too!" she walked over to her and gave her a hug! Another night, I walked in and saw her singing *HaMalach* with the whole bunk around her. It brought her out in a way we thought was impossible, and her friends were so excited to see that side of her.

Camp is a gift to the campers and the staff; we all gain so much from each other!

What Now?

Growing Up with Special Needs

Rabbi Ezra Klein

For the past two and a half years, our daughter, Nechama, was part of a small class of children with special needs in a local mainstream high school. In the middle of her senior year of high school, we found out that this would be the last year the class would exist.

"Okay, take a deep breath," I told myself. "What now?" The community we live in has very little in the area of frum education for children with special needs, and almost nothing for adults with special needs. What are we to do with our precious 19-year-old daughter with Down Syndrome?

We quickly realized this question went far beyond our immediate need for a program for her. Were we to find a program, it would be only a short-term solution. The questions we avoided these past 19 years now stared us in the face. What is our long-term plan for Nechama? Like, really long-term. What will her life look like? Will she always require round-the-clock care from others? Will her life have a sense of purpose? Will she have genuine social connections? Will she find fulfillment and happiness? Will she have a meaningful life, full of Torah and Yiddishkeit?

When a child with special needs is born, we grapple with questions, mostly about ourselves: Why me? What is the purpose of this in the context of my life? How will we be able to manage this additional responsibility? As our child grows up, we have different questions, more in terms of the child's life—and these can be scarier. We know our children's deficits and we question their abilities to tackle these issues. Deep down we know that they likely won't overcome all of their challenges.

Many readers may be reassuring themselves that this discussion is not relevant to them, since they have excellent resources for frum adults in their local community. I question that assertion. Do these institutions relieve us of our responsibility to delineate proper goals and set techniques in place to bring out the best in our children? The institutions may have caring professionals who help our children in many ways, but they don't take the place of parents. We simply can't rely on these institutions to bring about our deepest goals for our children.

Why haven't we given this much thought before? We were just really busy! At first, we were busy keeping Nechama alive, as she went through five heart surgeries and a few bleeding ulcers. Then we were trying to get her to walk, talk, and improve her physical health. We had to find the right school, the right aides, and all the help she needed for her education. In between, we were busy searching for the correct diagnosis and treatment for her gastrointestinal issues.

To be honest, had we given these issues more thought and effort earlier, our daughter would probably have benefitted. For this reason, I encourage all parents to consider these matters, even if their child is not yet an adult.

At this point in time, with great appreciation to our Creator for sustaining Nechama in good health, we must turn our attention to her existential issues. Although the number of special needs children seems to be increasing exponentially, Hashem hasn't sent us a Navi to guide us in channeling their gifts towards leading their most meaningful lives. This must mean that He expects us to figure it out by ourselves.

For those readers who are busy maintaining their child's health and survival, there is no choice but to pursue that full time. We are discussing situations where those life-threatening issues have, to a great extent, faded into the background and no longer take all of our time and energy.

A typical child in our frum world, whether boy or girl, is not usually forced to make any major decisions about their direction in life. They go to elementary school, high school, seminary or yeshivah; then they date and, hopefully, marry. Perhaps they will seek a higher secular education to help them earn a living. When they are ready, they will enter the workforce and climb the ladder to financial success, while raising a family. Meanwhile, they will seek to further their spiritual growth by learning Torah and doing mitzvos as best they can. The biggest decisions of their lives may be determining which seminary or yeshiva to attend, and whom to marry. It's all mapped out. Fortunately or unfortunately, contemplating the purpose of all this seems almost unnecessary.

Our children, on the other hand, are not part of that assembly line. We need to help each of our children carve out his own personalized goals and game plan for success, with his own definition of "success."

I believe we can do this, with the help of the One Above, by following these steps:

- Create in our minds a best-case scenario of our child's life and capabilities.
- Identify what our specific goals are in several essential areas.
- Identify and take the next step necessary to bring him closer to each desired goal.
- Celebrate successes often, with genuine appreciation.

In this article, let's explore the first step: Create in our minds a best-case scenario of our child's life and capabilities.

One school of thought in the secular world believes that there is no limit to what special needs people can do, and that we should never think that they can't do everything a typical person can do. This is a very nice sentiment; however, it's also unrealistic. Our children are not typical people, so saying that they can accomplish anything a typical person can do is pointless, no matter how politically correct it may sound. Putting pressure on parents and children to accomplish unrealistic goals is not helpful for anyone. Yes, miracles happen, and we may even be able to pray for miracles. But we rarely direct our active efforts at bringing about open miracles.

We need to help each of our children carve out his own personalized goals and game plan for success, with his own definition of "success."

I'm talking about creating a realistic vision of our child's future for the purpose of drawing up a game plan of action to help bring the vision to fruition. We can't do that if the vision isn't realistic. If we devise a plan based on unrealistic expectations, we will probably meet failure early on and give up. Or, if we just have "faith" that our child will be spectacular, putting no plan into action, it will likely end in failure as well.

On the other hand, it's dangerous to limit what our children can do. Not too long ago, it was assumed that children with special needs were totally incompetent, and they were institutionalized. When I was a young boy, I went to visit someone who had a child with Down Syndrome. I watched, feeling confused, as the child, locked in a room, climbed all over the couches and ate paper. We've come a long way—but only by shattering stereotypes and false limitations. And I'm sure we will amaze the world with still more advances.

Our Nechama's growth amazes us. We look back at her humble beginnings as a child who took an extremely long time learning to walk and talk. Fast forward to today; despite still struggling with cognitive and behavioral challenges, she has two daily jobs (nonpaying, as of now, with a full-time coach), and contributes significantly to both places of employment.

How can we know what our child's capabilities can be? One way is to observe others with a similar diagnosis who have had success in their lives. While it is unrealistic to assume that everyone with the same diagnosis is the same, these observations can give us hope that our child might achieve similar successes.

I would urge you to venture outside of your community in your research as well. With a much wider group of people to study, you may find attainments not as common as those in your community. For example, I recently stopped into a Trader Joe's, where Chuck, a friendly employee with Down Syndrome, noticed my daughter and came over to shmooze with us. He told us about his paying job in the store, with no aide or coach in sight.

I recall, many years ago, when Nechama was still a baby, attending a convention for Down Syndrome. I pulled into the parking lot of the hotel, and an SUV pulled in next to me. Out stepped a couple, one of whom was driving, both clearly with Down Syndrome! That shocked me into changing my perspective.

Always err on the side of expecting too much; we can adjust our expectations later if the reality is different. However, we also need to be careful not to set ourselves up for disappointment by insisting that our child accomplish what someone else did. Everyone is an individual with unique abilities. We never want to pressure our child to do something we want them to do, especially if they are truly incapable. For example, we don't expect that our daughter will ever drive independently. By creating a realistic vision for our child, we can help them succeed in developing their potential.

With the help of Hashem, I hope to continue writing articles detailing the other steps involved in helping our children succeed, as well as addressing other issues concerning adults with special needs. Please write to the Editor with your ideas, concerns, or questions. Your input makes a difference!

Smart & Safe AT CAMP

Fraydel Dickstein

I wish every special child could have the experience of going to camp. It's a gift for the child as well as the family. I remember, in the early years, how I would cry endlessly when sending Yehuda to camp. Now, with his seventeenth birthday upon us, I am so happy that he has the opportunity to go to camp, like many big boys his age.

Heads up to moms who are transitioning to a boys' camp. No one can beat a boys' counselor, but their style of dress tends to differ from what we mothers envision. (Picture your son in mismatched clothing, or what you sent as a pair of pajamas as his new favorite outfit). Just enjoy it – it's part of the incredible package that a boy counselor offers.

I need to take a moment here to let you know that for us, the transition to a boys' camp was incredible. Yehuda at nine was the youngest camper, and the other guys were crazy over him – he was an instant celebrity. The vibe in his camp was so positive and fun – we feel privileged to be a part of it.

Ok, let's start with packing. Packing can feel overwhelming. In the early years, I found it completely impossible. I now believe it was my ambivalence about sending Yehuda to camp that made it so difficult; I was so worried about him. It's amazing how our emotions affect the practical side of life. Here are some tips culled from many years of experience that I hope will make things easier.

The camps give out a helpful packing list, which I try to follow. If you can order diapers and other bulky toiletries to be sent straight to camp, it can help minimize your packing. If, like me, you need to send many sets of linen up to camp, the simplest way to pack it is in garbage bags. It personally feels more secure to me to put them into a well-sealed cardboard box. In the early years, I needed everything to look just right, so I sent up multiple duffle bags. I think overall I like well-sealed boxes best.

Mainstays 5-Piece Reversible Bed in a Bag - Twin Set *$33.74 in Walmart*
I buy a number of these linen sets and send them up to camp with Yehuda. I like to send one plastic mattress cover to be put directly on his bed, and about four or five fabric sets to use on top. They are easy to just dump all in one load, and they have lasted me over seven years, so it feels like a good buy.

2 X Plastic Pillow Cover Case, Waterproof Zippered Cover
$11.98 in Walmart
I just bought these and I can't figure out why I did not buy them sooner. They are great, and keep me from needing to wash the actual pillows.

My favorite part of writing *Neshamale* is reaching out to friends and hearing what they have to say. I asked a friend with a twelve-year old daughter what her best tip is for packing for camp. Without missing a beat, she said: "I pack everything in Sterilite bins, and then I put them into duffle bags. I always get feedback from the counselors about how much they love it."

Sterilite Set of Ten 6 Quart Storage Boxes, Clear Plastic Storage Bin with Snap-on Lid *$10.98 in Walmart*

Travelers Club 36" Asgard 3-Wheel Rolling Duffel Bag
$31.50 on Amazon
I also buy duffle bags at Amazing Savings, as they usually have the best prices. I buy the soft ones and find them to work very well.

Here is a funny little tip. We sometimes get these boxes when we have big Amazon deliveries. They're free and they fit Sterilite bins inside perfectly. I have had people take my boxes to use for moving. I don't know if I would actually buy them, but if you happen to know someone who gets a lot of Amazon deliveries, they may be happy to give you

some of their boxes. Feel free to call me if you have extras!

You all know this, but I need to reiterate it: LABEL, LABEL, AND LABEL EVERYTHING! You will still get back lots of your son's friends' stuff, but hopefully it is labled and you can call the phone numbers to return it. (I plead the 5th if, as of January 23, I have yet to return all the labeled stuff of Yehuda's friends...)

Although a general list is sent out, it's always good to keep your child's individual needs in mind. Yehuda loves to swim, and the first few summers I needed to send many extra bathing suits up to camp. Now I am prepared and send along at least five.

Sending food can be tricky, and many camps discourage you from doing so. I was unsure of Yehuda's favorite foods like rice cakes; I didn't know how many he could eat or spill in one night. We ended up sending up some of his favorite foods like rice cakes, Pringles, and oranges, and told the counselor to hide them and give it to him as needed. Some counselors liked this and even asked for more, while others were not into it. I would say this depends a lot on the counselors.

Shampoo and detergent were super tricky for us, as the minute Yehuda would get his hands on it, there would be no more. Now I send it, but warn the counselor that it needs to be hidden. Personally, the best item we ever sent with Yehuda was his scooter – he used it non-stop in camp. (A shout-out to Rafoel for scootering along with Yehuda all the time!)

Yehuda's Manual

I understand everything you say and do, and even what you feel.

Make sure you want me to hear what you are saying.

Please explain me everything you need or want from me.

Be my voice, say what you think I want to say.

Always clearly explain what you want from me; I am really cooperative. Sometimes you need to wait and explain again. You don't need to physically force me to do anything.

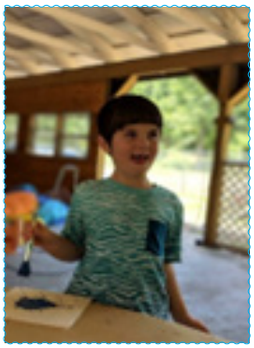
Celebrate everything I do, tell me how wonderful I am, that I make you happy, that you like me. I will feel so good inside, and I will want to connect and stay with you.

Great techniques for connecting with Yehuda:

When I vocalize (I often make sounds), listen. Tell me how much you like to hear my voice and give me something—food or a tickle, a head squeeze, etc.

When talking to me, use lots of energy, enthusiasm, excitement—I light up!

If I am stimming (spitting, shooting water, banging) know that I am taking care of myself as best as I can (I have a doctorate in mindfulness). Respect me or even join me; you will see how much fun it is!



This "manual" is one of the many things I have sent along with Yehuda over the many years I have sent him to camp. I also send laminated pictures of our family, and of exciting things we have done with Yehuda, to hang by his bed. In a way, I do this more for the counselors than for Yehuda. I want them to see that he is a valued, cherished member of our family!

The Dickstein family is personally so grateful for camp. Even Yehuda's worst summer did a lot of good for him. The air and the outdoors have a way of making him blossom. I always find that a lot of challenging behaviors would come up leading up to camp, but that he would almost always return from camp without them.

To all of the amazing camp directors, counselors and staff: You have no idea what an often life-saving experience you are giving our family! Summers tend to be impossible for just about everyone. Throw a special needs child into the mix, and you are pretty much toast!

I honestly believe *Moshiach* will visit our special needs camps – the atmosphere is one of true paradise for our special *neshamas.* The camps are islands of purity and giving. May we all greet *Moshiach* speedily. (Not sure if I am ready to acquiesce my front spot to Yehuda's counselor…).

Tips From The Experts

hey! that's us!

My well-meaning family and neighbors are always telling me to make sure to do self-care. They feel for me that my special children take up so much time, effort, and energy. The problem is that it's hard for me to find capable babysitters. I need ideas of how to do self-care in a way that I don't need to leave home, or only leave home when my husband is home for a short time in the evening. I would love to hear practical ideas that other special moms are using.

Julie K.

Here are some tips for self-care you can do in the comfort of your own home:

Take a hot bath with lavender bubble bath (Target has other fun aromas).

Home massage - there are massage therapists who do home visits and it's worth every penny.

Home manicures/pedicures.

Rest in your bed - close your eyes and take a nap, or read.

Take a walk around the block.

Browse your computer or watch a podcast.

Do nothing! Just sit and do nothing! Malka S.

Julie: Take a long bubble bath with the lights out and a scented candle lit.

Chaya Friedman

Yahalom, Lev with Love, Ezrienu, and Center can pair up families with babysitters who work with special needs kids.

Nechama Crystal

If you have don't have an option that allows you to leave home briefly, I would either:

A) Ask those same family/neighbors who say those comments: "Sure, when is a good time for you to come hang out with the kids while I'm relaxing in another room of the house?"

B) See if you qualify for a home health aide- they can really help relieve certain aspects of caregiving which might replenish your energy reserves, as well as return some of your evening time to your own interests (self-care can be at home too).

C) Accept that the babysitter thing is not so simple for you now and believe that Hashem will send you ideas for things you can do/enjoy, even without going out much.

Danit Mils

When we hear the words "self-care" we usually think of going on vacation, getting a massage, or any other indulgent treat. That may be. But a more genuine type of self-care is to truly take care of ourselves by being kind and caring to our inner selves. Specifically, focusing on the way we speak to ourselves, whether it is kind or harsh, encouraging or crushing, can be the greatest form of self-care. When we didn't respond perfectly to our child's tantrum, does our inner voice say: "You're the worst parent! You never stay calm! Your kids will be traumatized!" or do we say: "You're having a hard day. It's not easy to stay calm during a tantrum. Keep doing the best you can!" When we talk to ourselves the way we would talk to anyone we love, we are literally "caring for ourselves," and this will make us happier, calmer, and better people. The best part? You don't even need a babysitter. Sheva H.

For me, the only time I leave the house is when my husband is home for an hour at night. I work out. Going to the gym is my me-time. I always come out calmer and stronger and just feeling better able to handle the day. Also, the physical strength gained helps me *shlep* my physically challenged daughter around. If you can't get out to a gym, the next best idea would be to join a virtual gym class online or over the phone. There are many options out there. Tanya has some great videos. Exercise releases endorphins and improves your mood and overall health. Simi R.

Ideas for self-care at home:

Dressing in a *bakovadik* way

Working out

Listening to a *shiur*

Schmoozing/laughing/socializing

Drinking a coffee undisturbed

Eating a treat

"Eating in" with a friend or spouse

Virtual support groups

Playing games

Painting/Coloring

Doing a jigsaw puzzle

Doing a crossword puzzle

Eating healthy

Listening to music/Dancing

Journaling /writing

Reading

Getting a massage/facial

Pick one and do it today!

It's hard to watch what we Super Mommies do in a day, let alone regularly.

Although instructive, it can be guilt-inducing when others lecture you about self-care. It's like getting admonished when you have a newborn to "sleep when the baby sleeps"! Right, and when should everything else happen?

That being said, your family and friends mean well.

As the mother of two special needs kids, I try to put intention into very small things that make a big impact for me. You can find what works for you, but here are some things I do.

Walking, even just for a short time, is actually energizing and refreshing and a break from the rigors of childcare.

Call an enjoyable workshop or *shiur*. Torah Anytime has a vast array of speakers and many features for playback or to bookmark.

Speak to a family member or friend who believes in you, understands you, and has positive energy. It makes a big difference and can leave you uplifted.

There's a new video called "Anyone Can Dance". It's for women and girls and brings *simcha* and movement straight to your living room. My family is enjoying it tremendously — and the endorphins released, just wow!

If you can, splurge on good quality fruit and vegetables you enjoy. They leave you feeling better than eating chocolate, and are a feast for the senses. They may take a few minutes to prepare, but you ARE worth it!

My favorite self-care is having a coffee and reading a magazine in quiet.

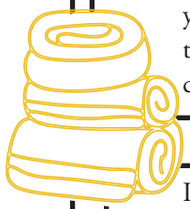
An idea that I didn't yet do myself, but plan on starting, is to paint at home on my own.

An idea for at night when your husband can watch for a bit, is to go on a short run/walk. Even 15 minutes can feel so refreshing.

Ruchy Lipschitz

It's all in how you frame it. If you tell yourself that taking a shower or drinking a coffee or listening to music is your self-care time, you will actually feel better. So much of this is in your mind. It doesn't really matter what other people think or say – you know if you are burned out and really need more breaks or not. If you do, try to be more mindful and enjoy little things throughout the day that give you a good feeling. Call a friend while doing housework, listen to an interesting hotline while you cook, keep music on in the background and stop for a quick exercise routine a few times during the day. This can be so invigorating and can make a real difference in your quality of life. However, if you still feel that you need to get out, please reach out to your local *chesed* organization and try to get some coverage.

Nechama Miller



I love the question on self-care. In my experience, there are many ways to do self-care without leaving my home. I once was at a mother's event and two mothers gave examples of their self- care. One said she takes a delicious bath for an hour every night while listening to music and using fun things like bath bombs, or maybe delicious smelling candles. Another mother told how she knits at every red light. I personally like the bath idea. I also enjoy doing yoga in my bed before I go to sleep. I just feel good from doing these things. Going for a walk is an incredible refresher, even if just for twenty minutes. These all have the benefit of lifting your mood and boosting your health, besides being called self-care.

When Covid hit, I think, like all of us, I was petrified I would not be able to handle it. I decided to put on fun dance music every night and we danced away – 'round and 'round our dining room table – and it really gave me the stamina to make it through! Giving myself a manicure or pedicure is also very relaxing. I sometimes will feel that saying *Tehilim* or *davening* can give me that feeling of self-care, too.

Hatzlacha on your journey. I hope you find things that work just right for you!

Another mom trying to make it work

Question for the next issue:

My 3-1/2 year old daughter drools constantly, going through 6-7 bibs a day. I've gone to two ENT's already who said there's nothing wrong with her tonsils or adenoids, and ruled out sleep apnea. They felt it was due to low muscle tone. The SLP in school wants us to go for a third opinion and sleep study. Is removing adenoids the only solution? My daughter has Williams Syndrome and can't have anesthesia, so I wanted to know if any readers have experience with this issue and saw success with any type of therapy?

Name Withheld

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

SHARING

I Wonder

Sarah Eliyahu

To My Dear Beloved Campers,

I wonder what you would say if you could talk and express yourself like everyone else.

I wonder how you view the world, and I wonder what you're thinking, and what you dream about.

Every time you cry, or I see pain in your eyes, I wonder who or what is causing you pain. Is your shirt itchy? Did someone say something that hurt you? Or are you just having a hard day? And every time, I wish you could tell me in your own words so that I can make it all okay.

I wonder if you know how precious you are to me and the difference you make in my life.

I wonder if you know how hard I try to fulfill your needs, and to help you grow and succeed.

I wonder if I am fulfilling all your needs, and if I help you the way you help me.

I wonder if you know how much I love you, and how much I care about you.

I wonder if you know that, although you're different and people limit your abilities, you

are one of the most amazing, special, and precious people in the world.

I hope you know that your hugs are heavenly, and your smile warms my heart, and your laughter brings joy to my soul!

I Love You, my precious *neshamale*!

Love, Your Counselor Who Loves You
More Than Anything in the World!

Terrified,

Yehudis Zentman

I enter the amusement park, excited, but with fear.
I have so looked forward to this trip, I can't believe I'm here!
The rides tower high above me, so colorful and bright,
I race towards them all speedily, then quickly stop in fright.

Do I really want to do this? Am I really ready?
Do I want to fly above the park, shaky and unsteady?
Maybe I'll just play it safe and on the ground, I'll stay
Then I won't be worried, and I'll be relaxed all day.

Suddenly, I realize, where I went wrong with that thought,
If I don't go on the rides at all, my whole trip is for naught.
The reason that I traveled far to this amusement park,
Was to go on all the rides I could, and have fun until dark.

So, with a small pit in my stomach, I push myself ahead,
I don't stay back on steady ground, but brave the rides instead.
And as the day advances, and I go from ride to ride,
The fear is still there somewhere, but I know I've changed inside.

There's a thrill that each ride brings me, a thrill hard to explain,
When I push myself onto the rides, such fun and joy I gain.
Though surely it feels scary to be dangling in the air,
I know deep down that I am safe, that I truly want to be there.

I know, when it is time to go, that I made the right choice,
I did not give in to my fears, but heard my inner voice.
The enjoyment I experienced was worth my push to ride,
I feel contentment as I leave, and satisfaction deep inside.

At times I see my life through a lens of apprehension and fear
There's so much uncertainty and commotion, so much which is unclear.
I feel like I'm on a roller coaster, racing at top speed,
Up and down so many times, desperate for the break I need.

Enjoying the Ride

Some days I'm on a pirate ship, tipping high up in the air,
Not sure when or how I'd get off, and what would greet me down there.
My stomach keeps dropping, my head is spinning, and I really feel unsteady,
How did I even get into this park? I feel completely unready.

But when I begin getting used to the rides and actually open my eyes,
When I begin breathing and look around, I am in for a big surprise.
The views from way high up on the rides can't compare to the views from below,
And they continue getting more breathtaking, as higher and higher I go.

So even as my stomach is queasy, I try to enjoy the ride,
And when it is over and I run off, I know I am changed inside.
Though surely it feels scary to be dangling in the air,
I know deep down that I am safe, that I truly want to be there.

Yes, sometimes, I still look longingly at those on the merry-go-round.
It looks so relaxing to ride on a horse that slowly goes up and down.
The horses are bright and colorful, and the pace, consistent and slow.
There is time to schmooze and take pictures, as round in circles they go.

On my thrilling amusement park rides, however, there is no time to chat or relax,
I needed to hold tight and buckle my belt; each day is filled to the max.
Who can take pictures when riding a coaster? I just scream as I fly through the ride,
Yet somehow, when I stumbled off weakly, I feel strong and happy inside.

And one day I will truly see, that so much was achieved,
Each challenge gained zechusim, more than can be believed.
Though many rides were scary, and I was shaken to my core,
I'll be happy that I braved each one, since that's what I came here for.

Though it may be rough and frightening now, I know I'll appreciate it after,
When one day I'll understand it all, and be filled with joy and laughter.
And even now, while I am scared, I can still enjoy the ride
When I open my eyes and realize: He's right here at my side.

In Camp

Anonymous

You know, all day long people stare at me.
They wonder why I am this way.
Why does she have to be different?
Why does she have to repeat herself all day?
Why does she hit and pull?
Why does she yell and scream?
Why can't she just be involved?
Why can't she process instructions?
Why can't she express herself?
Why is she dependent?

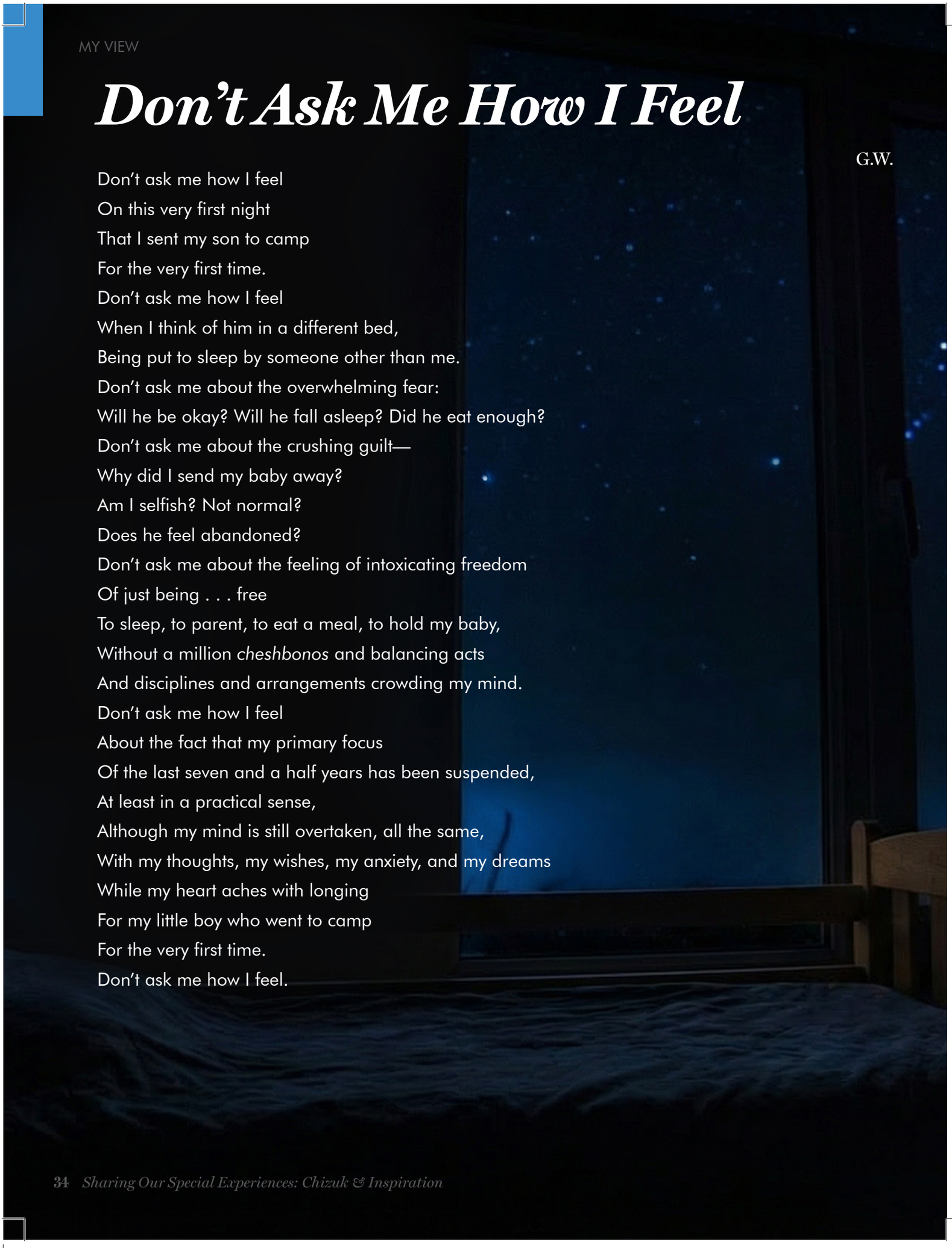
And they call me names:
They call me slow,
They call me special,
They call me physical,
They call me dumb,
They call me strange,
They call me by my disability.

But then I came to camp
Where they know:
No! She is not different,
her neshama is just the same.
She loves people and is being social
and adds so much each day.
She is happy, fun, and lovable,
adding tremendous light to life.

Yes, in camp I am also called names:
They call me pure,
They call me precious,
They call me princess,
They call me tzadeikes.
They see me for who I am inside.
In camp I am all-able.

Don't Ask Me How I Feel

G.W.



Don't ask me how I feel
On this very first night
That I sent my son to camp
For the very first time.
Don't ask me how I feel
When I think of him in a different bed,
Being put to sleep by someone other than me.
Don't ask me about the overwhelming fear:
Will he be okay? Will he fall asleep? Did he eat enough?
Don't ask me about the crushing guilt—
Why did I send my baby away?
Am I selfish? Not normal?
Does he feel abandoned?
Don't ask me about the feeling of intoxicating freedom
Of just being . . . free
To sleep, to parent, to eat a meal, to hold my baby,
Without a million *cheshbonos* and balancing acts
And disciplines and arrangements crowding my mind.
Don't ask me how I feel
About the fact that my primary focus
Of the last seven and a half years has been suspended,
At least in a practical sense,
Although my mind is still overtaken, all the same,
With my thoughts, my wishes, my anxiety, and my dreams
While my heart aches with longing
For my little boy who went to camp
For the very first time.
Don't ask me how I feel.

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

Achrayus – Responsibility
Am – Nation
Anashim Gedolim – Great Men/Rabbis
Aron – Holy Ark
Avos – Patriarchs
B'emuna Shlayma – With complete faith
B'simcha – With joy
Bais haMikdash – The Holy Temple
Bentch Lecht – Light Shabbat or Holiday candles
Bitachon – Trust (in HaShem)
Bnei Yisroel – The Children of Israel
Chag – Jewish Holiday
Chasidishe Yid (Y) – Chassidic Jew
Chavrusa Tumult – A one day free-for-all system to choose learning partners at the BMG Yeshiva in Lakewood, NJ
Cheshbonos – Accounts
Chessed – Acts of Kindness
Chizuk – Encouragement
Chizuk l'Doros – Encouragement/Strength for generations
Choshech – Darkness
Davening (Y) – n: Prayer, v: Praying
Dveikus baHashem – Closeness to HaShem
Emunah – Faith
Frum (Y) – Religious
Gezayra – Jewish legal enactment
Hashgacha Pratis – Divine Intervention
Hishtadlus – Effort
Imahos – Matriarchs
Ish Tevuna – Man of exceptional understanding
Kallah – Bride
Kinim – Lice
Klal Yisroel – The Jewish People
Koach – Strength, power
Korbanos – Sacrifices
Kriyas Yam Suf – The splitting of the Reed (Red) Sea
Kumzitz (Y) – Sing-along gathering
Leviim – Levitical tribe
Ma'alos – Levels, elevated character traits
Makkas Dam – The biblical plague of blood
Makkos – The Plagues (in Egypt)
Mazel Tov – Congratulations!
Mitzri – Egyptian
Mitzrim – Egyptians
Morah – Teacher (f)
Moshiach – The Messiah
Neshama – Soul
Omed b'Nisayon – To withstand a test/challenge
Rashi – Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak, pre-eminent Torah commentator (1100s)
Rav – Esteemed Rabbi
Regel b'fnei atzmo – A holiday on its own
Ribono Shel Olam – Master of the Universe (God)
Ruchniyos – Spirituality
Schmooze (Y) – Chat
Shechina – Divine Presence
Shemini Atzeres – Jewish holiday on the last day of Succot
Shidduch – Marital match
Shira – Song
Shvi'i shel Pesach – The Seventh (last) day of Passover
Sukkos – Jewish holiday of "Booths"
Tachlis haberiah – The purpose of Creation (?—Do you mean Tachlis haBri'ah? Othewise, I'm not sure what this means—the purpose of a creature?)
Tatteh (Y) – Father
Tisha B'av – 9th of Av (Hebrew month), day of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple
Tzadeikes – Righteous Jewish woman
Vort (Y) – Engagement party
Yetzias mitzrayim
Yetzias mitzrayim – the exodus from Egypt
Yiras shamayim – fear of Heaven
Yom tov - Holiday

Have Your ABA Services

And your camp too!

LOCATED IN THE MOUNTAINS 8 WEEK SUMMER SLEEPAWAY PROGRAM

Little stars, big dreams, endless sparkle.

Eligible for NJ residents with ABA

When you choose Guided Growth for your child's ABA services, you unlock the full range of Leebeinu 365 perks, including:

- **Mid-Winter Florida Trip!**
- **Shabbatons!**
- **After School Hours!**
- **Summer Camp!**
  - Campers **ages 5-12 boys and girls**
  - Separate groups by level
  - **Staff positions open** for girls 9th and up (counselors 11th grade+)

To apply or find out more information:

Email info@leebeinu.org

Call or Text (323) 241-2919

Leebeinu365

FORMERLY CAMP LEEBEINU

NY residents
qualify through OPWDD.
NJ residents
qualify through Guided Growth ABA.
Not in NY or NJ?
Out of Network Insurances accepted

Taking out of network insurance plans plus most Medicaid plans including Fidellis, Aetna, and Wellpoint

To learn more about our Guided Growth ABA services visit guidedgrowth.com

Guided Growth ABA THERAPY